

Dr Mahathir and his beard

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BY TOMMY LEE, ANTHONY
TAN AND MANJIT KAUR

LANGKAWI: Many people may not know this, but there was a time when Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad kept a beard and even Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali could not initially recognise him.

And it was here that he grew it, when he was posted as a government doctor for six months in 1956.

Sharing this episode with participants of the Asean Tourism Forum here yesterday, the former prime minister said the state surgeon posted him to Langkawi when he told him that he was getting married.

"There was only one post for a doctor in Langkawi then and since I was getting married to another doctor, I was posted here before my marriage.

"I thought it was a good opportunity to wear a beard although it was not fashionable then except among the Punjabis," he recalled.

Dr Mahathir, who was the keynote speaker at the conference attended by more than 600 people, said his beard

attracted passing remarks, especially when he turned up in court in Alor Star to give medical evidence.

"In those days, Malays did not wear beards," he said, adding that Dr Siti Hasmah had also failed to recognise him at first and turned away when he visited her at the Kuala Lumpur General Hospital.

"She did a double take and

said 'It's you!' in surprise.

"There I was hiding behind a beard.

"So, there are a lot of things you can do in Langkawi," he quipped to the laughter of those present.

The participants at the conference included journalists, hoteliers, tour operators and travel trade personnel from various parts of the world.