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CIQ issue not deterring Singaporeans: Dollah

MALAYSIA believes that Singaporeans will not be deterred from travelling to the peninsula by rail although the Malaysian Customs, Immigration and Quarantine (CIQ) facilities remained at the Tanjung Pagar railway station in the republic.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said Singaporeans had been using the train service all these years and they know that the service is good.

"I do not think the present arrangement will create difficulty or deter them from using the rail service," he told newsmen in Kuala Lumpur yesterday after attending the bilateral talks between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his Laotian counterpart Sisavath Keobounphanh.

Abdullah was asked to comment on reports that a Singapore member of Parliament and the media in republic had urged Singaporeans to avoid travelling by rail to avoid immigration problems when they entered Malaysia following the dispute over the CIQ issue.

Despite such calls, train tickets out of the republic were fully booked over the weekend, with KTM Bhd having to add additional coaches to cope with the demand.

According to Johor State Immigration Department deputy director Kamariah Rahmat, a total of 1,389 Singaporeans and other foreigners entered the country via Tanjung Pagar last Friday.

A further 1,212 crossed over on Saturday and 523 on Sunday.

Singapore had moved its CIQ facilities from Tanjung Pagar to Woodlands on August 1 and had requested Malaysia to do the same but the latter decided not to.

To avoid problems following Singapore's move to relocate its CIQ facilities to Woodlands, the Malaysian immigration had decided not to stamp passports of rail passengers to and from Singapore but only input their particulars into the computer.

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