

PM: Time to go

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PUTRAJAYA: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says veteran Barisan Nasional politicians who have been around a long time should make way for new faces.

He said they should give a chance to new faces and also help to campaign for these candidates' victories in the general election.

In an interview with Bernama yesterday, his last before handing over power at the end of the month, the prime minister said previously, he was "embarrassed to tell them it was time to step down".

"They could have turned around and said 'what about you?' Now that I have stepped down, I can tell them 'you can stay on only for so long. You can't stay forever, you can't stay until you die in office'."

He said these long-serving incumbents should remember that they are in that position because other people supported them and kept them there, election after election.

Now, he said, it is the turn of new faces and the older guard should make way and help the new candidates win in the polls.

"That's what I think we should all do. I am going to do just that. I need to help the elections even though I am not a candidate."

Give way and help new faces in polls, old guard told

Asked about some BN leaders who had been there as long as him or even longer, Mahathir, 78, said: "It is up to them. I believe that after some time, you can't stay; you are burnt out. And I think your constitution may not be as good as the younger generation."

He said he had benefited from the late Tun Hussein Onn who willingly stepped down and made way for him to become prime minister in 1981.

"I didn't push him out; he decided to step down. If he had not stepped down, I would not have had the opportunity to do anything.

"So, even if you have done well, you should be prepared to accept the fact that somebody else may do better," he said.

Mahathir will hand over power to Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi on Oct 31.

Veteran leaders in the BN who have

served over 20 years include Wanita Umno chief Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik, MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu and Sarawak Chief Minister and Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu president Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud.

Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, another long-serving leader, quit as MCA president on May 28 after a bitter rift within the party.

Mahathir, who will chair the Organisation of Islamic Conference summit tomorrow, was also asked to comment on Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf's views that he has become public property and could not retire from the international stage because he has a lot to contribute to the Muslim world.

"If I am required to do anything that is productive, yes, I will be willing to contribute, not in an official position because I will not be able to have the kind of authority I have in Malaysia as prime minister.

"The only contributions that I can make is maybe ideas. My contribution even in Malaysia is in terms of ideas ... Authority is necessary in order to implement ideas," he said.