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## Ministers to monitor projects

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PUTRAJAYA, Tues. - Ministers and senior officials were today directed to personally monitor the progress of government projects and not to rely solely on reports from their subordinates.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said if this was not done, it could derail the Government's efforts to stimulate the economy.

"It's already May ... You have seven months before the year ends. I want you to monitor all the projects under your ministry and ensure all allocations are promptly spent," he said.

The Prime Minister said this when launching simultaneously the National District Officers Conference 2001 and the Project Monitoring System II here today.

Also present were Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Samsudin Osman and 230 district officers.

Dr Mahathir said the Government would be able to monitor the progress of projects directly through the PMS.

Under the system, all information, including the progress of a particular project, would be entered into a government computer network.

This would allow the relevant authorities to monitor the project effectively.

Dr Mahathir said the authorities' efforts to stimulate the economy would work only if all levels of the Government worked as a team.

"Unfortunately, some reports submitted by officers in charge at the lower levels are inaccurate or incomplete.

"And when we go to see for ourselves, only then do we know that not much has been done," he said adding that whenever he visits such projects, even the roads were newly tarred.

Citing examples, Dr Mahathir said it sometimes took up to two years for the authorities to acquire land to build schools.

"This is not acceptable. If a project is scheduled to begin this year, it has to begin this year.

"If it is supposed to begin next year and completed the following year, it has to be done," he said.

Dr Mahathir also told district officers to have established manual procedures and desk files to ensure all related parties were kept informed of the progress of a particular project.

This was not to make the procedure bureaucratic but to ensure the progress of the project was according to schedule.

Dr Mahathir also expressed regret over the lack of initiative on the part of some officials in not spending allocations.

He said some would do "Christmas shopping" before the year ends just to ensure the money was spent.

"We want allocations to be spent throughout the year and not just at the end of the year. All these need proper planning," he said.

However, he added that this did not mean officers should unnecessarily spend allocations to the point of wastage.

Dr Mahathir told the authorities to query their subordinates if they failed to provide satisfactory reasons for the delay in their projects or why payments to contractors were not made.

He also told them to acquire computer skills so they could communicate with their superior officers easily.

Dr Mahathir said the Government, which recently announced a RM3 billion economic stimulus package, was trying hard to ensure Malaysia would not be hard hit following the slowdown in the US economy.

This was in addition to the RM26 billion allocated under Budget 2001.

"Initially, we had targeted a growth of eight per cent for this year but due to the anticipated slowdown, we have revised it to 7.5 per cent.

"That is why we need to spend whatever is allocated to keep up with our growth target," he said adding that 23 per cent of Malaysia's trade was with the US.