

Anwar: UUCA amendments move 'mere rhetoric'
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As a university student awaits disciplinary hearing for lowering a flag with an image of Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak outside the Umno headquarters in Kuala Lumpur on Dec 17, the government's sincerity in amending the Universities and University Colleges Act (UUCA) has come under question.

Is this, asked PKR de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim in a statement yesterday, the prime minister's move to amend the UUCA to allow greater academic freedom?

"The commitment of Najib's administration, which supposedly wants to amend Section 15 of the UUCA to allow greater freedom for students to take part in party politics, is now seen as merely empty rhetoric," he said.

He added that the fact that the student, Adam Adli, was facing **action** under the Act for lowering the flag, as well as similar actions against students by universities in the past, were signs of Umno's fear over the recent wave of student activism.

He called for all forms of pressure against students to be stopped, and pledged Pakatan Rakyat's support for the UUCA to be abolished.

"The punishment and use of UUCA on the incident (flag lowering) is clearly aimed at frightening students and dampening their spirit and tenacity," Anwar said.

The incident took place during the Dec 17 protest when some 500 people - mostly students - marched to the Umno headquarters in Kuala Lumpur demanding **academic freedom**.

There, Adam (*left*) had briefly swapped a flag depicting Najib with a banner that read "Liberate Academic Freedom".

Despite demands to do so, Adam refused to **apologise** and his institution, Universiti Perguruan Sultan Idris, has ordered him to appear before a disciplinary hearing on Jan 9. He has also faced **threats** and was nearly assaulted for his action.

Najib had on Nov 24 pledged in Parliament to **amend** Section 15 of the UUCA, which would lift the prohibition on student involvement in political parties, trade unions and other societies.