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Individuals must also take responsibility

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I READ with great interest the statement by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi on poor work ethics leading to the lack of service and maintenance in Kuala Lumpur. He also complained that this had become a disgrace (NST, Feb 13).

I remember that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had touched on this theme in Langkawi more than a year ago.

Perhaps the calls by our national leaders for a maintenance culture have fallen on deaf ears. The hard work put in by our planners, engineers and builders in coming up with the magnificent structures is in danger of being ruined by failure to maintain them at world-class standards.

The past five years have seen the culmination of several engineering feats in Malaysia, namely, the completion of the tallest building in the world (the Petronas Twin Towers) and the Kuala Lumpur Tower, and the opening of the RM8 billion Kuala Lumpur International Airport.

The worldwide audiences of the XVI Commonwealth Games held in September 1998 could not but be awed by the state-of-the-art facilities in the National Sports Complex, which are among the best in the world.

As the excitement of the Games wore off, the questions in many minds must be, how well the stadiums and the other new infrastructure built for the Games would be maintained, and how long these structures would stay gleaming white and impressive.

As to who should be taken to task for not maintaining these valuable assets, and to be more efficient in serving the public, there is already a lot of flak aimed at the local authorities and other service providers.

Enough said about that. Instead, let us consider the individual's role in ensuring that things are well looked after.

While waiting to board a train with a friend one day, I learnt a very powerful lesson about individual responsibility. The departure time was re-scheduled and when the train was about to leave 30 minutes later than usual, we had a further disappointment. Our destination was not in the list of train stops. We managed to catch our train after another 10 minutes.

But before we did that, my friend walked up to a porter and, for the next five minutes, coolly ticked off the railway company for not providing good service. I asked her what she did that for, as I felt she was only wasting her breath.

She replied that an employee represented the company he or she worked for. Hence, if you want to complain to the company, just talk to any of the staff. It is his or her personal responsibility.

I wish Malaysians could individually take responsibility in all aspects of life, just like the porter is expected to do.

A user or consumer has such a responsibility as well. When we observe something in our neighbourhood which is not well maintained, we can make a difference by contacting the local authority.

I know this can be exasperating sometimes. I know this from experience. Once, I collected 300 signatures to complain about the dirty conditions in a commercial centre near my office. I did not receive any acknowledgement.

I have since moved from the area and the environment there is still unhealthy. Nearer to my present office, the same local authority built a covered walkway to keep the rain away from pedestrians. No one can use it now because the floor becomes flooded when it rains.

Taking responsibility as an individual means placing great value on the facilities built for us.

It means being caring enough to confront the culprit who misuses or damages things. It means being interested enough to find out what has gone wrong so that one can point this out to the right persons. It means to go out of the way to speak with or write to the persons or company responsible for maintaining it or providing the service.

Finally, it means to show praise, when due, to individuals or companies which do a good job making our life pleasant and comfortable. Are these too much to ask for? I think not.