

No decision yet to fully reopen borders, says PM

TANGKAK: The Cabinet has yet to discuss the National Recovery Council's (MPN) proposal to reopen the country's borders by March 1, says Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob.

He said the Health Ministry had yet to provide feedback on the proposal to the Cabinet for evaluation.

"We must find a balance between wanting to protect the tourism industry and the people's health, so the Health Ministry will look into it in detail and propose the next step to the Cabinet.

"As of today, our borders are still closed... there's no discussion yet to reopen," Ismail Sabri said after a meet-and-greet programme with the Ledang Barisan Nasional election machinery at Dewan Putra Padang Lerek here yesterday.

On Tuesday, MPN chairman Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said it had recommended to the government to fully reopen the country's international borders by as early as March 1.

Ismail Sabri said the only opening so far (for quarantine-free trav-

el) was at the Malaysia-Singapore border via the Vaccinated Travel Lane (VTL).

According to him, the government was aware of the woes faced by the tourism industry, which had been badly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, but did not want the entry of foreign tourists to cause a spike in cases in the country.

"I have friends (from my time serving as a minister) in the Tourism Ministry ... friends who say they cannot survive, tour drivers who depend on income gained from fer-

rying travellers. Now, there are none (tourists), they cannot survive.

"Perhaps we can see now that the government is still providing assistance (in terms of) wage subsidy to workers, but we do not pay much, only RM600. This is meant to help, but we do not know how much longer they can survive.

"That's why we may eventually reopen the borders, but to do that, we have to get the advice from the Health Ministry.

"Yes, it's true we want to reopen the borders because we want to

assist the tourism industry, but we also want to protect the health of Malaysians. If the travellers who come here are infected, then it will only expedite the increase in the number of cases and endanger our people's health," he said.

Earlier, Ismail Sabri spent about three hours in a closed-door meeting with the Muar Barisan Nasional electoral machinery at the Johor Umno building.

He is also understood to have attended a meeting with the northern Johor Umno division chiefs.