

M'sia and Thailand agree to implement VTL scheme

BANGKOK: Malaysia and Thailand have agreed in principle to implement air, land and sea VTL (Vaccinated Travel Lane) to facilitate the movement of people of both countries.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob said the related ministries and agencies would be holding discussions on the details of the standard operating procedure (SOP) to reopen the border soon via VTL and Test & Go scheme.

"For a start, we can implement the air VTL between Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok for fully vaccinated travellers. We will also consider adding other destinations in future.

"The VTL scheme will also be expanded to open land borders via Bukit Kayu Hitam-Sadao, as well as all CIQ in the north of the peninsula and southern Thailand and the sea VTL between Langkawi and Satun.

"This will help to revive the economic and business network between the two sides, especially in the tourism sector," he was quoted as saying by Bernama in a joint media conference after a restricted meeting with his Thai counterpart Prayuth Chan o-cha.

Earlier in the meeting with Prayuth, Ismail Sabri said they dis-



At attention: Ismail Sabri inspecting the honour guard with Prayuth during a welcoming ceremony at Government House in Bangkok. - AFP

cussed the construction of a second friendship bridge across Rantau Panjang and Sungai Golok, and for a new bridge from Pengkalan Kubor to Tak Bai to be expedited.

"We agreed that the related agencies expedite the construction of the projects to assist the movement of people and goods between both countries," he said.

Ismail Sabri also hoped to enhance the close cooperation with Prayuth and improve bilateral ties to a higher level.

"As nearest neighbours, it is important for Malaysia and Thailand to forge cordial relations at various levels while exploring new fields of cooperation,' especially in efforts to recover from the effects of

Covid-19 pandemic," he said.

On regional issues, Ismail Sabri said they also discussed the situation in Myanmar.

"We concur that it was important for Asean to continue playing a positive and constructive role in seeking a peaceful and lasting solution in the interest of Myanmar and also the Asean community.

"We share the same view that it was important for Myanmar to cooperate in the implementation of the Five-Point Consensus and the need to preserve the integrity of Asean," he said, adding that Malaysia and Thailand hopes for Myanmar's return to democracy.

The Prime Minister also expressed Malaysia's undivided support to Prayuth for the chairmanship of Thailand for Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) 2022.

"I hope to return to Thailand to attend the Apec Summit at the end of the year," he said.

Malaysia and Thailand have established diplomatic ties for 65 years since Malaysia became independent in 1957.

Ismail Sabri's three-day visit is part of his familiarisation tour of South-East Asia. He had earlier visited Indonesia, Singapore, Brunei and Cambodia.

Thailand remains Malaysia's sixth biggest trading partner in the world and the second largest in Asean. Malaysia is Thailand's fourth largest trading partner.

Two-way trade between Malaysia and Thailand increased by 23% to RM97.97bil last year from RM79.63bil in 2020.