

# 'KL COMMITTED TO DEVELOPING MINDANAO'

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Establishment of Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao will boost economic ties, says PM



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MANILA

**M**ALAYSIA has expressed its continued commitment to helping the Philippines develop the economy of the newly-minted autonomous government in Mindanao, Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, in a joint statement with Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte at Malacanang Palace here yesterday, said the establish-



Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad shaking hands with Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte at the Malacanang Palace in Manila yesterday. BERNAMA PIC

ment of BARMM last year would boost economic ties between both countries due to the vast economic potential of the region.

"I congratulate Duterte on the success of the ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) and the appointment of members into the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA)," he said after a closed-door bilateral meeting with Duterte and members of his government.

Present at the meeting were Foreign Minister Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah, International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Darell Leiking and ministry officials.

BOL was enacted last year when Duterte's administration approved the law, which granted more autonomy to the country's predominantly Muslim region. An 80-member body of the BTA that will govern the region is set

to be inaugurated soon.

Dr Mahathir said the sub-regional economic cooperation initiative in Southeast Asia, known as the BIMP-EAGA (Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines East Asean Growth Area), could be employed to assist both countries in development initiatives in Mindanao.

He encouraged the private sectors in both countries to explore new collaborations in trade and

investments, besides discussing programmes for teachers and students in madrasah, especially in Mindanao.

Duterte thanked Malaysia for playing an important role as the third-party facilitator in the long-drawn peace process between the Philippine government and Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir said Asean partners could learn from other trade blocs in developing a "trading currency" that could be used by member countries.

"We may not have a single currency because we will not be as close as members of the European Union, for example.

"We'll keep our currencies. But we can develop a trading currency that can be used by everyone... with the currency having a certain value relative to the currency of each member country.

"This (idea) can be refined so that when we do come closer together following a gradual process, then we will have the benefit of avoiding the mistakes made by other regional (trade) unions," he said at a question-and-answer session during the Malaysian-Philippine business forum.

He was responding to a question on the evolution of Asean in the face of rising economic giants such as India, China and Russia.