

PM: Gov't to appeal UUCA court ruling
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The Universities and University Colleges Act (UUCA) 1974 will be amended to remove provisions prohibiting student involvement in politics, but the government has vowed to appeal a court ruling that the law is unconstitutional.

Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak told the Dewan Rakyat today that Section 15 of the law would be amended, but he did not specify a timeframe.

"The government believes in the maturity and wisdom of our students and respects their constitutional rights... This will allow students to (take part in political activities and) become members of political parties," he said.

The prime minister said this in his speech when tabling a motion to lift three 40-year-old emergency proclamations this morning.

However, Najib stressed, students below the age of 21 would still be barred from political involvement and that restrictions against politicians and political activity on university campuses would still be strictly enforced.

Appeal necessary

Despite pledging to make the amendments, Najib said the government would still appeal against the recent Court of Appeal ruling that Section 15 of UUCA was unconstitutional.

He said this was necessary because "the court decision has far-reaching implications on the principles of law in the country".

The ban on student involvement in politics was introduced by then-education minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad in 1975 following student protests in Baling, Kedah.

Since then, critics have decried the Act as stifling not only to student freedoms but their constitutionally guaranteed right of association, noting that the UUCA restrictions as dumbing down students to the realities of real politics, despite being the next generation of leadership for the nation.

Recently a group of four students from UKM, picked up by the police and charged under Section 15 for allegedly being on the campaign trail for an opposition party during a recent by-election, had won a judgement from the Court of Appeal against the law.

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