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Polls will mark end of an era for veteran politicians

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Many veterans who have dominated the Malaysian political landscape since Independence and the 1960s will retire at the general election, marking the end of an era.

Most prominent among them is former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who began his political activism as a student in Singapore in the late 1940s and contested and won his first parliamentary seat in 1964.

Dr Mahathir went on to become Deputy Prime Minister in 1976 and Prime Minister in 1981 before retiring last October.

He will vacate his Kubang Pasu seat in Kedah but has pledged to continue working for Umno and campaign in the elections.

Another veteran, former finance minister Tun Daim Zainuddin, who made his mark as the point man for the Government in negotiating a solution to Sarawak's political crisis in the mid-1960s, will also vacate his Merbok seat, also in Kedah.

Daim served as Finance Minister from 1984 to 1991 and was recalled during the Asian currency crisis in 1997 to serve the Cabinet again. He left the Cabinet in 2001.

Former Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, who will go down in history as the longest-serving MCA president - 16 years, began his political career by winning the Mata Kuching parliamentary seat in Penang in 1974.

In 1986, he moved to Labis in Johor as MP.

Dr Ling, too, will no longer take a seat in Parliament House after the general election.

Former Agriculture Minister Tan Sri Sulaiman Daud, who has been MP for Petra Jaya since 1974, is also retiring.

Energy, Communications and Multimedia Minister Datuk Amar Leo Moggie, having relinquished his position as president of Parti Bansa Dayak Sarawak in May last year, will also leave the political scene.

He contested and won the Machan State seat in Sarawak in 1974, and is currently the MP for Kanowit.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Mohd Effendi Norwawi has reportedly asked to be "excused" from this election. The MP for Kuala Rejang first contested and won the Sarawak State seat of Dalat in 1991.

Land and Co-operative Development Minister Tan Sri Kasitah Gaddam, facing charges of corruption, is unlikely to contest. He won the Kinabalu Parliamentary seat in 1986 and is currently a Senator.

Former Wanita Umno deputy president Tan Sri Zaleha Ismail, MP for Gombak, will also be making way. Penang MCA stalwart Tan Sri Sak Cheng Lum will also quit the political scene with this election. He first became the State Assemblyman of Bagan Jermal, Penang, in 1978. After switching to a parliamentary seat in 1986, he retained the Bagan Jermal State constituency in the past two elections and was also Penang State MCA chairman from 1986 to 2002.

Former Malacca MCA chairman Datuk Gan Boon Leong, who turned giant-killer in the 1982 election by defeating the then DAP secretary-general Lim Kit Siang in Bandar Hilir, Malacca, has also announced his intention to retire from politics. He is the State Assemblyman for Duyung.

Some aren't yet ready to go, however. Among the veterans who are keen to continue serving the rakyat is Tun Ghafar Baba, who has contested and won

in every general election since 1955. The MP for Batu Berendam has offered himself as a candidate for a 12th consecutive election this time around.