

**Reviving legacy of the teaching university**  
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INTERVIEW Higher learning institutions in the country were once legendary for grooming thinkers and intellectuals.

Today, sadly, we are only left with their remnants, says student activist Adam Adli Abdul Halim - and this was what motivated him to initiate Legasi Mahasiswa Progresif (LMP).

Adam took on the idea of mooted the movement upon his arrival at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI), when he began his studies in Bachelor of Education in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) in 2009.

NONE "It was initiated by three of us, a friend of mine proposed the name... it is catchy and very easy to remember.

"It does have a slight leftist leaning... most of us believe that the system is wrong; we felt cheated, so we don't mind if they call us leftist...

"Being progressive is good, for if you are not progressive, you are repressive," said Adam in a recent interview with Malaysiakini.

The 22-year-old said UPSI, established as Sultan Idris Training College (SITC) in 1922, was long admired as a hotbed for the rise of activism and nationalism in the pre-Merdeka days.

Some of its renowned intellectuals are Zainal Abidin Ahmad (commonly referred to as Za'ba) and Kesatuan Melayu Muda (KMM) founder Ibrahim Yaacob.

"These are the people who inspire me, they are the reason I enrolled in the institution that created these leaders," Adam said.

"They might not be recognised in a big way, but their contributions are bigger than most, even bigger than the history of how we got independence. So I want uphold the legacy they left behind.

UPSI's legends made teaching appealing

"I want to change things, I want to change it to the SITC it was and remembered as, not only as a place that produced teachers, but also as a place that gave birth to fighters."

Adam said he initially intended to pursue law, but UPSI's legends made teaching appealing to him.

adam adli suspended by upsi 090112 protesting However, the Universities and University Colleges Act (UUCA), which was introduced in 1971, was instrumental in stifling student movements, particularly in preventing university students from taking part in political activities or joining political parties, among others.

Although later amendments allowed students to join off-campus associations that they were previously banned from doing so, university students are still banned from joining or being affiliated with any political party.

A few students, heretics of the system, have on a number of occasions challenged the law, demanding academic autonomy and freedom from the stringent UUCA.

Likewise, Adam was booted out for three semesters by UPSI for "bringing the institution into disrepute and disrupting public order".

He was hauled up before the university's disciplinary committee after taking part in a rally for academic freedom on Dec 17.

Adam created a stir after he lowered a flag depicting Umno president and Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak at the Umno headquarters in the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC) in Kuala Lumpur, replacing it with a pro-students banner.

Although severely reprimanded by a number of people, Adam had refused to apologise for the flag incident, remaining steadfast that the move was necessary in protest of the government's insistence in retaining the UUCA with some changes, rather than abolish it.

LMP aspires to act as a mover, explained Adam, by helping to produce "educated educators", for he does not see "UPSI as a factory to create civil servants".

Students today too engrossed in 'having fun'

Students today were far too engrossed in "having fun" and there was little no urge to chase after knowledge.

"It's not wrong, but it should be in an educated way... have fun, but don't be seen as ignorant. Be part of the society... not just an individual. Most of the students today only think about themselves, that's why they chase the As."

NONEBut recognising that, the situation is too much to be handled y just a few people. Adam, who is the coordinator of LMP, said it is made up of 30 active members only, but the movement is now picking up momentum, with more students joining the cause.

"You are educated, so when you talk of corruption, you talk of issues that affect the country, such as improving governance and having greater academic freedom... people will actually listen, for that's what happened back in the 60s and 70s.

It was just an excuse to say that being vocal might get in the way of academic excellence, although Adam says he does find it difficult to divide time between academic and non-academic activities.

"Some people like playing video games, surfing Facebook, to go hiking and shopping. I love political activism, so what is wrong with that?

"The key is you choose what you want to do, never look at it as a problem. Some people may not like activism, of course, but I'm struggling to find time to juggle meetings and classes. My grades, though, are okay... my CGPA (cumulative grade point average) is 3.3 to 3.4.

"Sometimes, I do skip classes... but others do, too. If they skip classes, it's mostly because they slept late after playing video games or being on Facebook... nothing wrong. But if I skip classes, it's because I returned late from a talk or dialogue session," he sighed.

Asked if he still intended to become a teacher, Adam said: "I had the ambition of becoming a teacher, but looking at the situation now... I can't really say.

"I can still be a teacher, why not? But maybe not in a public school, I will have my own school, who knows?

"I have a dream of opening up a school for the poor and the homeless children. A school that focuses on

quality."

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