

Borders to reopen soon, says PM

Ismail Sabri: Omicron variant delayed plan to move into endemic stage

PHNOM PENH: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob has assured Malaysians in Cambodia that the country will soon reopen its borders to ease the process of travelling, especially for those residing overseas.

He said the Omicron variant had delayed the country's plan to move into the endemic stage, eventually delaying the process of reopening the borders as well.

"We almost announced that Malaysia has entered the endemic stage but in December 2021 the Omicron variant, a super spreader, was detected.

"However, Omicron is not as bad as Delta. It spreads quickly but is not as dangerous as Delta," he said at a dinner with the Malaysian Family in Cambodia on Wednesday night.

Also present were Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Saifuddin Abdullah, International and Trade Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Azmin Ah, Malaysian ambassador to Cambodia Eldeen Husaini Mohd Hashim and Senior Minister of the Prime Minister's Department representing the Cambodian government Datuk Othman Hassan.

Othman is also in charge of Islamic Affairs in Cambodia.

Ismail Sabri said Malaysians would eventually need to learn to live with Covid-19.



Warm welcome: Ismail Sabri attending an official welcoming ceremony by Hun Sen (left) at the Peace Palace in Phnom Penh. — Bernama

"We have to accept it as any other disease such as dengue," he said.

In recent days, Malaysia's Covid-19 cases hit about 27,000 daily.

However a majority of the cases are of Category 1 and 2, thanks to the high vaccination rate in the country.

"I know a lot of you are eager to come back home. I understand some of you have not gone back

home for almost two years.

"So we will start opening our borders to the whole world soon and you can return to Malaysia," added Ismail Sabri.

There are about 5,000 Malaysians living in Cambodia, and 2,000 of them are in Phnom Penh.

Ismail Sabri said the reopening of the country's borders was important because many had been affect-

ed by the closure since the pandemic hit, especially those in the tourism sector.

"As such, we will reopen it. Restrictions on people's movement have a huge impact on everyone," he added.

Meanwhile, Ismail Sabri attended an official welcoming ceremony at the Peace Palace, which is also the office of Cambodian Prime Minister

Samdech Techo Hun Sen yesterday, in conjunction with his visit at the invitation of his Cambodian counterpart.

Immediately after his arrival at the Peace Palace, *Negaraku* and Cambodia's national anthem *Nokor Reach* were played, before Ismail Sabri was accompanied by Hun Sen to inspect a guard of honour.

Ismail Sabri had earlier visited the Cambodia Independence Monument where he placed a wreath, followed by a similar ceremony in the same area at the Monument of Preah Borom Ratanak Kaudh, which was erected in honour of the late King Norodom Sihanouk.

The two leaders held a four-eyed meeting on bilateral ties, regional issues and cooperation at the international level.

Ismail Sabri later had an audience with King Norodom Sihamoni at the Royal Palace, before departing for Bangkok.

Cambodia, the host of Asean 2022, is the fourth country in South-East Asia to be visited by Ismail Sabri since he was sworn in as Malaysia's ninth prime minister on Aug 21 last year.

Putrajaya and Phnom Penh established diplomatic ties 65 years ago.

Ismail Sabri had earlier visited Indonesia, Singapore and Brunei. — Bernama