

Border reopens reunites families, boosts tourism industry

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Bernama

Malaysia reopened its international borders to foreign travellers at midnight today, placing the country in a position towards economic recovery, especially for the tourism sector.

The reopening was part of the transition to the endemic phase announced by Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob early last month involving air, land and sea entry points, which have reunited families separated between countries.

The Johor-Singapore entry point was arguably the very festive as midnight approached, with Malaysian workers - many of whom have eagerly waited to return home - ushering in the moment with cries of relief, cheers of happiness and singing the Malaysian anthem, Negaraku.

Checks by Bernama at several locations today, especially entry points such as Johor Bahru Sentral, also revealed rising number of vehicles and a throng of

Singaporean visitors eagerly purchasing tickets to their respective destinations.

In Kelantan, however, three border entry points, the Bukit Bunga Immigration, Customs, Quarantine and Security Complex (ICQS) in Tanah Merah; the Rantau Panjang ICQS in Pasir Mas and the Pengkalan Kubor ICQS have yet to open for travellers between Malaysia and Thailand.

A clothes trader in the Pekan Rantau Panjang duty-free zone, Norizan Ishak, 55, expressed hope that the border would reopen before May 1 so that economic activities in the area take off once again as currently only commercial vehicles were allowed to use the route.

In addition, many travellers at the Malaysia-Thailand border of Wang Kelian were stranded and could not enter the country following confusion over the standard operating procedure (SOP).

Checks revealed there were travellers who did not take the Reverse Transcription-Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR) test in Thailand also failed to register their personal details on MySejahtera as required by the Malaysian government.

Eatery operator, Anatee J Sasn, 21, said she was not allowed to enter the country

to send her sibling who was studying in Ma'ahad Tahfiz Sains Darul Muttaqin (MASDAR), Sintok, Kedah because she did not take her RT-PCR test.

"I only took the Rapid Test Kit-Antigen (RTK-Ag) test and because of that we were denied entry today. I may come again this Monday after taking the required screening test," she added.

Perlis Immigration Department director Khairul Amin Talib said that there were no travellers from Thailand coming through Wang Kelian till noon today.

Meanwhile, things were quiet at the Bukit Kayu Hitam ICQS in Kedah, and not many vehicles were passing through even though it opened as early as 6am. Only several individuals were spotted entering the border, all of them visiting their families.

Nurse Noorasyikin Bunnawi, 31, who was among those met at the entry point, expressed her happiness at being able to meet her mother, Siti Zubaidah Abdullah, 62, a Thai national, who needed further treatment at the National Heart Institute (IJN) in Kuala Lumpur.

Kedah Immigration Department deputy director (control) Rosmaliza Mohamed Rashid said as of 10am today only 10 applications to enter Malaysia from

Thailand and 20 applications to leave Malaysia were received.

'Easy flight'

Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA), which was the first entry point to receive international travellers when a Saudi Airlines flight landed at around 1 am.

Indonesian travellers Bolo Susanto and Yandi Ongkojo, who arrived at klia2 from Surabaya, Indonesia viewed the reopening as timely, especially since it enabled Bolo to get treatment from a private hospital in Melaka.

"It can be said that the flight was very easy, with father in his wheelchair, we were assisted carefully. And not forgetting MySejahtera," said Yandi, who is a frequent health tourism traveller to Malaysia.

In the north, Scoot Tiger Air Flight TR498 brought the first batch of international arrivals, 172 passengers from Singapore, to the Penang International Airport today. It is the first of nine scheduled flights today.

State Tourism and Creative Economy Committee chairperson Yeoh Soon Hin said in a media conference today that the airport will receive eight flights from

Singapore and one from Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam for a total of 1,000 passengers.

The general manager of a motoring company, Goh Wei Sing, 47, who was among those waiting at the airport this morning, was eagerly awaiting the arrival of his wife and child after being apart for almost two years.

"I worked in Japan for 20 years and married a Japanese. Before Covid-19, I returned to Penang to work here and according to plans, they were supposed to follow over, but due to the pandemic, they stayed where they were," he said.

At the Senai International Airport, Johor the first international flight, AK1491 from Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam landed at 12.20am with around 90 passengers, who were greeted by Deputy Tourism, Arts and Culture Minister Dr R Santhara Kumar.

Meanwhile, checks at the Melaka International Ferry Terminal revealed that it was not yet operational even though many people had visited the area in hopes of travelling to Dumai, Indonesia. It is understood that the Dumai-Melaka border entry has yet to be reopened at this point.

A visitor, Rozana Ishak, 45, said she was eager to visit relatives in Indonesia as she had done before the pandemic hit, especially during the Ramadan month.

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