

11/06/2003

Capital pride

THE PRIME Minister has observed that criticism of the development of Putrajaya as the federal administrative capital has quietened following its success. He was alluding to the vilification of Putrajaya as an extravagant mega-project. As Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad pointed out, there is no reason why Malaysia should not have an impressive capital. Just as the Brazilians take great pride in Brasilia and the Americans in Washington DC, Putrajaya has become an emblem Malaysians can be proud of. He joked that if in a hundred years the Opposition took over, he was sure they would not sell Putrajaya because it was so beautiful. "I built it for the future, not for myself."

The Government has been justified in spending the money on developing Putrajaya because it has to be treated differently, to look different and to act differently from the other cities in the country. If Putrajaya had been developed only out of the need to relocate the federal administration to relieve congestion in an overcrowded Kuala Lumpur, it would have become a city whose only difference was that it had a large concentration of office buildings and government employees. But a capital differs from other urban centres and requires an environment that is different from a commercial or industrial city in order to fulfil its specific functions.

Putrajaya is not merely an administrative centre, a seat of political power and a focus of decision-making but also an important symbol of the country's spirit, achievements and aspirations. As an intelligent garden city where fibre optic cabling and high bandwidth connectivity are as integral as splendid architecture and lush open spaces, Putrajaya is an impressive landmark in Malaysia's journey to become a developed nation.