

'SOME FIREWORKS TOO HOT TO HANDLE'

Experts caution against *anaars*, rockets; push for stricter laws on cracker sales

ROSHNI OLIVERA
Times News Network

Every year in India, 450 to 470 people die of burn injuries caused by firecrackers. Of these, most are boys below the age of 15; in many cases, the victims have been bystanders. Mumbai alone recorded 15 deaths a year in 1999 during Diwali, according to the National Crime Records Bureau. Eye injuries, many leading to permanent visual loss, account for 20 per cent of injuries. That apart, each year there are thousands of cases which go unreported, says Loss Prevention Association of India Ltd (LPA).

Even as fireworks purchases climb in the run-up to Diwali, LPA has urged the government to introduce stricter laws, such as a ban on sale of fireworks to children below 15 years. "Abroad, fireworks are sold only to persons above age 18," says Sudesh Kapoor, LPA secretary. "The US permits supervised fireworks displays, which are done under controlled conditions by professionals and fire brigades. In Canada, retail sales of fire-

CRACKER TRACKER

Fiery issue



Amitabh Bachchan was a burns victim

- Every year, 450 to 470 people die of burn injuries caused by firecrackers.
- Of these, most are boys below age 15.
- Mumbai recorded 15 deaths in 1999 during Diwali.
- Eye injuries, many leading to permanent visual loss, account for 20 per cent of injuries.

works are banned. Sparklers and indoor fireworks are only available to those over 18, who have a certificate of competency. In Holland, parents must see that children don't get hold of any fireworks." Kapoor believes we need more supervised firework displays to lower the accident rate.

Incidentally, the Burns Association of India (BAI) says *anaars* and rockets are the most dangerous. "Over the years, *anaars* have caused most accidents," says Dr Sunil Keswani, plastic surgeon and BAI secretary. Amitabh Bachchan was among those who suffered grievous burns several years ago when a cracker exploded in his hand.

"It's nothing but playing with fire," says Mandar Kulkarni (18), who hurt his hands and face when

an *anaar* exploded close to him. "It took months to heal. Now I stay away from crackers." Kala Seth's daughter Nidhi (4) burnt her hand last year after she touched a hot sparkler. "It was so scary," says Kala. "Now, I'm always around when my children light crackers."

- Buy fireworks that are legally manufactured, follow the warning label on the carton indicating method of firing and precautions to be taken.

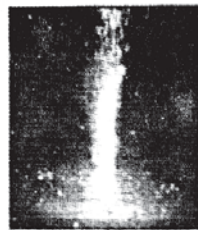
- Wear close-fitting clothes or thick material instead of loose, flowing garments.

- Make it clear to your children that they should never play with fireworks unless you're there to watch over them.

- Keep fireworks in metal containers.

- Don't allow children to keep fireworks in their pockets. Store

Playing with fire



Anaars are dangerous

while in the hand. Light them from the side without bending

them away from fire or heat sources.

- Never light fireworks or unpack them near a flame.

- Firecrackers, 'bombs', *anaars* should not be lighted

over them and move away quickly.

- Never light fireworks in a metal container.

- Hold lighted sparklers away from the body.

- Flying fireworks — such as rockets — should always be lighted in open grounds, pointing straight up.

- Fireworks which don't burst after lighting should be destroyed by pouring water over them.

- Keep a bucket of water handy. It can put out fires and can be used as first-aid for minor burns.