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Make way for new faces, urges Dr M (HL)

PUTRAJAYA, Tues. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has advised veteran Barisan Nasional politicians who have been around for a long time to make way for new faces.

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

In a wide-ranging interview with Bernama today, Dr Mahathir said previously, he was "embarrassed to tell them that it is time to step down".

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

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

Now, he said, it was the turn of new faces, and the old guard should 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 in the election even though I am not a candidate."

Asked about some Barisan Nasional leaders who have been there as long as him or even longer, Dr Mahathir 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."

Dr Mahathir 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, then 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 than you."

Dr Mahathir, 78, shocked the nation when he announced his retirement in June last year at the height of his popularity (see Page 8).

He has been in Government for 29 years, since his appointment as Education Minister in 1974 and his ascension to the Prime Minister's post in 1981.