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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 Chief 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 developing 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.