

A CHIP OFF THE OLD MAHATHIR BLOCK

The name Mahathir isn't likely to vanish from the Malaysian government any time soon. Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad may be due to retire at the end of the month after more than two decades at the country's helm, but officials from the United Malays National Organization, the leading party in the ruling coalition, say one of his offspring is expected to carry on the family tradition and run for parliament at the next general election. Businessman Mokhzani Mahathir, 43, the second son of the premier, is tipped to run in Merbok, a parliamentary constituency in the northern state of Kedah, they say. The next election must be called by early 2005. Merbok's current incumbent is Daim Zainuddin, a former finance minister who has indicated that he wants to withdraw from politics. If elected, Mahathir junior is likely to form part of the next administration as he enjoys close relations with Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who is due to become prime minister on October 31.