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We need to set up a permanent legacy for Lima's creator

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WALKING side by side with the Prime Minister at the first Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace exhibition in 1991, I whispered my dissatisfaction at how the show was organised.

I told Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad about my misgivings about the show, which at that time was held under a huge tent in Kuah.

I told him the organisers had not done justice and that the show could have been better organised with great impact. Dr Mahathir didn't utter a word until he reached the Kuah jetty where some boats were put on display. He then turned to me and said:

"This is only the first show. Let us give the organisers a chance to see what they can do. Let's see what happens at the next show. We must give them a chance.

"After all, they had just started and are breaking new ground. Let's wait and see."

With that he moved away to inspect the boats on display.

The Manan Brothers are not the Wright Brothers. But their willingness to put up a show which finally has gained international recognition must be placed on record.

Today, as everyone knows, Lima is an accepted event on the international air show calendar. The event has gained in strength and popularity. This can be seen from the increased number of participants, with a more exciting variety of aircraft and maritime hardware on display.

Over the years, one can also see the expansion of the maritime exhibition, with a more focused display at the Porto Malai jetty, while the aerospace one has graduated from the tent to a proper exhibition hall.

Lima is here to stay. The assurance by Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi that he will give all possible attention to Lima should make the organisers and participants feel more confident of subsequent shows.

Lima has all along been seen as a brainchild of Dr Mahathir and everyone has been asking whether Pak Lah will give the same kind of attention to the exhibition.

Pak Lah's assurance on Thursday should make everyone involved with the show feel comfortable and secure.

But perhaps the organisers should sit with the Langkawi Development Authority to help make the event more memorable, not only for participants but the people of Langkawi as well.

A show of this nature and prestige cannot be allowed to be undermined by differences, no matter how petty or major, between the organisers and the local authority. I've heard grievances here and there and they must be addressed comprehensively and not be allowed to fester.

Lima has benefited the people of Langkawi in many ways. More hotels have come up; more seafood joints and restaurants have sprung up offering greater choices and able to meet different budgets; the shops are more aware of their responsibility to help make the legendary island a firm favourite as a tourist destination.

Langkawi today is the fruit of Dr Mahathir's vision and attention to detail. While Lima is set to be a permanent feature, perhaps a more permanent legacy should be found for him. Almost every single project on the island is Dr Mahathir's creation, directly or indirectly - a proper airport, the cable car project, first-class hotels, new millionaires.

Speaking to local businessmen and entrepreneurs, I found out that the

SARS outbreak also had a positive effect on Langkawi.

The people on the island, so used to having tourists flocking to see its many attractions, are beginning to realise that the tourism dollar is not a guaranteed revenue stream. Some are beginning to be more polite to tourists, and are not charging so much for their services as before.

I hope their realisation is real and long-lasting. There were times when one had to fork out a few ringgit just to get a roti canai, while fresh fruit juice used to cost just as much.

Car rental companies have also increased, but they need to be properly regulated. There is still a need to educate the people of Langkawi to be more proactive and to seize the many opportunities available.

Lima, more than any other single event, has given Langkawi fame and