Students and politics may mix

Varsity Act changes to be tabled for first reading on Monday

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KUALA LUMPUR: Amendments to the Universities and University Colleges Act (UUCA) 1971 will be tabled in Parliament for first reading on Monday.

Deputy Higher Education Minister Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah said amendments to Section 15 would allow university students to become members of political parties although political activities would be prohibited on campus.

“The Government recognises that students have a voice and understands their idealism to change the world, but the choice is up to the students themselves,” he said after launching the BSN Inter Varsity Social Venture Challenge 2012.

Last year, the Court of Appeal ruled 2-1 in declaring Section 15(5)(a) of the UUCA — which prohibits students from expressing support or opposing any political party — as unconstitutional.

The court decision held that the provision was unreasonable and violated the constitutional guarantee on freedom of speech.

The appeal was filed by Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia political science undergraduates Muhammad Hilman Idham, Woon King Chai, Muhammad Ismail Aminuddin and Azlin Shafina Mohamad Adza who had faced disciplinary action for being present at the Hulu Selangor parliamentary by-election campaign in 2010.

On a related note, Saifuddin said university students should be involved in initiatives which could provide solutions to social problems such as poverty, moral decadence and environmental issues.

“There is a limit to voicing out, but there are a lot of benefits in working out something.

“I am not saying that students should stop their political activities but the choice is entirely up to them. If there are 100 people marching for a political cause, I would hope to see 200 people participating in social enterprising activities.

“When voices are translated to real work, it will give direct and practical benefit to the society,” he added.