

M'sian minister challenges Dr M to quit Umno

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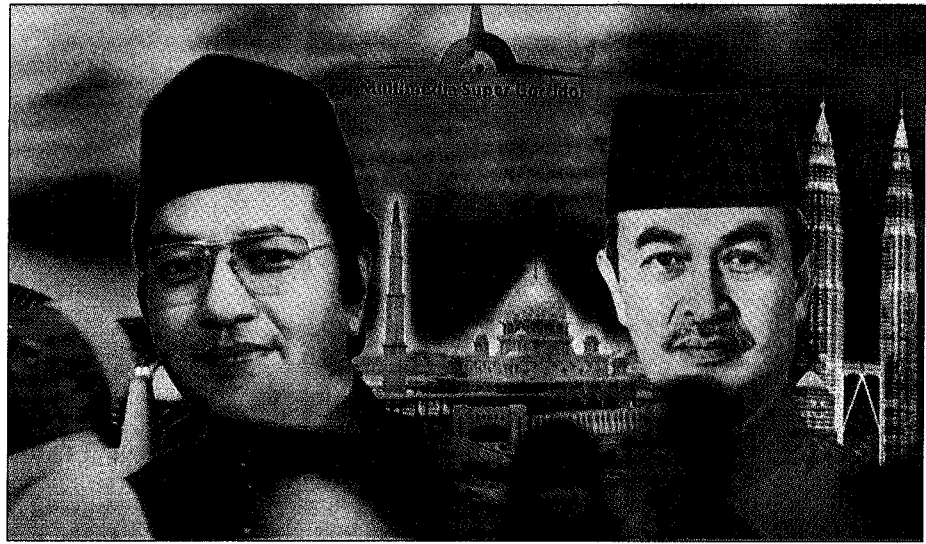
Nazri Aziz also slams ex-PM for slighting Abdullah's son-in-law

By **S JAYASANKARAN**
in Kuala Lumpur

THE gloves have come off in Kuala Lumpur as criticism by former premier Mahathir Mohamad against Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi escalated. Nazri Aziz, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, yesterday invited Dr Mahathir to be "man.enough" to leave the United Malays National Organisation, the dominant political party over which Mr Abdullah presides.

"If he continues to remain in the party, he would be like the opposition," Mr Nazri said at a press conference in Parliament House. "It would be better if he acts like a man and leaves the party."

Mr Nazri also defended Khairy Jamaluddin, Mr Abdullah's son-in-law, whom Dr Mahathir had sin-



REUTERS

Prime movers: *There is no enmity between Mr Abdullah and Dr Mahathir, says Rural Development Minister Aziz Shamsuddin*

gled out on Saturday for allegedly having too much influence in government.

"An 81-year-old man wants to quarrel with a 31-year-old young man," said Mr Nazri. "Better to pick someone his own size. Because you are angry with a young politician, you want to burn the country?"

Meanwhile, almost all the mainstream media blacked out Dr Mahathir's comments over the weekend, signalling a ratcheting-up of the cold war against the ex-premier.

In addition, Mr Abdullah was scheduled to chair a late meeting yesterday with Malaysian newspaper edi-

tors where he was expected to brief them on how to tackle the Mahathir issue.

Political analysts close to Umno said that Mr Abdullah had been advised to handle the issue head-on and to do it politically *a la* Mahathir. By this, they meant calling Umno leaders personally and making

sure that the top Umno leadership — the deputy, the three vice-presidents and the leaders of the Youth, Wanita and Puteri wings — was firmly behind him.

Dr Mahathir was prime minister for an unbroken 22 years, a record in Malaysian political history.

On Saturday, he took his strongest swipe against Mr Abdullah yet, raising more issues than his previous "four questions" he'd wanted answers to.

It isn't clear what Dr Mahathir really wants but what's apparent is that many of his diatribes resonate within the party and government. Last week, Aziz Shamsuddin, the Minister of Rural Development and a long-time political secretary of Dr Mahathir, said that there was no enmity between Mr Abdullah and Dr Mahathir. "The real problem is that there is a third party who is trying to control the present government," he told reporters without elaborating.