

'GOVT MUST CREATE MORE JOBS, CONTROL POPULATION GROWTH'

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THE Philippines can catch up with the rest of the world if it would be able to control population growth, create more jobs by attracting more foreign direct investments (FDI) and having a "stable" government.

This was the response of Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad, "the man who made Malaysia," to the BUSINESSMIRROR's question of how the Philippines could catch up with the rest of the world shortly after he disembarked from a Malaysian Airlines plane on Thursday afternoon.

When told that the Philippines used to be economically advanced than the rest of Southeast Asia in the not-too-distant past, Mahathir said: "Leaders must always care for the people and work for the people; leaders never work for themselves."

Mahathir is in the country for an overnight stay on the invitation of the Financial Executives Institute of the

Philippines (Finex), according to its president, Benedicta Du-Baladad. Baladad said the conference's theme is "Barriers in Asian Financial Integration."

"We thought we will invite Mahathir to get some thoughts from the man who made Malaysia and who made a big contribution in this part of the world," she said.

Baladad added that Mahathir and former President Fidel V. Ramos were invited to grace the Asian Leaders Forum, that will be held at a hotel in Makati City on Thursday night. Mahathir will be leaving for Kuala Lumpur on Friday.

The BUSINESSMIRROR asked Mahathir what he would

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FORMER Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad (right) arrived in the country on Thursday and was welcomed by Financial Executives Institute of the Philippines (Finex) President Benedicta Du-Baladad. Mahathir is the keynote speaker of the 49th Finex National Conference, which will be held in a Makati City hotel on Friday. NONIE REYES



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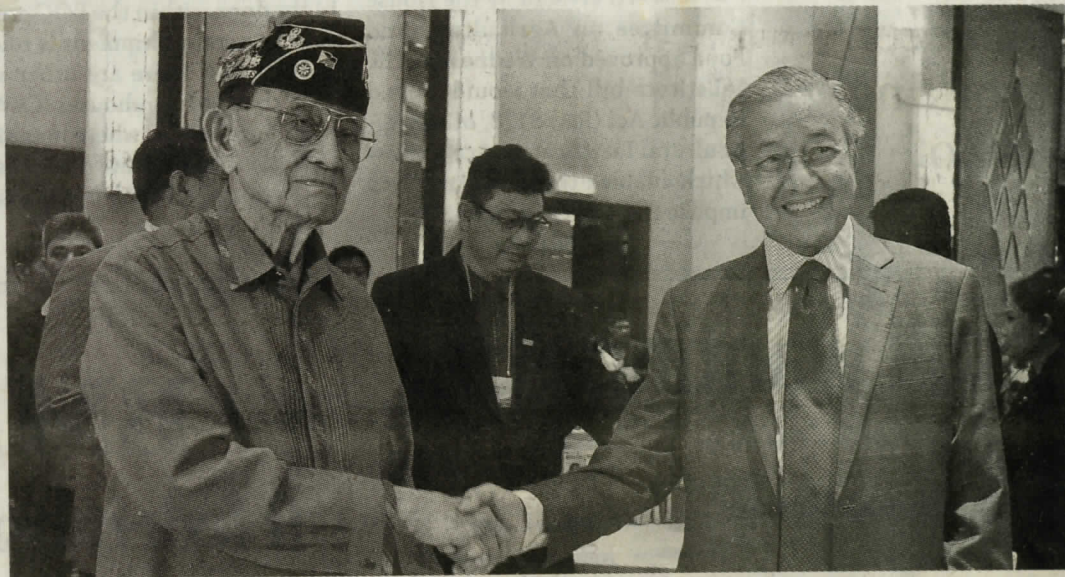
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talk about during the conference, and he replied it would have something to do with economics and Asean countries.

When it was pointed out that the Asean seems fragmented and could not manage to get a solid voice on sensitive topics, such as the South China Sea, Mahathir replied: "Because leaders nowadays change very frequently. So, when leaders change, that kind of camaraderie they develop through discussion and understanding are no longer available."

Headed, however, a caveat that a leader staying too long in office could also pose a problem.

Queried for the ideal term, he said: "Two terms would be ideal." And, yet, Mahathir's term of 22 years was one of the longest in Asia, having ruled the Malaysian Peninsula from July 16, 1981, to October 31, 2003.



FORMER Philippine President Fidel V. Ramos (left) welcomes former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad during the Asean Leaders Forum organized by the Asean Society Philippines, P&G Grant Thornton and the EON Group held at a hotel in Makati City on Thursday. The two leaders led the panel discussion during the first in a series of initiatives that aims to raise greater awareness and education about the Asean as a region of growth and opportunity. ALYSA SALEN