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Studying options on 'Economist'

KEPALA BATAS, Mon. - Acting Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi today said the Home Ministry was studying several options, including banning The Economist.

"We are still studying the options," he said after attending a special meeting with about 3,000 civil servants and grassroots leaders at Dewan Millennium here.

Also present at the meeting were Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon and his deputy, Datuk Dr Hilmi Yahaya.

"Whatever the decision, it must be effective because we don't want the magazine to do the same again."

Abdullah, who is also Home Minister, was asked to comment on numerous calls from many quarters, including Barisan Nasional leaders, urging the Government to take action against The Economist for insulting Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his leadership.

He also said the magazine has yet to apologise for its derogatory article, "A Qualified Success", although the people had demanded that it do so.

"My office has not received anything from the magazine. There are many options to be considered and the Home Ministry will announce our decision soon," he said.

In Kuala Lumpur, Wanita Umno chief Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz said that Abdullah should be given a chance to serve as the Prime Minister before his abilities could be questioned.

"He should be allowed to prove himself. It is not fair to judge him before he even assumes the post."

In Pendang, Kedah Umno staged a symbolic burning of The Economist and called for a permanent ban on the magazine.

Youth chief Datuk Abdul Aziz Sheikh Fadzir said the symbolic burning of the magazine was to tell the "mercenary" writers of The Economist that the people were fed up with them for demeaning the country's leaders.

He said the motive of the "hidden hand" behind the Western media was to take economic and political control of the country.