

Mahathir uses online news site to air views

KUALA LUMPUR

WITH local media not giving him much play these days, former Malaysian prime minister Mahathir Mohamad has turned to a new outlet to air his views: the popular online news site malaysiakini.com.

The independent site, whose reporters were often banned from government functions when he was premier, yesterday ran part of an interview it had with Tun Dr Mahathir last week.

At the outset, Tun Dr Mahathir said: "I never liked malaysiakini.com. It was very critical of me before."

The website, which faced threats of a shutdown when he was in power, has become his platform as his loud comments on issues of the day are being seen by officials in the Abdullah administration as unwelcome interference.

In the interview, the 80-year-old politician made the startling allegation that it was Malaysia that offered the

sale of sand to Singapore to persuade the Republic to agree to build a full bridge to replace the Johor Causeway.

"The offer comes from Malaysia, as far as I can make out. You see, there are many people from Malaysia's side — I think about 50 people — (who) attended that meeting where the offer was made. From the Singapore side, also, about 50 people," he said.

He also said that Singapore had been buying sand privately from Malaysia but that he stopped it after realising the sand was being used to reclaim land that could affect Johor.

He revealed that he had stopped flights by Singapore air force aircraft into Johor airspace because Singapore was not cooperative on other bilateral problems. But he dodged a question on whether he is disappointed with his successor, Datuk Seri Abdullah Badawi.

"I don't like to pass opinion on the present government's performance because that may have negative effects."

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