

Najib says will lift student politics ban
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By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 24 — Datuk Seri Najib Razak said today the government plans to lift the ban on student participation in politics, as part of his administration's political reforms.

The prime minister told Parliament today amendments would be tabled to amend the controversial section 15 of the Universities and University Colleges Act (UUCA), to allow students above 21 to be active members of political parties.

"The government believes in the maturity and intelligence of our university students.

"With that, to respect the constitutional rights of our students who have reached the age of maturity as stipulated by law, the government will amend section 15 of the UUCA to allow them to be members of political parties," he said when tabling a motion to lift three Emergency declarations.

The surprising announcement earned Najib a round of loud cheers from the House and lawmakers banged on their tables to show support.

Najib however stressed that under the law, politics would still be banned from university campuses.

"This decision is a result of the government's concern and understanding of the people's aspirations, and how we have listened to their wishes.

"This is not merely cheap rhetoric or tales from merchants of dreams... This is the result of political will and moral bravery," he told the House.

Najib, however, admitted that despite plans to amend the UUCA, the government would still proceed with its appeal of a recent court ruling that section 15 of the law is in breach of the Federal Constitution.

"This is because the court decision has implications on the country's legal system," he explained.

In a majority 2-1 judgment, a three-man panel of judges ruled earlier this month that Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) had breached Article 10 of the country's highest law when it disciplined four students involved in a political campaign last year under section 15(5)(a) of the UUCA.

Section 15(5)(a) of the UUCA states: "No student of the University and no organisation, body or group of students of the University which is established by, under or in accordance with the Constitution, shall express or do anything which may reasonably be construed as expressing support for or sympathy with or opposition to any political party, whether in or outside Malaysia."

The four students — Muhammad Hilman Idham, Woon King Chai, Muhammad Ismail Aminuddin and Azlin Shafina Mohamad Adza — were found campaigning for a political party during the Hulu Selangor parliamentary by-election in April 2010.

Political parties from both sides of the divide had welcomed the court decision, stating that student politics must be allowed in a healthy democracy.

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