

Dr M speaks up

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FORMER PREMIER LISTS HIS DISAPPOINTMENTS WITH SOME GOVT DECISIONS IN INTERVIEW WITH MALAYSIAKINI

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PETALING JAYA: Former premier Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who once called *Malaysiakini* a "traitor" to the country, has criticised the country's current leadership in an exclusive interview that was granted to the online news portal after a six-year wait.

Mahathir, who led the nation for 22 years, told *Malaysiakini* in

a 45-minute interview with four editors and one reporter at his office in Petronas Twin Towers on May 16 he is disappointed with some decisions by his handpicked successor who took office three years ago.

He, however, refused to rate Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's performance, citing possible negative effects.

Proton and the half-bridge project - both mooted during his tenure - topped the list of Mahathir's disappointments with the current administration.

The full interview will run in parts over three days until tomorrow at www.malaysiakini.com/news.

Malaysiakini editor-in-chief Steven Gan said Mahathir began the interview by declaring his dislike of the news portal.

"There are some questions which I will not answer ... I never liked *Malaysiakini.com*. It was very critical of me before," he said.

Gan described the meeting as "not a warm one".

"I presume he agreed to it grudgingly or maybe he was advised to do so," he said. "We have been pursuing him for an interview since *Malaysiakini's* inception in November 1999. We have no idea why he finally agreed."

The interview which was scheduled for March was postponed three times. "We wish we had more time to talk and question him on the 22 years of his leadership which he has to

account for," Gan said.

The relationship between *Malaysiakini* and Mahathir was always a strained one that contained moments of animosity. Mahathir branded *Malaysiakini* a "traitor" to the country in 2001, and in the earlier years, its reporters were often banned from government press conferences.

In January 2003

Malaysiakini's office was raided by the police and its computers confiscated fol-

lowing a report by Umno Youth against a letter published by *Malaysiakini* which they alleged questioned the special rights and privileges of bumiputras to the detriment of other races.

In Kuala Lumpur, Mahathir admitted he was against

Malaysiakini six years ago but the online news website still wanted to interview him.

"Six year ago, they write a lot about me. They were not for me and now they want to talk about me and I don't know what they have written. I have not seen ... maybe it is something not nice or maybe nice but I have given my views," he told reporters at the Malaysian Business Corporate Governance Award 2005.

In the past, he said he had given interviews to people who did not like him such as the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, *Time* magazine and *The Economist*, and they wrote "a lot of nasty things" about him instead.

