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Tanjong Pagar: Talks 'break down' (HL)

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JOHOR BARU, Thurs. - Singapore said today that talks with Malaysia to resolve the row over railway travel procedures have broken down and travellers will face difficulties if Malaysia does not move its immigration checkpoint to a new location from Saturday.

Singapore will move its Customs, immigration and quarantine checkpoint from the Tanjong Pagar railway station in central Singapore to a new checkpoint at Woodlands, close to its border with Malaysia.

The Singapore Immigration Department had made interim arrangements by offering space for Malaysian Immigration to set up air-conditioned booths at the Woodlands train checkpoint (WTCP) but Malaysia rejected this.

In a statement issued late this evening, the Singapore Ministry of Home Affairs said during the meeting on July 28, Singapore had proposed space for Malaysian Immigration to set up air-conditioned booths on the 10m-wide platform at WTCP.

The statement said the Singapore Immigration also pointed out that Malaysian Immigration would remain at the Tanjong Pagar railway station if such an arrangement failed.

"Singapore has informed the Malaysian Government that rail passengers will face difficulties and inconvenience if Malaysian Immigration insists on executing its duties at Tanjong Pagar railway station after Saturday.

"We also have on many occasions informed Malaysia that its Customs, immigration and quarantine operations cannot remain at the Tanjong Pagar railway station.

"If Malaysia's CIQ remains at the Tanjong Pagar railway station after Singapore's CIQ moves to WTCP, the sequence of immigration clearance will be illogical and contrary to international practice."

The statement said Singapore Immigration must clear departing passengers for exit from Singapore before the Malaysian Immigration could clear them for entry into Malaysia.

It also said Malaysian Immigration officers would cease to have any authority to perform their functions at Tanjong Pagar once Singapore Immigration is no longer present to lend them its authority.

"Therefore, Malaysian Immigration officers performing immigration functions at Tanjong Pagar will be acting without legal authority and contrary to the proper sequence of immigration clearance.

"As such, all immigration endorsements made by them on Singapore passports at Tanjong Pagar will be unauthorised and improper."

"Under Malaysian law, it is the Johor Baru railway station that is gazetted as an immigration control post for persons travelling by train from Singapore to Malaysia, and not Tanjong Pagar railway station," the statement added.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, when contacted tonight to comment on the Singapore Ministry of Home Affairs statement, said he would have to read it carefully before making a statement tomorrow.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said on Monday that Malaysia would not shift its CIQ facilities from Tanjong Pagar after the Foreign Ministry rejected a Singapore statement that both sides had agreed to interim arrangements.

The Foreign Ministry said the Singapore statement contained factual inaccuracies and that Malaysia had requested for space inside the WTCP and

not on the passenger platform as stated by Singapore.  
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