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`Mokhzani did it to protect his family'

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Datuk Mokhzani Mahathir, who stunned business and political circles by announcing his exit from the corporate world yesterday, did it to defend the family's honour and integrity.

"The family, particularly the father, has been unfairly accused of practising nepotism and Mokhzani cannot bear to see the image of his father coloured by wrong perceptions on his (Mokhzani's) participation in business," said close associates.

Of course, they said, the opposition would want him to stay on in business, as "this is an easy target" to pursue their agenda against so-called nepotism and cronyism within Umno and the Government.

Mokhzani, they said, feels he has not been spending enough time with his family and that he ought to take a more active role in Umno Youth, of which he is the assistant treasurer.

"He firmly believes that the revival of Umno begins with the strengthening of Umno Youth," one of the associates told the New Straits Times today.

They believe Mokhzani, one of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's seven children, feels that Umno and the Government are now grappling with the question of perception and that he needs to work hard to address this.

Analysts are also saying that it will be "laughable" for anyone to suggest that he is now being groomed for a major political role.

"Why would he want to do that ... the exit is to protect the family ... why create more problems?"

Umno's fortunes were given a lift by his decision to leave the corporate world, they said.

"In one stroke, the Opposition armoury has been dented. Think of the invective caused by the Prime Minister's sons' participation in business."

With Mokhzani out of the way, they said, attention would shift to his elder brother, Mirzan, who is also in the business world.

"However, Mokhzani has been the one in the news. Little is heard of Mirzan lately."

Some of his associates believe that being young, educated and experienced, he does not regret deciding on the withdrawal.

Mokhzani is 40 and an engineer by training. He is chief executive officer of Pantai Holdings Bhd and Tongkah Holdings Bhd. He has 12.6 per cent direct interest in Tongkah Holdings and 32.9 per cent in Pantai Holdings.

Yesterday, Mokhzani said he decided to leave the corporate world as he was disappointed with the allegations by irresponsible groups who tarnished his name and that of his father.