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States, Ministries ordered to cut red tape (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has directed all Ministries and State Governments to cut red tape in approving projects which can boost economic growth.

Rural Development Minister Datuk Annuar Musa and Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Dr Ting Chew Peh said at separate Press briefings that the directive was issued at yesterday's meeting of Menteris Besar and Chief Ministers and at Wednesday's Cabinet meeting.

Annuar said in Malacca that Dr Mahathir felt delays in approving projects would only hamper efforts to revive the economy.

"Dr Mahathir had pointed out that less bureaucracy would help the Government in the long run. Procedures must be simplified and applications must not take too long to be approved."

On July 4, Dr Mahathir had said the public service must be revamped to reduce bureaucracy.

He had also said civil servants could no longer operate at the current pace given the economic situation.

In Banting, Selangor, Ting said all State Governments had agreed at the meeting to reduce red tape in approving housing and other development projects so long as issues like health, safety and the environment were not compromised.

"Now that the State Governments have agreed, the local councils must also follow suit so that pending projects can be approved faster.

"There is no reason why local councils cannot give approval on matters within their jurisdiction, like land conversion and building plans within months instead of years," Ting told reporters at the groundbreaking ceremony of a civic centre at Sungai Jarom New Village.

He said the Ministry had received complaints about some local councils taking up to two years to approve land conversion applications.

Following discussions on the matter, he said, the Cabinet directed all local councils to take immediate measures to speed up the approval process, especially for low-cost houses.

To monitor compliance by the councils, they would be required to submit a report on the status of applications for development projects.

"Those which still take a long time to grant approval and cause a project to be delayed will be asked to show cause," Ting said.

The meeting was attended by all Menteris Besar and Chief Ministers except Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman, Kelantan Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat and Sarawak Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud.

Annuar said he had given the agencies under his Ministry one month to report on their re-organisation to reduce bureaucracy in the approval of rural projects.

Speaking after meeting community and political leaders at the Wacana Cinta Negara function in Yayasan Melaka, Annuar said the agencies could form a one-stop centre to process applications.

"I have asked Risda (Rubber Industry Smallholders Development Authority) to submit a report on how long it takes to process an application for replanting. Other agencies also have to submit similar reports.

"We must be consistent in all efforts to turn around the economy," he added.

He said the Government had initially allocated about RM4 million this

year to develop industries in rural areas, but raised it to RM10 million in view of the economic problems.

"The Government has set aside RM50 million to develop the industries next year."

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