

MALAYSIA TO REOPEN BORDERS ON APRIL 1

Carefully considered move will kick off transition into Covid-19 endemic phase, says PM

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MALAYSIA will transition into the Covid-19 endemic phase by fully reopening its borders on April 1.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob said Malaysia would join neighbouring countries like Thailand and the Philippines that had begun receiving international travellers after closing their borders for two years due to Covid-19.

He said the decision was made after careful deliberation of health and safety aspects, including the progress of the Covid-19 vaccination programme and economic recovery, as well as the outcome of risk management measures implemented by the authorities.

"Travellers who have received two doses of Covid-19 vaccine are no longer required to undergo quarantine. They are only required to be tested two days prior to travel and within 24 hours upon arrival in Malaysia."

He said international travellers would no longer be required to apply for MyTravelPass, which would be abolished.

Similarly, Malaysians with valid travel documents will be allowed to travel in and out of the country to nations that had reopened borders to foreign travellers.

"The Health Minister will announce further details tomorrow (today). The standard operating procedures (SOP) will be revealed soon," he said at a press conference at the Parliament building yesterday.

He said for countries that had yet to fully reopen their borders, travel would be done through Vaccinated Travel Lanes (VTL).

"The official announcement on the country entering the endemic phase date will depend on WHO (World Health Organisation).

"Under the transition phase, Malaysians are still required to wear face masks in public, with restrictions on operating hours lifted, depending on the type of



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob (centre) speaking at a press conference at the Parliament building yesterday. BERNAMA PIC

business licences."

Prayers at mosques and surau and religious activities at non-Muslim places of worship could be carried out without physical distancing, although the final SOP would depend on state religious authorities and the National Unity Ministry.

Other SOPs for the transition into the endemic phase include the requirement for premises owners to ensure good ventilation, frequent and standard sanitisation of all ministries and mandatory use of MySJTrace in confined areas.

Ismail Sabri said existing SOP, such as checking in with the MySejahtera app at premises, would continue, except for non-crowded open areas that were not used for public gatherings.

He said the maximum number of employees at workplaces that was subject to vaccination coverage would be abolished.

"All individuals are allowed to cross states regardless of their vaccination status.

"Previously, there was a 50 per cent maximum capacity for activities involving crowds. Under the transition phase, the limit will be lifted."

He said physical distancing would still be encouraged despite the update in the SOP.

Besides reopening the borders, six criteria needed to be fulfilled under the transition into the endemic phase.

This includes having one SOP with nine guidelines, a Heightened Alert System (HAS), National Testing Strategy and TRIIS (Test, Report, Isolate, Inform, Seek).

Another criteria is to have an automated "Find, Test, Trace, Isolate, Support" (FTTIS) system as well as appointing community empowerment ambassadors.

A total of 10 SOPs have been put in place as part of the transition into the endemic phase.

Ismail Sabri reminded the public to stay vigilant amid the surge in Covid-19 cases due to the Omicron variant.

He said efforts to safely reopen the country's borders in stages, dubbed "Reopening Safely", would be led by Senior Defence Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein, Health Minister Khairy Jamaluddin, Finance Minister. Datuk Seri Tengku Zafrul Tengku Abdul Aziz and Communications and Multimedia Minister Tan Sri Annuar Musa.

"On behalf of the government, I would like to express appreciation to each member of Keluarga Malaysia who remained strong, resilient and disciplined in adhering to the SOP and supporting every initiative to fight Covid-19.

"The country will not be able to embark on the transition into the endemic phase without the help of Keluarga Malaysia."

Ismail Sabri described the transition into the endemic phase as the country's exit strategy to allow Malaysians to return to life that is as normal as possible.

As a country with one of the highest vaccination rates among the population, Malaysia has begun implementing VTLs with Singapore, Thailand and Cambodia to boost the hospitality and other economic sectors.

Thailand and the Philippines began allowing the entry of foreign travellers last month to allow the tourism industry to recover from their pandemic losses.

Page 1 pic: Travellers waiting to board their flight at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport on Monday.