

Port truckers stage protest

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PORT KLANG: Thousands of container truck drivers stopped transporting goods for two hours to protest against depot operators in Northport and Westport.

The protest did not disrupt operations at Northport although the number of trailers into Westport was reportedly fewer than usual.

Claiming that an increase in charges and delays by the operators had affected their earnings, the drivers urged the Transport Ministry and Port Klang Authority (PKA) to look into their grievances.

Although the protest was largely peaceful, some who had gathered outside Northport in Bandar Sultan Sulaiman yesterday were seen throwing stones and empty bottles at trucks that refused to stop.

R. Pandian, 52, a container lorry driver for 30 years, said operators had increased depot gate fees by more than three folds.

“They used to charge RM5. Recently, the charges were increased to between RM15 and RM20.

“We would not mind paying a standardised fee of RM20 if their services were improved. But the services have deteriorated, resulting in an average of only one trip per day for us,” he said, adding that they could previously make at least four trips.

Another driver P. Pannerselvam, 55, said their income was based on the number of trips made.

“If we make only one trip a day, how are we to cope with the rising cost of living? I have to skip breakfast to save to pay them (depot operators),” he added.

The Star reported on Monday that some 1,000 drivers planned to protest, worrying the ports as this might affect their operations.

PKA chairman Datuk Teh Kim Poo said that although the matter was beyond its jurisdiction, he was willing to negotiate with depot operators and truckers in his capacity as Klang Barisan Nasional chairman.

“I personally feel it is unfair for the operators to raise charges when services do not improve,” he said.

Malaysian Hauliers Association president Datuk Che Azizuddin Ismail said none of the protesters were their members, adding that he had reminded them not to take the matter to the streets.

“In fact, we also announced that this issue was being looked into through proper channels,” he said, adding that meetings with PKA and related ministries had been held.

“But it is difficult to find a solution because no one regulates these depots. So, I advise shipping lines to choose container depots wisely.”

A source from Northport said that although traffic flow for trucks heading into the port had been disrupted, its operations were not affected.

However, a source at Westport said there would usually be more than 5,000 trailers using the port but there were only hundreds yesterday.

Malaysian Freight Forwarders Federation president Alvin Chua said such protests would definitely affect port operations in the long run.

“The protest lasted only for a few hours and these ports would have had the space to accommodate containers that were not transported out. But what about the long run?” he asked.

Chua said he was informed that several freight forwarders were also afraid to send out their trucks, fearing that they might be vandalised during the protest.

Source: <http://www.thestar.com.my/News/Nation/2012/05/03/Port-truckers-stage-protest/>
