

Country does not need fireworks

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Licences to be

industry, says PM

reviewed

By K.H. Lim

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. — The Government will study whether to cancel licences issued to fireworks factories in the country, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The closure of these factories would not affect the national economy, the Prime Minister added.

Last week's Sungai Buloh fireworks factory tragedy highlighted how dangerous such an industry could be, he said.

"It also shows how important it is to stop the playing of fireworks in the country," Dr Mahathir told newsmen during a visit to the site of the ill-fated factory of Bright Sparklers Sdn Bhd, about 20km from here.

He described the tragedy in which 25 people died as a lesson not only for the Government but also for everyone in the country, highlighting in the process that fireworks were a dangerous commodity.

Dr Mahathir said the fact that the incident occurred at the place of manufacture showed how dangerous the situation could be. The danger was not only to those who made them but also to those who sold or transported them, he said.

"While we have been strict in stopping imports, we now find that we have factories in our own backyard.

"Even though such factories produce items mainly for export, surely a portion is sold locally," Dr Mahathir said.

The Prime Minister felt that the country does not need such industries.

"These fireworks are mainly exported to advanced countries. I suspect that these countries do not like such industries to be located there. Not that they do not know how to make them but they prefer to import them.

"I'm confident that our economic growth will not be affected if we do not have such industries.

"I hope this is a lesson not only to the Government but also to everyone in the community that firecrackers, whether made locally or (abroad), are dangerous and we should stop production of explosives except what is needed by the armed forces."

The Prime Minister expressed his condolences to victims and their families, pledging that the Government would continue providing aid to them.

He noted that the public had also generously donated to a fund set up for the victims.

Dr Mahathir arrived at the site about 2.50pm and spent more than an hour inspecting it. He was briefed by CID director Datuk Zaman Khan, Selangor deputy police chief Asst Commissioner Tuffile Nawab Din and officials from the Chemistry and Welfare Departments.

He later visited the Sungai Buloh community hall, where some of the victims are staying temporarily.

He said the licence to the Bright Sparklers factory was issued in 1973 when there were not many industries or job opportunities in the country.

The Government was not so choosy then, he said.

Dr Mahathir made a reference to his visit to Macau in the 1960s. During the visit, he noticed that workers in fireworks factories there were supplied with the explosives to work at home.

"This was certainly dangerous," he said. Since the technical expertise (of the ill-fated factory) was also from Macau, it was therefore not surprising that there was not much emphasis on safety at the factory.

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On the total ban on firecrackers and fireworks, he said everyone now realised its significance.

"If fireworks and firecrackers are permitted, there will be a need to make them, store them and transport them.

"I hope this will not become a political issue. People dying in a tragedy is not a political issue."

On the legality of the factory and the contradictory statements made by various authorities, the Prime Minister said the matter was now best left to the Royal Commission of Inquiry.

"We should now stop making any more statements on this. My statement today is only on the lessons we can learn from this tragedy."

On the dangers of fireworks sold in shops, the Prime Minister related his experience when he was a doctor at the Alor Star General Hospital.

"There was an explosion once at a shop in Jalan Pekan Melayu which sold a type of firecrackers which would explode when flung on the floor.

"I know first-hand how bad the injuries can be. I had to operate on some of the survivors.

"This type of firecrackers was also recently given to my children. I confiscated them when I saw them."