

Officials busy as numbers soar at Beitbridge

Over 31,000 travellers are passing through the Beitbridge border post daily as the festive season gets into full swing. The South African Revenue Service (SARS) said over the last 10 days, the Beitbridge border post in Limpopo has processed at least 17,000 travellers daily, but this week the figure has jumped to more than 31,000 per day.



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The revenue services said despite the high volumes in numbers, the process has been smooth and efficient although slow, tedious and time consuming. SARS said this was to be expected.

"South African ports of entry are often wrongly associated with congestion and bottlenecks, particularly during the festive season when millions of people are travelling. However, SARS Border Control Customs Unit has put plans, structures and systems into place to make things easier for travellers, especially the aged, pregnant women and children," it said.

All hands on deck

Almost 200 staff members volunteer to provide assistance and support at ports of entry like Beitbridge and Lebombo, among others, to ease the pressure and waiting time period for travellers and other visitors. Other measures put in place include facilitating the movement of people, vehicles and cargo and preventing possible congestion as the increase in traveller movement, coupled with extended hours of operation over this peak period, put resources under severe pressure. The implementation of the intervention has seen volunteers making things easier for pregnant women, among others.

On 16 December 2015 at about 10pm bus travellers entered the public health clinic room accompanying a four-month pregnant woman. The woman informed the nurses at the health clinic that she was asthmatic and did not have her medication. "She was given priority status that saw her escorted to the immigration counter for immediate passport processing. Soon she departed after all her fellow bus passengers were processed without any incident."

The revenue service said customs officials on the ground were hands on and ready to assist in any way they can. "This initiative has seen all associated departments and agencies working at border control implement a collaborative programme to speed up processes to be more effective. This is one of the major plans that aims to encourage working together in preparation of the implementation of the single Border Management Agency by December 2016."

In addition to the regular support provided at Beitbridge and Lebombo borders over the festive season, this year additional staff have also been deployed at the borders of Lesotho (Maseru Bridge, Ficksburg and Quachas Nek) and North West Province (Kopfontein and Ramabatlabama) to ensure efficient customs operations.

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