

It's in the interest of public safety, says Dr Mahatir

Total ban on fireworks

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — The Government will impose a total ban on the import, sale and distribution as well as the letting off of fireworks from next year, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

A similar ban on firecrackers is already in force.

Bernama reports that in an interview with RTM after recording his Hari Raya message at Angkasapuri here, the Prime Minister said the ban was in the interest of public safety as several unpleasant incidents which resulted from the letting off of fireworks and firecrackers had been reported in the country.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Home Minister, said he was confident that the Chinese community would not object to the Government's move although the letting off of fireworks was part of its tradition during the Lunar New Year.

He pointed out that Singapore had long banned fireworks and firecrackers.

"I see that the fireworks are dangerous because our people are very smart in using their materials to fill bamboo to get a louder sound and in the process get hurt.

"They (the Chinese community) agree that there is no need to use fireworks and firecrackers and they will not oppose the move as they realise that this habit of letting off fireworks and firecrackers has gone beyond the limit."

Several organisations, when contacted, welcomed Dr Mahathir's announcement saying it was time to

put a stop to the rising number of cases of injury as a result of playing with fireworks, firecrackers and *meriam buloh* (bamboo cannons).

Federation of Malaysian Consumers Association president Hamdan Adnan said the ban was to be applauded, although he saw no reason why it could not take effect from this year.

"It's long overdue," he said, adding that Dr Mahathir's announcement on the eve of Hari Raya Aidilfitri cut across all racial barriers as "life is everyone's concern".

He said carbide, which is used as an explosive in *meriam buloh*, had lost its usefulness as fuel for lighting lamps.

"Now with the advent of electricity and other forms of fuel, we should ban carbide as it is now being abused, for example, as a ripening agent for fruits," said Hamdan.

National Council of Women's Organisations vice-president Mrs F.R. Bhupalan said the announcement was welcomed as too much leeway had already been given.

"It is time the Government took action as all warnings against the misuse of fireworks have gone unheeded," she said.

"Too often, people have been letting off fireworks in an undisciplined manner, and the results have included houses and squatter homes being destroyed and children getting hurt

PLEASE TURN TO
PAGE 2, COL 3

NUTP: Move will benefit all races

□ FROM PAGE ONE

or killed.

"The Government has been too patient so far and it is high time stricter measures were taken."

National Union of the Teaching Profession secretary-general Siva Subramaniam said it was a good move as every year many children were injured, with some suffering from permanent injuries.

"The fact that the Prime Minister is concerned shows that the problem is not limited to one race. It is an across-the-board issue that affects all Malaysians."

In the latest fatal accident on Feb 13, a Form Four student in Grik was killed while his friend was seriously injured when a home-made bomb exploded during a fishing trip.

Mohamed Saripol Bahari Hassan made the bomb, which is widely used to catch fish, by putting fireworks' powder inside a bottle. It exploded before he could throw it into the river.

The *New Straits Times* reported today that 11 children and a man sought medical treatment at the Tengku Ampuan Rahimah Hospital in Klang for injuries caused by *meriam buloh*, firecrackers or fireworks between Jan 31 and yesterday.

A hospital spokesman said five of them were below two years old. Of the 12, six were Malays, four Chinese and two Indians. They were treated for injuries on the face, hand, eyes and chest.

In Malacca, a 15-year-old boy almost had all his fingers severed today when a metal pipe he had filled with carbide exploded.

Roszamin Rahmat, of Jalan Seman, Batu Gajah, was rushed to the Malacca Hospital where he has been warded.

The boy's father, Rahmat Kasini, 58, said Roszamin had been warned many times not to play with fireworks and *meriam buloh*.

"But he is stubborn and continued to play with them. I have even thrown the pipe away on several occasions," he said at the hospital.