

# Herald Sun



**Solidarity:** Cabbies outside Flinders St station yesterday. They removed shirts to demonstrate their vulnerability. Picture: TREVOR PINDER

# CAB CHARGE

## City blockade forces action on security and fares

SAFETY screens and prepaid fares at night will be introduced in taxis after hundreds of angry drivers blockaded the city and forced the State Government into a deal yesterday.

The 22-hour sit-in shut down the Flinders St and Swanston St intersection and disrupted city traffic.

The protest followed the near-fatal stabbing of 23-year-old driver Jalvinder Singh by a passenger in Clifton Hill on Tuesday.

Many of the protesting taxi

**David Hastie, Paul Anderson and Georgie Pilcher**

drivers stripped off their shirts to symbolise their vulnerability on the road.

They chanted "shame Victoria Police" as they waved placards reading "How many mothers have to lose their sons driving taxis" and "Stop killing taxi drivers".

Mounted police in riot gear were put on alert as drivers threatened a nude march to Parliament House.

The protest won a swift victory as Transport Minister Lynne Kosky — who initially refused to negotiate until the blockade was called off — caved in to demands.

Ms Kosky agreed to introduce safety screens in taxis by Christmas and make prepaid fares compulsory in metropolitan and regional areas between 10pm and 5am, seven days a week.

The Government will cover half the cost of the \$1300 screens that will go in up to 4000 taxis, with operators covering the rest.

The Government is yet to decide whether the owners will be able to increase fares to cover their share of the cost.

The agreement included: **A CAMPAIGN** to help improve the image of taxi drivers.

**MEDICAL** fees for Mr Singh to be covered by the Victorian Taxi Directorate.

**DRIVERS** who used their cars to blockade the city will not pay parking fines.

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Jalvinder Singh

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**SPORT**  
**HEAT ON HAWKS**  
 UMPS WATCH MITCHELL, HODGE

**Hi TV LIFTOUT**  
**NO SEX PLEASE**  
 DR McDREAMY LAUGHS AT HIS IMAGE

**TAXI UPROAR**

# Attack accused denies memory

Shelley Hadfield

AN HIV-positive man accused of the attempted murder of a taxi driver claims he has no memory of the attack, a magistrate heard.

Parish Charles, 45, appeared in the Melbourne Magistrates' Court yesterday flanked by two security guards and wearing blue latex gloves.

The court heard that as well as being HIV-positive, Mr Charles has mental health problems and may have meningitis.

He is accused of stabbing Jalvinder Singh, 23, who is in a serious condition in the Royal Melbourne Hospital.

Lawyer Rob Melasecca said that Mr Charles, of Alphington, had been suffering pain to the head, pain due to electric shock treatments and sweats, possibly from withdrawals from his HIV medication in recent days.

"The difficulty is the victim in this matter is in an induced coma so he's not able to tell us what the circumstances were and Mr Charles appears to have no memory of the incident," Mr Melasecca told the court.

He said outside court that Mr Charles was a gentle man with no convictions.

"He's absolutely horrified and beside himself. He's never been in trouble so it's something that is upsetting him greatly," Mr Melasecca said.

He said Mr Charles was "totally, totally devastated and depressed and horrified".

"I think it's hit him so terribly because he is a gentle man.

"His primary concern is the victim more so than himself at the moment — he's horrified."

Mr Melasecca told magistrate Lance Martin that Mr Charles needed to be tested immediately for life-threatening meningitis, have a blood test to monitor his HIV and have his mental health assessed.

"He does not know where he is, does not know why he's there. He really must be moved immediately to a hospital setting... otherwise it's not going to be attended to, then what we'll have is two victims instead of one."



Parish Charles

The court heard that Mr Charles could be transferred to St Vincent's Hospital.

Mr Melasecca said outside court that Mr Charles had suffered HIV for 20 years.

"He has been withdrawing from HIV medication. He's had a lot of headaches, a lot of electric shocks.

"He's been trying to go to the doctors and get help. He's had a history of depression and treatment for depression and he's trying very hard to discover what's wrong."

Mr Melasecca said police alleged that about 1am on Tuesday Mr Charles caught a taxi bound for the Alfred hospital.

He allegedly became involved in a dispute with the driver because he did not have any money and the driver returned him home where his partner paid the fare.

Mr Melasecca said police claimed Mr Charles then drove his partner's car to the Alfred.

But Mr Charles did not enter the hospital.

"Mysteriously he ended up in this taxi," Mr Melasecca said police claimed.

Mr Charles is accused of assaulting Mr Singh then stealing his cab.

"This is not going to be a case about anything other than his intent and his state of mind."

Mr Charles is charged with seven offences, including attempted murder, intentionally causing serious injury, assault and theft of the cab.

He was remanded to July 23. He did not apply for bail.



Time for action: angry cabbies in force outside Flinders St station. Pictures: MIKE KEATING



Victory salute: joy over the Government's concessions.



Face of concern: safety issues have inflamed passions.



Tense moment: a cabbie makes his point in front of police.

## City blockade forces deal on taxi safety

There have been at least 30 reported vicious attacks — including bashings and stabbings — on Victorian cabbies since January 2006.

Taxi Drivers Association president Arun Badgujar said Melbourne drivers were quitting their jobs because they were fed up with the assaults, abuse and attacks.

"I have been driving for 12 years now. I have had my fair share of assault... but these days we are hearing about at least five incidents a week. I am talking about serious assaults," Mr Badgujar said.

He said he was jabbed with a used needle containing the hepatitis virus in 1998.

After a harrowing wait tests revealed he was clear but Mr Badgujar said drivers were sick of fearing for their safety.

"They are scared," he said. Jack Hodge, secretary of the Victorian Taxi Operators Group, said he did not like the idea of security screens.

"I know not all drivers want these screens because I did a ring-around of my own drivers, and the vast majority didn't want them," Mr Hodge said.

He said he was concerned about the room the screens would take up, turning some vehicles into three-seaters.

Live cameras and audio from taxis back to the depots would have been more useful, he said.

Fellow taxi operator Stephen Harris said safety screens had been unsuccessful in Sydney.

"People hated them, the passengers hated them, the drivers hated them — they couldn't interact with passengers and passengers couldn't interact with them," Mr Harris said.

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"The NSW Government eventually changed their mind and said you don't have to have the bubble, you can have a camera instead — and now there are no bubbles."

Mr Singh, an Indian student, was left for dead in Clifton Hill early on Tuesday and is in an induced coma after suffering major blood loss.

He was last night in a serious but stable condition in the intensive care unit at Royal Melbourne Hospital.

His flatmate, Armadeep Singh, said Jalvinder was improving.

"There is hope. I've just seen him. He's getting better," Mr Singh said yesterday.

Attacks on cabbies have included the death of a driver in August 2006, the bashing of another cabbie by a passenger wearing knuckle-dusters, the choking of another and the horrible bashing and robbery of 71-year-old Bill Hunt.

After the driver's death in 2006, cabbies protested against then transport minister Peter Batchelor in the city and at Flemington Racecourse.

At the time, the Government promised safety screens and a security taskforce.

Shadow transport minister Terry Mulder yesterday backed the push for greater safety measures.

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# 150 YEARS OF FOOTY

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