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Cutting red tape to the minimum

THE Federal Government's latest directive to Ministries and State Governments to cut red tape in approving projects to boost economic growth is succinctly clear that it wants delays to be cut to the barest minimum. This is splendid news to all, particularly long-suffering developers and businessmen.

That a month's time-frame has now been set for local authorities to approve applications for housing and development-related projects will give no room for any lame excuse to withhold approval of projects. That the Federal Government means business and will not allow bureaucracy to hamper efforts to revive the economy is obvious by its urgency in pursuing the issue. The directive from Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was issued at last week's Cabinet meeting and at the discussions with Menteri Besar and Chief Ministers, which dealt at length on the Government's measures in resolving the economic problems. Earlier this month, he drove home the need to revamp the civil service to reduce red tape.

There were statements aplenty last week to reinforce Dr Mahathir's urgent call. The array of pronouncements came from no less than the Chief Secretary to the Government, Public Services Department Director-General and Menteri Besar. As State Governments and their agencies have a pivotal role, their willingness to co-operate so long as issues like health, safety and the environment are not compromised, is significant. They do need to introduce proactive and effective work procedures from now on to take up the central directive with alacrity and sustain it until a positive work culture emerges. Indeed, as Dr Mahathir has rightly pointed out, procedures must be simplified. There is no reason that this cannot be done if the relevant federal authorities, the States and the local authorities put their heads together to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses and take immediate remedial actions. A vital area is technical expertise and manpower resources which has to be looked into for fast approval of projects without jeopardising quality.

The public knows only too well that previous directives from the Federal Government to speed up approvals have had little effect. A pertinent case is the issuance of the certificate of fitness for dwellings and other buildings. There is a directive to issue the CF within two weeks but this has clearly not been adhered to by many local authorities. The issuance of strata titles is another tale of woe. Although efforts are being made to speed up the process, it is taking far too long for the proper laws to be enacted paving the way for better management of highrises. In this increasingly competitive global environment, taking years to bring out a piece of legislation and to approve a project is certainly a retrogressive step. Local authorities should not underestimate the Federal Government's patience. Those who continue to disregard the productivity call do so at their own peril.

Taking the cue from Kuala Lumpur's seriousness in tackling bureaucratic red tape, the Housing and Local Government Ministry should use this golden opportunity to inculcate an efficient work procedure and discipline among its own rank-and-file and that of local councils. Less bureaucracy will help the Government in the long run. We are amazed at the Ministry's latest call on the media to play a bigger role by monitoring the local councils' effectiveness. If the Ministry has bothered to go through the

print media daily through the years, the latter's constructive role can fill volumes. A picture speaks a thousand words and there has been no lack of telling photographs in our dailies. Instead of now calling for pictorial evidence for the Ministry's action, it should have been monitoring the media's many reports in this area. With the Ministry's new invitation to the public, we fear that it may be inundated with public complaints which it cannot handle and then it would be accused of talking glibly.

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