

THE Covid-19 pandemic and the ensuing economic meltdown has impacted Negri Sembilan's growth and the rakyat's well-being, but the state administration remains committed to helping the people cushion the effects of the pandemic.

Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Aminuddin Harun, who took over the reins of the state government in 2018, says although the pandemic has derailed several initiatives, his administration has risen to the challenge by finding new ways to increase revenue and help the rakyat.

"When the federal authorities enforced the movement control order in May 2021, almost all economic sectors in the state were impacted and unable to operate.

"Property development, construction, quarry and sand mining and tourism were among the worst hit sectors, which affected revenue," he said.

Due to this situation, the state was only able to collect RM397.4mil in revenue for 2021, compared to the initial RM448mil target projected for the whole of 2021.

But Aminuddin said the relevant government agencies had been working doubly hard to increase revenue collection by adopting new strategies.

The state government had done exceptionally well in 2020, he said, when it managed to collect almost RM448mil or 98% of the projected revenue despite the tougher conditions due to Covid-19.

"We have been doing our best to neutralise the effects of Covid-19 on our economy and are extremely proud that we managed to collect the projected revenue for 2020 despite being affected by Covid-19 for months.

"For the record, we had also managed to attract investments totalling RM7.93bil in 2020, which was the highest ever in the state's history, and we are not going to slow down," Aminuddin said.

In December 2020, he launched Invest NS 2021 to keep the momentum going and attract more local and foreign investors to the state.

This initiative has been successful so far, with the state securing some RM2.2bil in investments in the first half of 2021.

"We expect to get RM5bil in investments for 2021 which will help create 1,274 jobs.

"Things are also expected to improve as an economy expert from Universiti Putra Malaysia has forecast the state to register a GDP of between 2.3% and 3.3% for 2021," he said, adding that the outlook for 2022 was even better with GDP of between 3.2% and 4.2%.

The state has also been prudent in managing its income and had reserves totalling almost RM900mil as of Nov 15, 2021.

"For the 2022 budget, a sum of RM520mil has been set aside and we are expecting a revenue of RM432mil, a deficit of RM88mil.

"The budget prioritises the post-Covid-19 economic recovery agenda with the entire focus given to initiatives that can boost the state's economy," he said.

His administration, through the state Economic Planning Unit, has also developed the Negri Sembilan Development Plan (2021-2025) to further bolster its economy.

The mid-term plan, he said, focuses on the fiscal and macroeconomy, entrepreneurship and small- and medium-scale industries, human capital, natural resources utilisation and high value sector.

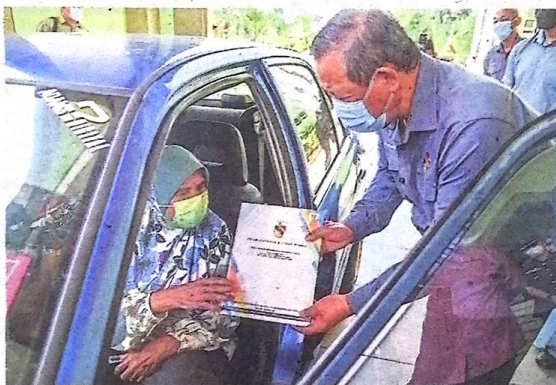
Apart from revitalising the domestic economy, the move will help reduce the financial burden of the rakyat and improve household income via the implementation of various programmes.

A total of 52 existing and new

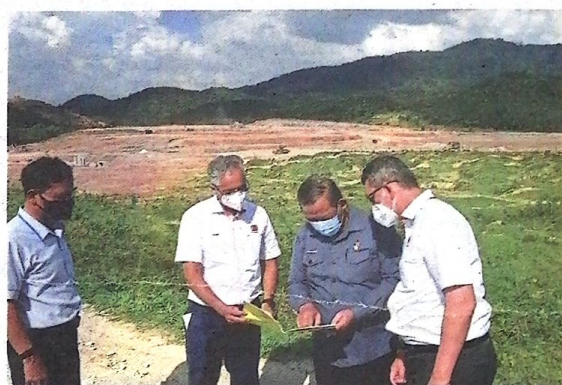
Lending a helping hand



Aminuddin with representatives from small- and medium-scale companies involved in the infrastructure sector after presenting them with initial capital to carry out their projects. The capital, allocated from a RM5mil revolving fund, aims to assist these contractors who were hard hit by the Covid-19 pandemic.



Aminuddin presenting a land title to a recipient from the Felcra Rompin A scheme in Jempol. The settlers, who have their own rubber smallholdings, have been working on the land since the early 1980s.



