

Taiwan Uber drivers protest fine hike as app halts service

February 10 2017

Protesting Uber drivers circled Taiwan's transport ministry Friday as the ride-hailing app halted operations on the island following an impasse with the government which deems the service illegal.

The US firm announced last week that it would suspend business in Taiwan from Friday after the government raised the maximum penalty for Uber [drivers](#) to Tw\$25 million (\$804,000)—the highest in the world.

The Transport Ministry last week said it was preparing to charge the firm Tw\$230 million in penalties.

Uber has racked up fines for running a business without the proper registration to operate as a taxi service since it entered the Taiwan market in 2013.

About 200 cars, adorned with ribbons and Uber stickers, drove around the transport ministry in downtown Taipei on Friday, according to an alliance of drivers which organised the protest.

Single mother Fiona Yang, 38, said Uber had been her main source of income for the past two years as she juggles earning a living and raising two children.

"I can understand why they had to suspend operations. The penalties are outrageous," she told AFP.

"It has a big impact on me. How am I going to raise my kids?"

Uber said last week it hoped the suspension would prompt action from President Tsai Ing-wen, who is pushing for the island to foster its own "Asian Silicon Valley".

"The current regulatory environment makes it impossible to serve the island the way we know works best," the firm said in a statement.

Taiwan's suspension came after Uber halted services in Hungary last July due to new legislation that stops drivers from making money with their own vehicles.

The [smartphone app](#) has faced stiff resistance from traditional taxi drivers around the world, as well as bans in some places over safety concerns and questions over legal issues, including taxes.

Uber insists it is a platform connecting drivers and passengers, not a transport business like taxi firms.

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Citation: Taiwan Uber drivers protest fine hike as app halts service (2017, February 10) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-02-taiwan-uber-drivers-protest-fine.html>

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