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Mahathir-Singapore

MALAYSIA HAS NO WISH TO DISPUTE WITH SINGAPORE

SEPANG, Aug 1 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Malaysia does not wish to have any dispute with Singapore and called on its neighbour to settle the issue over the long-standing Malaysian immigration checkpoint at the Tanjong Pagar railway station south of Singapore.

"The initiative is with them," the Prime Minister told reporters upon his return from a week-long visit to three African nations at the KL International Airport here.

Asked by reporters on the matter, Dr Mahathir said the dispute was started by Singapore and not Malaysia.

"Actually, if there is a souring of relations between Malaysia and Singapore, it is because of them," he said and maintained that Malaysia would not relocate its customs, immigration and quarantine (CIQ) checkpoint from Tanjong Pagar to Woodlands.

"As far as we are concerned, we will function as usual," he said.

The two countries are at a standoff following Singapore's decision to move its own CIQ facilities from the Tanjong Pagar station owned by Malaysia's KTM Berhad to Woodlands closer to the Malaysian border effective today.

Singapore had insisted that Malaysian immigration moved to Woodlands and warned that rail passengers would face difficulties and Malaysian immigration would be acting without legal authority if it continued to operate from Tanjong Pagar.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia did not want to have a dispute with Singapore.

"We were going along fine when suddenly, they decided that they do not want our people to be in Singapore. I need a little bit of time to think about what we need to do," said the Prime Minister who was briefed on the latest situation at the airport.

To a question, Dr Mahathir said he did not know if Singapore could force Malaysia to relocate its checkpoint to Woodlands "but certainly when we are having problems with our economy, this is an unwelcome problem.

"I don't know why they choose this time to do this thing. Maybe to them it is a strategy," said Dr Mahathir.

Asked if he was confident that Malaysia and Singapore would be able to settle the dispute without the intervention of a third party, Dr Mahathir said: "We hope we can, we'll try."

-- BERNAMA

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