

PERMITS FOR FIREWORKS FACTORIES TO BE REVIEWED

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. — The Government will study whether permits that have been issued to fireworks factories should be revoked, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said Malaysia could do without a firecrackers and fireworks industry and that the Government would study whether such an industry was desirable in future.

"I think we don't need such an industry. Even without it, our economic growth will not be affected," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Government would study whether to revoke the permits or stop the industry altogether.

"If we do still need it, we shall impose stringent control so that explosions and fire such as the one at Sungai Buloh will

not happen again," he told newsmen after visiting the tragedy site.

The Prime Minister was on a two-week leave overseas when the tragedy occurred on May 7. He returned yesterday.

The Government, he said, should only allow the manufacture of explosives for the armed forces.

The Sungai Buloh tragedy was a lesson for the Government and Malaysian society, he said, adding that everyone should be wiser after this.

The Government, he said, had allowed the fireworks and firecrackers industry to be set up in 1973 as there were not many factories then.

He said there were not too many factories and job opportunities then and the hazards posed by such an industry were

not fully understood.

Dr Mahathir said that before the tragedy, no one spoke about the industry such as its relevance and whether permits should be given but now everyone was giving all kinds of advice.

"The incident also proves why it is important for the playing of fireworks to stop," he said.

Dr Mahathir said if such fireworks were allowed, these products were bound to be either imported or manufactured locally.

He said even industrialised countries preferred not to have fireworks and firecrackers industries because of the hazards involved and they would rather import the products instead.

Dr Mahathir hoped the Sungai Buloh tragedy would not be

politicised because it was an accident involving deaths.

He urged everyone to stop issuing statements on the matter to avoid confusion and to let the Royal Commission carry out its job, adding that he did not blame anyone for the tragedy.

Dr Mahathir said efforts designed for the people's good were sometimes politicised.

These included the exploitation of issues such as resettlement of hawkers in Penang and the location of dump sites for toxic wastes.

He said the Government had identified the sites for such purposes but the plan could not be implemented because of objections although the locations were away from dense areas.

He said the Government had carried out in-depth studies on the suitability of these locations

but there were those who politicised the issue for their own political gain.

"These toxic wastes are now stuck in areas that are not suitable because of objections from some people," he added.

Dr Mahathir said people who did not protest against such issues were sometimes asked to join in the protests.

He also gave an assurance that the Government would help the families of the victims and called on the public to continue donating to the Sungai Buloh fire relief fund.

The Prime Minister, who was briefed on the tragedy and rescue work by CID Director Datuk Zaman Khan, also visited the victims who are putting up temporarily at the Kampung Baru Sungai Buloh community hall.