Aminuddin's business-friendly administration has been working hard to attract investors to the state even during the pandemic. Here, Aminuddin is being briefed during a visit to a project site.

initiatives involving a sum of RM64mil will be carried out this year for the rakyat which include financial assistance programmes, cash grants, non-financial incentives and other supporting aid.

Aminuddin said to produce more micro-entrepreneurs, the state government will provide a grant of RM3,000 each to individuals under the Negri Sembilan Entrepreneur Fund (TUNS) this year.

As of last November, 4,147 individuals had benefited from the programme, which was launched in 2019.

Citing an example, he said Siti Aisah Saharudin, who successfully applied for the grant in November 2020, had managed to increase her monthly income from RM2,000 to RM5,000 after she used the grant to venture into the catering business.

"We have received positive feedback on the programme so far with many success stories. This will be continued in 2022 with an allocation of RM3mil from the state government," he said, adding that this will benefit 1,000 entrepreneurs.

The TUNS Plus programme, launched in 2021, will also be continued. Under the programme, entrepreneurs will be eligible to apply for interest-free loans of up to RM15,000 to expand their businesses. Another RM3mil has been set aside for this.

As of November, the state government had approved 213 applications from those involved in the food, services, agriculture, beauty, textile, automotive, construction, handicrafts, medical, telecommuni-

cations and information and communications technology and retail industries.

Aminuddin said his administration has also decided to launch another programme known as Halal Cottage for those keen to run small-scale businesses from the comfort of their homes.

Under this initiative, individuals can apply for a grant of up to RM5,000 to upgrade their premises and to buy related equipment. A sum of RM500,000 has been set aside for this.

The state government, he said, will also help some local entrepreneurs market their products.

"We will spend RM2mil to upgrade a souvenir shop at the Taman Seni Budaya complex near the state museum, which will be turned into a hub to display such products," he said, adding that the centre will also be turned into a tourist destination.

He said to get more graduates involved in the agriculture sector, the state government will also continue with the Siswazah Tani initiative known as INSIST9.

"Those keen will be given a grant of up to RM10,000," he said, adding that RM500,000 has also been allocated for this programme, which aims to reduce unemployment among graduates.

Since its launch in 2020, a total of 119 graduates have benefited from the programme.

He also shared the success stories of Khairul Syakirin Mohamad, a graduate in Sport Science who ventured into chilli farming in

Tampin in 2019, and Tan Sie Jie, a diploma holder in hotel management who started growing vegetables in Jempol in mid-2020.

"Khairul Syakirin's farm produced 9.6 tonnes of chillies worth RM96,000 last year while Tan, who had a much bigger plot of land, managed to earn an income of RM140,000 with her produce weighing 35 tonnes," he added.

He said non-graduates will not be left out as they too can apply for grants under a separate programme known as Petani Muda.

Aminuddin said the initiative, launched in 2021, has been well received with eligible youths also being given grants of up to RM10,000 each to venture into the agriculture sector.

An additional RM500,000 has been set aside for the Petani Muda programme.

"My administration will also continue with the programme to turn idle land into agricultural areas and RM1mil has been set aside to those who are keen to take part.

"Those eligible will be given assistance, including equipment worth up to RM15,000 per hectare," he said, adding that this will also help increase food supply in the state.

Aminuddin said the state government will also set up a RM3mil Agro Fund to help those who are successful and wish to venture into agriculture on a bigger scale.

"We will form a strategic partnership with Agro Bank to help those who are keen to go big in agriculture.

"Those eligible will be able to

apply for interest-free loans of up to RM50,000 and expand their business," he said.

Aminuddin said the fishermen community will also be given aid from the state government.

A new initiative known as Insentif Galakan Nelayan (Ingen) has been launched with an allocation of RM500,000.

"Under the scheme, fishermen will be able to apply for grants of between RM5,000 and RM15,000 to, among others, buy equipment and repair their boats. To be eligible, they will have to get the necessary verification from the related government agencies," he said.

And to ensure that hawkers can continue to ply their trade in a clean environment, the state government will spend RM1mil to relocate them to new sites.

He said in 2021, the state government had approved 18 new centres, with a total of 273 lots in seven areas, to allow them to operate in a more conducive environment.

Aminuddin said the state government will also set aside RM200,000 to organise job fairs to help more people, especially those retrenched due to Covid-19 and unemployed graduates, secure employment.

He expressed hope that the people of Negri Sembilan will grab the opportunities being made available by his administration in 2022.

"It is also my hope that the relevant government agencies and departments will assist the rakyat who wish to take up these offers so that our aim to help as many people possible is realised," he added.