

Media advised against raising religious issues

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KUAIA LUMPUR: The Government wants the media to voluntarily stop printing or broadcasting issues related to religious matters.

Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the Cabinet decided on Wednesday that media organisations be advised against raising such topics in the wake of tension over Article 11's forums on the freedom of religion.

The Prime Minister advised media organisations to understand the situation and act accordingly.

He said the Government would not invoke the Internal Security Act against those who breached the gag order but advised restraint on their part.

"They should know what is expected of them.

"But please don't force the Government to take action when enough warning has been given," he said to a question from reporters on whether media organisations that breached the directive would be penalised.

The gag order to the media involves the suspension of printing or broadcasting of issues related to religious matters.

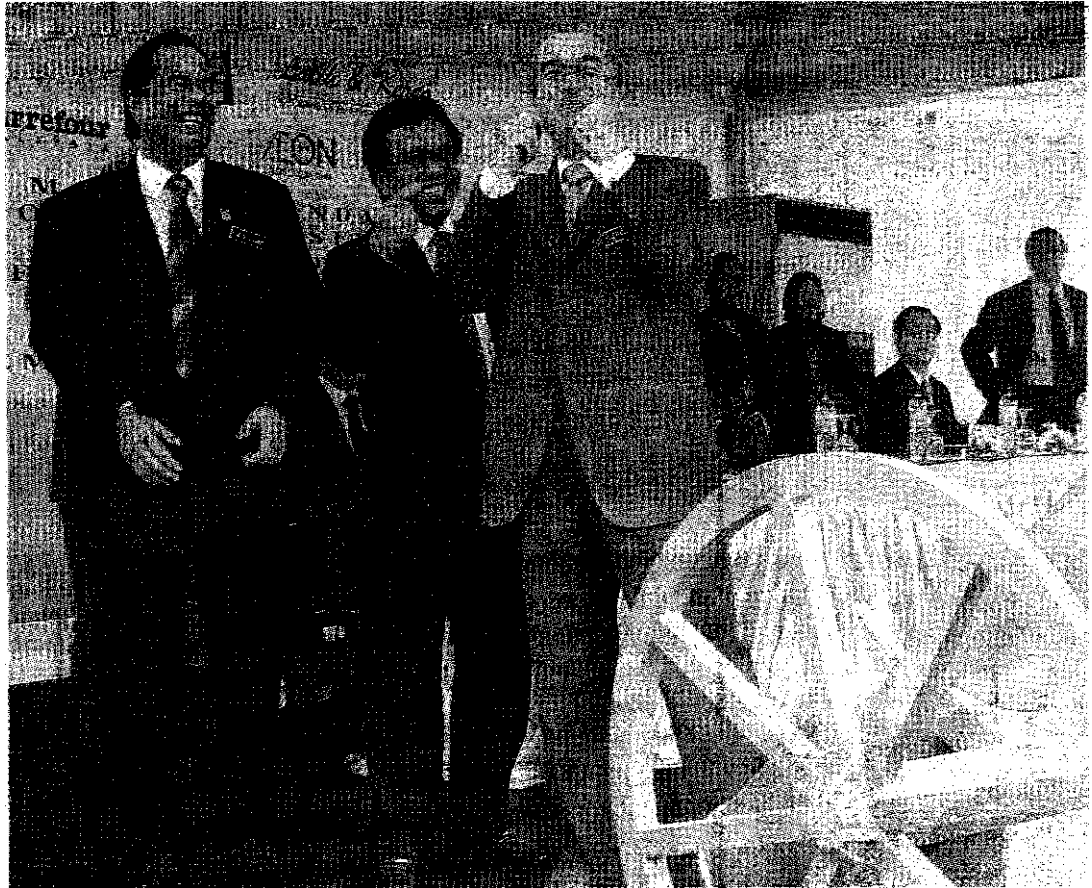
Abdullah was speaking to the media after launching Consumers' Day at the Putra Stadium in Bukit Jalil, near here.

The Prime Minister had on Tuesday advised the organisers of the Article 11 forums to stop these events immediately as they were deemed to have caused tension among Malaysians.

He had added that religious issues were more sensitive than racial ones.

The Prime Minister said the seasonalisation of religious issues would bring about unwanted situations.

On Article 11's request to meet him, Abdullah said he would wait for an appropriate time to meet them.



Abdullah at the official opening of the Consumers' Day at Putra Stadium in Bukit Jalil. With him are Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Datuk Shafie Apdal (second from left) and his deputy, Datuk S. Veerasingam. — NST picture by Rosdan Wahid

Article 11, a group comprising several non-governmental organisations, has been actively organising forums to discuss religious issues including Clause 121 (A) of the Federal Constitution.

Its forums so far have seen protests from various groups unhappy with the topic being discussed.

Earlier, in his speech, Abdullah said developed-country status did not only mean people becoming rich and famous, tall buildings and broad roads or other elaborate structures.

"Developed-country status should also mean that the poor and the middle class can afford things, especially basic needs."

Abdullah identified food and clothing, education, medical attention, availability of vehicles, affordable housing and good communication facilities, including the Internet, as things people should be able to afford.

He advised consumers not to waste or become spendthrifts. "The people must be alert to changes and happenings around them. Consumers hold the key to

making things happen.

"Development should be rakyat-centred because ultimately everything goes back to the people."

He said inflation would not be controlled if consumers did not play their role.

He also urged consumers to help the Government by providing information on people who hoarded goods.

"People who hoard goods are anti-people. They do not care about the welfare of the people but are only interested in profits."