

**Pak Samad labels Najib's gov't as 'cruel'**  
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National laureate A Samad Said has called Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's administration 'cruel' for cracking down on last Saturday's Bersih 2.0 rally in Kuala Lumpur.

"If we see what happened (on that day), it's cruel, I have said on my Twitter and Facebook that we are heading towards a police state," he said.

The soft-spoken and usually low-profile septuagenarian was recalling his experience during the July 9 massive rally in which leaders and supporters of electoral reform were sprayed with tear gas and water cannons.

In an exclusive interview with Malaysiakini today, the distinguished 76-year old poet and novelist who is popularly known as Pak Samad (right) said that despite the government's denial of police high-handedness during the four-hour long rally, the world was watching.

"They (the police) have said that there was no brutality inflicted on members of the public, but we can see (what happened) in YouTube, they cannot lie," said Samad.

Samad explained that during the rally, he was trapped with other protesters by police on both sides at KL Sentral, who subsequently fired tear gas on them.

"There was feeling of anger, of nervousness... Never have I felt so much hatred towards the government," he said.

"I felt like I was going to die (because of the tear gas) due to my age," he added.

Turned into an icon of sorts for the Bersih 2.0 movement after being probed for his 'seditious' poem recital at its launch on June 19, Samad wanted Najib to resign.

"In Japan, if ministers have done something wrong, they would bow out... but in this country, people crave for power," he said.

Citing the Facebook page carrying that demand, he said that the now rapidly-growing number in that petition mirrored the people's sentiment.

"That is enough to reflect what the people are feeling right now," he said.

**Losing touch with reality**

The page has seen more than 187,000 people backing the quit call to Najib since five days ago when the rally was broken up by police with tear gas and water cannons.

The page titled '100,000 People Request Najib Tun Razak Resignation' was set up last Saturday when police picked up around 1,700 people during the mass protest.

The national laureate added that rule by families of elite in the country has resulted in leaders losing touch with the people.

"For 50 years this country has been ruled by elitist families. They live comfortable lives and the reports that reach them contain only nice things, they do not feel (the people's needs).

"Its time that the leadership came from the bottom and not from the top," Samad said.

He pointed out that with the exception of former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad, all other prime ministers has been drawn from society's upper crust.

Najib is the son of the late prime minister Abdul Razak Hussein and nephew of former prime minister Hussein Onn.

"The leaders we have now are old, they cannot understand the aspirations of the young," Samad said.

Asked how long he thinks the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition will last, he hoped to see change in the coming general election.

"I hope in the next general election, they (the government) will step down or fall, that is my hope," Samad said.

Bersih 2.0 is the reincarnation of its former movement in 2007, which brought tens of thousands of people into KL to demand for clean and fair elections.

This demonstration, along with the Hindraf rally that protested against discrimination against Indians are credited for the ruling coalition's loss of its two-thirds majority in Parliament in March 2008.

A celebrated author, Samad is no stranger to protest rallies, being one of the big names who joined the March 2009 mass gathering to protest the government's policy on the teaching of Science and Mathematics in English (PPSMI).

A strong proponent of Malay literature, he penned at least a dozen novels and countless poems, and has also worked as a journalist in several national Malay-language papers including Utusan Melayu and Berita Harian.

He was honoured as a national laureate, or Sasterawan Negara, in 1985.

**The interview was jointly conducted by Wee Yu Meng, Jimadie Shah Othman, Abdul Rahim Sabri dan Nigel Aw.**

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