

Penang Port to rescue stranded cruise liners

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PENANG Port will seek approval from the authorities to bring in several cruise liners which are stranded in regional waters.

Penang Port Sdn Bhd chief executive officer Sasedharan Vasudevan said the company was holding talks with seven liners to allow them to berth at Swettenham Pier Cruise Terminal in George Town for food and water supply.

"We are talking to them through our agents and once an agreement is reached, we will seek approval from the authorities to bring them in.

"All the necessary Covid-19 tests would be done and the standard operating procedure (SOP) would be strictly followed, although there would not be any passenger disembarkation.

"Approval for passengers to get down will be given only if there are emergencies when the liners are here.

"In most cases, it would not be necessary as most of the liners have sick bays," he said.

Sasedharan said they were initially reluctant to bring in the liners as there were no clear guidelines during the movement control order (MCO).

"However, the SOP for a lot of things are clearer now for the

liners to come in," he said.

Sasedharan said there are roughly 2,000 passengers on the liners, which are mainly from Miami and Hong Kong, and they could be brought in if the lay-up, food and water supply costs were competitive.

"Some liners have gone to the Philippines and Taiwan because they have lower cost compared to Singapore.

"It is a win-win situation where food suppliers and others would be able to do some business and the port gets some income from lay-up and marine charges.

"It is not substantial, but could help provide lower operating costs

for everyone as we still have to pay rental to the authorities.

"This, to a certain extent, helps businesses where overall activities have slowed down since the MCO," he said.

Sasedharan said presently, there were three local liners which do the 'cruise to nowhere' at the pier.

Malaysia issued a blanket ban on all cruise ships coming into the country on March 7 following instructions from the Health Ministry and Transport Ministry.

Penang recorded an overwhelming increase in cruise passengers last year, registering 449,885 passengers compared to 354,507 passengers in 2018.