

**Adam Adli — student activist, villain, folk hero**  
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**By Lisa J. Ariffin**

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 30 — Adam Adli Abdul Halim would have just been another student activist until his act of bringing down a banner bearing a picture of Datuk Seri Najib Razak during a peaceful demonstration drew more media attention than the cause itself.

Following the incident, what started out as a small student protest for academic freedom on December 17 has now escalated into a growing movement of undergraduates, university lecturers and members of the public, uniting and demanding the government repeal the controversial Universities and University Colleges Act (UUCA), which strictly prohibits political activities on campuses.

File photo of Adam Adli (centre) speaking to the press in Kuala Lumpur on December 23, 2011. — Picture by Jack Ooi

It had also put the 22-year-old student of the Sultan Idris University of Education in the public limelight, drawing both admiration and disapproval alike.

Despite his sudden catapult to fame and accelerated awareness of the UUCA, Adam Adli remains unfazed and hopes this exposure “will be the end of our 40 years of unfinished struggle”.

“Academic freedom will be another big cause to be fought together in the struggle to rebuild our corrupted country... It is just as important as other issues discussed in society,” he told The Malaysian Insider.

“Many people, including the students, have never heard of academic freedom, UUCA, and ‘magna carta’ (a Bill drafted by students to replace the Act) until this (incident) happened. (Now), it seems that even the pro-government bloggers are struggling to understand our cause,” he said.

The self-professed rebel stands by his actions and reiterates “lowering the banner was a sign of protest”.

“But another reason unnoticed was, if I didn’t lower the banner, how on earth would I be able to raise the academic freedom’s flag?” he asked.

“It was two birds with one stone. It was a sign of protest on (Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak’s) policy on students and universities and also a sign of victory for the many hours of protest on that day.”

Adam Adli said his interest in student activism dates back to 2010 when he was banned from campus elections for participating in Demonstrasi Air 2009, a protest against the Selangor water price hike.

“Since there, there was no turning back for me. The reason is clear: we need to prove to

the people that we, as students, are part of the people and system. We want to represent the people," he said.

"Students had their role in history of fighting for the people, thus within this short time we would like to carve our own history. But first we have to free the students and universities, then we will prove to the people what can we do for the country," he added.

In recent weeks, cybertroopers have rallied behind Adam Adli, with Facebook page "We Are All Adam Adli" drawing close to 30,000 'likes'. However, all is not rosy in Adam's struggle.

In addition to criticisms from the public and numerous government officials, Deputy Inspector-General of Police Datuk Seri Khalid Abu Bakar said the authorities are keeping a close watch on Adam and advised him to exercise caution when going about his activities.

This prompted the feisty student to respond confidently that he does not feel threatened by such statements.

"I'm not going to give up. How can they restrict me? I don't see why must they do so," Adam Adli said.

"I believe, and I know, I'm not doing anything wrong ... I'm just voicing out my rights to protest over government policies and actions," he added.

He stressed that the uprising of youth can never be denied and "it is about time for everyone to realise the struggle of student activists".

"Students are not fools or tools. They see, they learn, they acquire the knowledge, and they are ready to make our country a better place. In no time I believe many more will come out," he said.

"The future now belongs to the youths."

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