

# Rail smooth

5.2.8.98

## But travellers complain of having to reboard train

**SINGAPORE:** Train services between Malaysia and Singapore proceeded smoothly yesterday although the Malaysian Immigration continued to operate from Tanjung Pagar in the south of the island while Singapore Immigration operated at Woodlands in the north.

Malaysian immigration officials cleared travellers by recording their details in the computer but did not stamp passports in what was described as an eleventh-hour decision by Kuala Lumpur.

However, passengers found the two checkpoints inconvenient, especially the elderly or those with children, because they have to disembark at Woodlands to get Singaporean Immigration and Customs clearing.

Singaporean Rohaya Ismail, 28, who was travelling to Kelantan, said she found the new procedures difficult as passengers had to get down several times from the train.

Rohaya, who was with her 67-year-old mother and 11-month-old son, said they had to carry down all their luggage at the Woodlands checkpoint before boarding the train again to Tanjung Pagar.

The extra stop for a checkpoint at Woodlands had caused KTM Bhd to think about rescheduling their services.

Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said it took between 15 and 35 minutes for passengers to undergo Singapore Immigration and Customs checks and KTM may reschedule north-bound trains to accom-

modate the extra time.

One service between Kuala Lumpur and Singapore was suspended yesterday to enable KTM to reschedule services to suit the Woodlands stop.

Returning from his African trip, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad questioned Singapore's motive for going ahead with the move.

"I don't know why they should choose this time to do this thing. Maybe it is strategic to them," he said.

Passengers travelling north were confused when Malaysian immigration officials did not stamp their passports or process the embarkation forms.

They were told to keep their forms and to hand them over only when they were leaving Malaysia in what an immigration official explained was a tourist-friendly system.

"The decision not to stamp the

passports is in the interest of travellers. We do not want them to face problems later at the Singapore Immigration checkpoint in Woodlands.

"We are clearing them on our computers. We screen the passport for any blacklisted holders and let them through if we are satisfied with the travel documents," said an immigration official in Johor Baru.

The move followed Singapore's warning yesterday that Malaysian immigration authorities in Tanjung Pagar would not have the legal authority to operate there once the Singapore checkpoint was moved to Woodlands.

Singapore immigration officers at the new railway station and Customs, Immigration and Quarantine (CIQ) checkpoint were also caught offguard by the Malaysian immigration move.

Passengers were told to wait

as the officers referred the documents to their superior officers for clarification. However, the senior officers later gave the green light for the passports to be cleared although they were not stamped.

The first KTM train to stop in Woodlands was the Singapore-bound *Senandung Malam*.

It arrived at Tanjung Pagar 45 minutes late yesterday, after having to stop 35 minutes in Woodlands where the more than 500 passengers had to alight with their luggage for immigration and customs clearance before reboarding the train to continue their journey.

The train arrived at 7.29am at Tanjung Pagar but minus any hustle and bustle at the platforms which used to be jammed as commuters lined up to get Singapore CIQ clearance.

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