

Inoculation drive presents opportunity for civil servants to shine



**TAN SRI
MOHD
ZUKI ALI**

THIS Thursday will mark a year since we were forced to stay home and abide by the Movement Control Order to combat Covid-19.

Apart from the immense human toll, the global pandemic has shattered socioeconomic security by negatively affecting businesses, jobs, incomes, education and food supply chains, to name but a few. Consequently, Malaysia's economy contracted by 5.6 per cent with 107,024 job losses reported last year.

Aiming to strike a balance between protecting lives and livelihoods, Malaysia has been implementing wide-ranging policies to mitigate the losses. Standard operating procedures for a myriad of sectors and different types of movement controls have been

enforced to flatten the Covid-19 infection curve.

Economic mitigation efforts include providing stimulus packages, creating jobs through the Penjana Kerjaya 2.0 programme and MyFutureJobs portal and strengthening the digital economy through the MyDIGITAL and National Digital Network initiatives.

The public sector has been reducing bureaucracy to expedite development projects, spur economic growth and promote new investments.

Efforts to help the country recover were further bolstered by the arrival of Malaysia's first batch of vaccines on Feb 21 and its official rollout three days after. Through the National Covid-19 Immunisation Programme, the government seeks to achieve herd immunity by providing free vaccination for 80 per cent of the population, or 26 million people.

The programme has three phases over a year, based on recipients' exposure to the virus and their infectivity risk.

The Covid-19 Vaccine Supply Access Guarantee Special Committee (JKJAV), co-led by the Health Ministry and Science, Technology and Innovation Min-

istry, and the Covid-19 Immunisation Task Force, co-led by the Health Ministry and Defence Ministry, have been assigned to plan, execute and monitor this mammoth exercise.

The public sector has an enormous responsibility in ensuring the smooth running of the inoculation drive involving 13,000 public healthcare and security workers, as well as 5,000 non-health workers from various sectors.

In addition to managing human capital, other critical tasks include procurement of administering assets, registration of candidates, categorisation of recipients, big data analysis, logistics, security and post-vaccination monitoring.

Such an undertaking presents a big opportunity for the public sector to demonstrate efficient inter-agency coordination and operations towards achieving the government's vaccination target.

Besides inter-agency engagement, the second inoculation pillar that calls for civil servants' sound support is strategic communications. Mediums like meetings, interviews, articles, websites and billboards should be used effectively to educate people about vaccines and the immunisation

programme, encourage registration and dispel misinformation.

An example of an issue that is being addressed through policy action and public information is the alleged queue-jumping by non-frontliners. Such claims reflect public vigilance about how the government is handling the inoculation drive that should be done based on JKJAV's guidelines.

Civil servants should seize the opportunity to provide clarification as a way to exercise transparency, integrity and accountability towards ensuring orderly and fair distribution of vaccines.

Third, the inoculation drive is paving a path that civil servants should direct towards sustainable Covid-19 recovery. The World Bank projects that Malaysia's economy can grow up to 6.7 per cent with an effective vaccine rollout that would improve consumption, exports and investments.

This is an opportunity for the public sector to continue enhancing its delivery systems for the people and planet. When crafting policies and performing duties, a crucial question that civil servants must always seek to answer is "how can we build back better?"

A constructive way is to align

policies and investments strategically with sustainable development goals, such as promoting good health and wellbeing, decent work and economic growth, quality education and responsible consumption and production.

The public sector must keep strengthening multisectoral cooperation across national and international levels that are essential for a successful recovery. The immunisation programme offers opportunities for civil servants to render profound contributions, including through efficient inter-agency engagements, clear communications and sustainable Covid-19 recovery.

As Malaysia lays the foundations for economic restoration, the public sector should conduct reviews, institutionalise best practices and propose improvements towards rebuilding political, economic and social systems that are more sustainable, inclusive and resilient.

The way we manage the inoculation drive amid today's health and economic crises will prepare us better for any risk and shock that tomorrow may bring.

The writer is chief secretary to the government