

Speaking up on issues other leaders only think about

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's frank views and unconventional style of leadership may have ruffled some people over the years but the Prime Minister has never been a hypocrite when it comes to calling things as they are.

Former Commonwealth secretary-general Chif Emeka Anyaoku said whatever issues Dr Mahathir raised and articulated on the international stage were actually "what leaders of developing countries thought and felt but could not express openly."

However, he said Dr Mahathir was able to do so because of his succinct views of the developing world and the good home base support that the Prime Minister enjoyed.

"I often told him that (whatever) he expressed (however, controversial it may be) was actually what many leaders from developing countries thought and felt but could not say openly.

"My hope is that leaders from the devel-

oping world would be able to fill the gap left by Dr Mahathir when he leaves office...it may

not be by any one individual but collectively maybe," he said in a recent interview.

Anyaoku flew in to Malaysia specially to pay tribute to Dr Mahathir and his wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali as the Prime Minister retires tomorrow.

The Nigerian diplomat, whose career with the Commonwealth spans more than 30 years, was elected the third Commonwealth secretary-general in Kuala Lumpur in 1989 under Dr Mahathir's chairmanship.

He was re-elected for a second term at the Limassol Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in 1993 and held on to the post until 2000.

Anyaoku is now the chairman of the Nigerian Presidential Advisory Council on International Relations and also President of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).

Asked if Malaysia could have suffered from negative repercussions because of the Prime Minister's outspokenness, Anyaoku said he did not think so.

Citing Malaysia's adherence to the fundamental principles of the Commonwealth,

he said, the country was a successful democracy, it achieved success in management of diversity and also in pursuing sustainable development.

"Given all this successes that were achieved in Malaysia, Dr Mahathir could articulate his views without creating unfavourable repercussions.

"There were times some leaders may have found his views unconventional and inconvenient but Dr Mahathir has never been a hypocrite and that has been his strength.

"He has always spoken on things as he sees them and he has always been found to be correct in the end."

Anyaoku, who once described Malaysia as "pride of the Commonwealth" when he was Secretary-General, said he regarded Dr Mahathir as a visionary leader who will be leaving many legacies.

Citing Dr Mahathir's inspired role in creating the Geneva-based South Commission, Anyaoku said it was an important initiative that had become the think-tank of developing countries on strategic and economic issues.

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meeting on a solemn note, urging Umno leaders to continue with the ways and policies set by earlier leaders such as former presidents Datuk Onn Jaafar, Tengku Abdul Rahman, Tun Abdul Razak and Tun Hussein Onn.

In an almost breaking voice, he said Umno must continue sharing and working with all the other Barisan Nasional component parties and other races.

"Umno must ensure fair administration for all the races, but at the same time ensure that the rights and privileges of Malays and Bumiputeras are upheld," he said.

Expressing his gratitude to Umno for giving him the opportunity to serve as party president and Prime

Minister, Dr Mahathir said he would continue working for its future betterment.

Earlier, in the true fashion of Dr Mahathir, the eve of his retirement was no breather for the Prime Minister as he continued with his hectic schedule when he tabled the Mid-Term Review of the Eighth Malaysia Plan at Dewan Rakyat.

He took two hours to deliver his speech, his last in Parliament as Prime Minister. The 193-member House was almost full as Members of Parliament turned up in force to bid farewell to the man who has led the nation over the last 22 years.

The tabling was telecast live by RTM.

Dr Mahathir arrived at Parliament House at 10am where he re-

plied to questions on Malaysian democracy and Malaysian bonds during the one-hour question time.

As the Prime Minister went about his official duties, about six million students nationwide paid tribute to him in special assemblies held simultaneously in schools.

Also present at the Press conference were Abdullah, Umno secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob, the three vice-presidents — Datuk Seri Najib Razak, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin and Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib — Wanita Umno chief Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, Umno Youth chief Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein and Puteri Umno chief Datuk Azalina Othman Said.

On the issue of appointing an acting deputy president, Dr Mahathir

said this did not arise at present as there was no provision in the party constitution for this.

"Under the constitution, the supreme council has the right to decide on certain matters if there is no provision pertaining to these matters," he said.

Asked if Abdullah had given him any indication as to whom he had in mind as the new Deputy Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir said in jest: "No, he is very mysterious."

On whether he was satisfied with what he had achieved during his term as Prime Minister, he said he was not.

"I know I have failed in many ways, but I know that I have succeeded in doing something. It is not for me to determine, but up to the

people," he said.

