

Cabbies: Fulfil our demands before we turn to PR
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KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 23 — Taxi drivers are threatening to become Pakatan Rakyat ambassadors if their demands are not met by the government.

Around 50 taxi drivers attended the launch of their pressure group, Tuntutan Pemandu Teksi Malaysia (Teksi), this morning, demanding 11 points which include unconditional granting of individual taxi permits and revising the free GO-KL bus service.

"We carry around one million passengers a day. Imagine if we become PR ambassadors instead of tourism ambassadors," said Teksi pro-tem chairman Mohammad Ridzwan Mohamad Daud.

"A lot can change in the two weeks leading up to the general election."

The taxi drivers also plan to hold peaceful protests every Saturday all over Malaysia until their demands are met.

Chief among the 11 demands that will be passed to the Land Public Transport Commission (SPAD) and the Prime Minister's Department tomorrow is the granting of individual taxi permits.

Under the current system, drivers pay up to RM1,700 per month to their taxi companies.

Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Ahmad Maslan said currently there were 79,571 registered taxi drivers and 1,303 taxi companies nationwide. These companies owned 31,978 permits or 48 per cent of the total taxi permits in the country.

"Are you (taxi driver) an employee, or the owner of your business? You are neither here nor there," Ampang MP and PKR Wanita chief Zuraida Kamaruddin claimed, while launching the group.

"...A PR government will be committed to abolish middle-man systems ... be it with taxi, rice, sugar, or electricity."

Teksi is also demanding the revision of the taxi meter rate, and would like to use other car makes besides Proton which, it claims, costs much more to maintain.

Speaking to The Malaysian Insider, most of the taxi drivers at the launch claimed they were earning less due to the escalating cost of living, and government projects like Teksi Rakyat 1 Malaysia (TR1MA) has not helped.

"We are earning even less than pisang goreng sellers," said Nazli Salleh, 41, who has been driving for almost 10 years.

"We're not doing this to get rich. We just want to earn an honest and halal living."

Roslan Shaari, 52, likened taxi companies to "along" (loan sharks). "They keep harassing us every day, calling to ask for payments."

"I admit there are some culprits who don't use the meter," said Ahmad Sofi, 34. "But it might be because they're pressured by all these factors (addressed in the demands)."

Teksi plans to distribute stickers and T-shirts saying "Kami Mahu Permit", which will be worn by members during their peaceful protests every Saturday.

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