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Not many can follow PM in voicing one's plan to retire

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HOW many people will follow Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to voluntarily announce their retirement? The Prime Minister, forever challenging Malaysians to test their minds against the mundane and routine, has actually given the cue to others to do likewise.

I was in the packed Dewan Merdeka a week ago when Dr Mahathir made the then shocking, now understandable, announcement. Together with Umno delegates and observers attending the annual party general assembly, I was speechless when he made known his intention to quit the national political stage.

Amid the loud protestations from delegates and supreme council members, Dr Mahathir repeatedly said he had made up his mind, that he'd been at the top for too long, and that it was time to withdraw.

I've not witnessed a similar scene elsewhere, be it in the political or corporate scene. I imagine it's hard to give up when one is at the peak of one's career. But Mahathir the doctor Prime Minister is the exception to the rule, I suppose.

Which leads me to my original question: Who else among the country's top political leaders will follow in his footsteps? There are several others who can be generally regarded as Dr Mahathir's contemporaries, having risen the political ladder in their respective parties more or less at about the same time.

Like Dr Mahathir, some of them have done much to help their organisations become what they are, in and outside the ruling national coalition. They have their own legacies too. I'm sure that if they have done enough to endear themselves to the grassroots, their legacies would be protected and enhanced.

The regeneration that is about to take place in Umno should also trigger other parties to do the same. Political parties everywhere need to reinvent themselves in order to keep up with their rivals or allies. Insofar as the Barisan Nasional is concerned, at the national and State levels, I can name several leaders from both sides of the Malacca Straits who can, and perhaps should, emulate Dr Mahathir's exemplary step.

They need not make their exit at the same time as the Prime Minister, but they can certainly share with the rakyat their plans. Several of them have been at the helm of their States for years, and perhaps they should make way for younger leaders. This is as good a time as any to make a graceful and dignified exit.