Asked if he thought he would be remembered by the people, Dr Mahathir quoted Shakespeare: "The evil that men do lives after them. The good is often interred with their bones."

On his retirement, he said he was relieved.

"I have no problem with supreme council members. In politics, sometimes, they are friends and sometimes, they are enemies. I hold no grudge against anyone," he said.

Later, Dr Mahathir and supreme council members joined party members to break fast at Dewan Merdeka at Putra World Trade Centre. Some 10,000 party members and leaders

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partners, Umno told

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from component parties had gathered and the night turned into an endless round of handshaking for Dr Mahathir and his wife, Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali.

In a brief speech, Dr Mahathir repeated his call to members to rally behind the leadership and strive to work closely with components of the national coalition. After the *maghrib, isya and terawih* prayers, Dr Mahathir went back to Dewan Merdeka for supper. The crowd who lined up to greet him sang *Pahlawan, Ku* for Dr Mahathir. Many were moved to tears. He was seen off by Pak Lah close to about 10.30pm.

Oh, for a peaceful retirement

*Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, the ever-gracious and devoted wife of the Prime Minister, talks to **NURAINA A. SAMAD** about standing by her husband through his tribulations and her hope of a quiet retirement for him.*

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DATUK SERI DR SITI HASMAH MOHAMED Ali is looking forward to Dr Mahathir's retirement although she admits that she will miss their friends here and abroad as well as the activities she was involved in as First Lady. Still, she does not see any difficulty for her or Dr Mahathir "retiring into civilian life".

"I know of people who found it hard to return to a 'normal life' when they no longer got special treatment and all the privileges.

"*Alhamdulillah* (God willing), we have no problem with that. In fact, it will be a refreshing change. The children and grandchildren, especially, are looking forward to it," she said in an interview with the

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A loving husband and father

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New Straits Times at her residence in Langkawi.

Dr Siti Hasmah spoke of her life as First Lady and being with her husband through the darkest period of his leadership.

To her, he is a loving husband and father, a dotting grandfather and a committed statesman who loves his people and country.

As a wife, she, of course, knows him intimately, yet he has kept some of the hottest secrets from her. She said she was almost always the last to know about the latest developments or happenings.

When former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim was sacked, she said she only knew about it when Anwar's wife Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail appeared at her doorstep in Seri Perdana.

When Dr Mahathir announced his retirement last July, she was as stunned as everybody else.

How does her husband take all the attacks against him by his detractors?

"He is strong, *Alhamdulillah*. He can ward off all these. He has a knack for dealing with these things."

Following the regional financial crisis in 1998 and just before the 1999 general election, a full-scale anti-Mahathir campaign was launched by Anwar's supporters. The campaign included attacks against Dr Mahathir's sons, especially

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their involvement in business dealings.

Dr Siti Hasmah said it greatly saddened her because Dr Mahathir is far from what these people had accused him of.

"I felt very much for them. I feel sorry for my children. People have the wrong perception about this. My husband has always made it clear to everyone, including his own children and relatives, on the matter of contracts and so on.

"His children or relatives getting favours from him as Prime Minister just never happened."

Dr Siti Hasmah said her children are where they are in their own right after having had the right professional and academic training.

"They are where they are with no help from their father. They work so hard and have all been on their own."

Indeed, Dr Siti Hasmah admires Dr Mahathir's strength, patience, resilience and fortitude.

"Always, when there are problems, he will tell me not to worry and that they will die off," she said.

When at home, they do not discuss his work.

Because he keeps a hectic schedule, time spent at home is precious. It is even more precious during the rare times when their children and grandchildren are able to gather at their home for dinner.

Dr Mahathir, she said, tries his best to attend his children's and grandchildren's birthday gatherings or other family *kenduri* where he can catch up with kith and kin.

Like any other husband, he does try to come home for lunch and when he is not able to, he calls her up.

Dr Siti Hasmah said that at the moment she is "(with Dr Mahathir) everywhere he goes to fulfil people's requests to see him."

When all this is done and everyone gets to say *adieu* to Dr Mahathir, she will begin the monumental task of sorting out and packing their things in Putrajaya.

It is not easy, she reminds you, because, after October, all their belongings would have to be moved to their "two-bedroom, renovated-attic" house at the Mines.

It is not a palatial home on a large piece of land for a statesman and former Prime Minister who has contributed 22 years of his life to building the nation.

"It is a small house. It is what we will be happy in. And it is home where our children and grandchildren can visit," she said with a twinkle in her eyes.

■ The writer is the Political Editor at NST