

**This is real, not just 'syok sendiri'**  
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INTERVIEW Adam Adli Abdul Halim's run in with authorities began at the tender age of 12, when he convinced some 40 friends to join him in boycotting school for a week.

The 22-year-old student activist recalled how Sekolah Kebangsaan Brickfields, where he completed his primary education, forced the children to sit for year-end examinations after Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR) examination.

"After UPSR, Muslim students have to sit for the Sekolah Agama (religious school) exam... this exam is normally held after UPSR.

NONE"On top of that, we were supposed to sit for final examinations. So I talked to some of the students and we decided not to go to school for a week," Adam told Malaysiakini in an interview.

Laughing, Adam said the teachers complained to his father, who was then head of the school's parent-teacher association.

"They told him what I had done. But my dad just laughed it off, and said to me - at your age you've done something that even a 30-year-old might not be able to do.

"Which was definitely good for me... so when I was suspended by the university (recently), my parents were fine with it," he said.

This was when, he realised that "this is real... not just syok sendiri" (for kicks).

Adam was on Jan 9 suspended for 18 months by Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI), as he was pursuing his fifth semester in Bachelor of Education in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL).

The university's disciplinary committee suspended Adam for bringing the institution into disrepute after taking part in a protest demanding academic freedom and the abolition of the stifling Universities and University Colleges Act (UUCA) on Dec 17 last year.

In that incident, several hundred students marched to the Umno headquarters at Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC), where Adam brought down a flag bearing the image of Umno president and Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak and raised a pro-students banner in its place for less than five minutes before hoisting back the original.

What started as a show of discontent, however, erupted into a national issue when Adam refused to apologise for his action.

Adam attributed the fire in him to his father, who has always admired past student leaders, especially those who had been active in the pre-independence and nationalist movements.

"My dad used to tell my brother and I stories of their legacy and contribution to society... dad was active too, during the reformasi days," he said.

2011 - student uprising year

He noted that after 40 years of suppression through rigid legislation, including the UUCA, the emergence of the new media has resurrected student activism.

"I would say 2011 was the year when students movements were revived. I remember on Dec 17, just before we marched to PWTC, I gave a speech at Dataran Merdeka, asking my friends whether we will continue to live in the glory of the past, or create our own history.

"Seems that on Dec 17, we created our own history - which was great and that's how student activism should be today," Adam said.

NONEHowever, Deputy Higher Education Minister Saifuddin Abdullah (right), who has often lent a ear to complaints raised by anti-establishment student groups, was thrust into the spotlight after the incident.

Saifuddin, who has often put up a liberal front, came under attack from pro-government students for being too receptive and friendly with their counterparts and called for his resignation.

Asked if their approach taken to address the issue of academic freedom had pushed Saifuddin into a difficult position, Adam said:

"I didn't see him as being biased when he listened to our demands... he was being fair because he knows what we are fighting for. No one else used to care that he got involved. He entertained us simply because he doesn't want us to be continually ignored.

"When the pro-aspirasi (pro-government) students attacked him, it shouldn't have happened, I mean, what was the issue they were trying to convey - they have no issues.

"Their protest is zero - they were protesting that they love the prime minister and UUCA? But when asked why - their answer is because UUCA had brought us good. Ask them what good? They didn't have an answer."

The irony is, says Adam, pro-government students had always been opposed to demonstrations.

"When pro-aspirasi students held a rally at the ministry, we were laughing . All this while they have been condemning us, stating that demonstrations are not their way... but now they know the power of solidarity, so it is good," he joked.

'Politics? Maybe when I'm older'

Asked if politics appealed to him, Adam said it had been part of his future plans before he became involved in the student movement.

"But as I thought it through over and over again, I figured it was not cool... maybe when I'm older or when people really need me to be in politics.

"I don't see myself in politics for now... but I'm okay with all political parties," he said.

NONEHowever, when it comes to attending events related to politics, he would always give it a thorough thought before agreeing as "students should not be seen as being tools of any party," he added.

"I would feel wrong too, I don't feel right to do that," he said adding that he felt the same way when he was cajoled into attending last week's '901 Free Anwar' rally.

Although hesitant throughout the earlier part of the rally, he later felt comfortable when people approached and commended him for the work he has undertaken.

"It was really risky; even then I thought I will go back... because student activism shouldn't be seen as being exploited... should always remain neutral ," he said, adding that in the end, he was there just to have fun with friends.

And whenever asked if he was ready to take on the task of continuing to struggle for academic freedom, all he could say was: "I can't think of myself anymore."

"Actually, it's been a while since I thought about myself, except whether I've eaten or not, and when hungry.

"Other than that, I would think what to do next. It's even been a long time since I lepak (hangout) with friends and family, but I'm ready for whatever comes next," Adam added.

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