

## **PM vows to free cabbies of 'modern slavery'**

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**By Nigel Aw**

Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak today pledged to abolish the monopoly of taxi licences by private companies, describing it as a form of "modern slavery".

Instead, the premier said the government plans to issue licences directly to taxi drivers under a new model for the industry as part of its "not too long term plan".

"I don't like to hear that companies get too many licences, the era where we give them out to private companies will end; under the new model we will give them to individuals where taxi drivers' interest will be taken care of.

"I dislike the (current) leasing system which is a form of modern slavery," he declared to the cheers of more than 5,000 taxi drivers at the Teksi Rakyat 1Malaysia (TR1MA) gathering in Bukit Jalil this morning.

This, the premier said, can be achieved within one to two years as the government needs to engage the relevant stakeholders.

Voting blocs

Today's gathering, where a certain bloc of voters are assembled and given goodies, is another example of a commonly used strategy by the government in the run up to the general election.

Earlier, there had been gatherings of Felda settlers and petty traders.

As in previous gatherings, while taking the opportunity to explain the government's long term plans, Najib also did not disappoint expectations as he announced a number of short term goodies including a RM35 million allocation from 1MDB foundation for taxi drivers.

The amount is intended to cover subsidy vouchers for some 70,000 taxi drivers nationwide for new sets of tyres worth RM525.

"We have identified over 300 tyre service centres nationwide where the vouchers can be redeemed for Malaysian made Goodyear or Continental tyres, " said a beaming Najib.

In addition, the Information Ministry will also allocate RM1 million to provide insurance coverage.

The coverage provides for RM10,000 compensation to taxi drivers in the event of death or permanent disability in an accident and RM500 in medical fees.

Describing the goodies today as just "the beginning", Najib also urged the drivers to help the government shape a good reputation for the country.

"If a tourist gets in a taxi and see a nice smile on the driver instead of an angry face, then they will assume that all Malaysians are like that," he said.

The gathering today was jointly organised by the Information Ministry, 1MDB and the Land Transport Commission (SPAD).

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