

02/07/2003

Learning in Dr M's honour

NOSTALGIA is often described as a creative instinct. It is an instinct very much on display as the nation resigns itself to the fact that its illustrious son, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, will retire at the end of October.

Gratitude, love and nostalgia lie behind the various suggestions to honour and preserve the legacy of Dr Mahathir's leadership - an enlightened leadership willing and pushing a young nation into a strong sense of belief and spirit of *boleh* in its manifest destiny.

These ideas, be it the think tank, institute on his thinking, library and university, mark the people's contributions and participation to the continual process of relocating the past as the lineage of the present. They are not an indulgence but represent the people's collective wish to pay tribute to the man who made Malaysia into what it is today and who, in doing so, became to each and every one of us more than just the PM.

Dr Mahathir has many a time said that he does not like accolades to be heaped on him. Nor does he want any tribute, reward or gift for what he considers as "service". When Dr Mahathir was the Education Minister in 1974, he directed that no institution of learning, including schools, should be named after living persons with the exception of the Rulers. So deep was his animus towards any show of self-indulgence and idolatrous worship. Ask him again today and he would instantly say he would not want to etch his name like a schoolboy on a small tree in the forest that is history.

If only to claim a small testimony to Dr Mahathir's vigour of thought and leadership and its impact on the nation's ethos, Universiti Utara Malaysia - an idea he ceaselessly pushed for until its fruition in his own constituency, Kubang Pasu, and a bequest of his belief in the importance of higher education - should be named Universiti Mahathir Mohamad. His obdurate refusal to be so honoured will, doubtless, be shown. But the people's will should prevail.