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SAID

PREVENTING ACCIDENTS

# SAFETY FIRST FOR CHILDREN

Good intentions must come with true love and sincere care for the young and weak

**I**T is just so sad and mind-numbing to have so many young lives lost in the Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah tahfiz school fire on Sept 14.

Twenty-one young and beautiful children and two adult wardens met their untimely end in the incident. Ironically, this would not have happened had the centre been more responsible and put more concern over their safety and security.

This rebuke might sound unfair or premature. But, how else could anyone put it after considering the facts and initial reports on the incident?

For one, the centre's building had not received a certificate of fire safety and should not have been occupied at all. Then the dormitory floor, which housed the victims, had only one entry and exit.

This exit became inaccessible to the victims when it was blocked by the raging fire. There were no other fire exit as the windows were secured with metal grilles. The dormitory, thus, became a cruel death trap from which the victims had very little chance of escaping.

Investigations into what caused the fire and how it turned into an inferno rapidly are certainly necessary. So should the reason for the inability of the victims to make their escape.

The findings may lead to the prosecution and punishment of the guilty party if there had been gross negligence or criminal intent. It should also draw important lessons on how to prevent such incidents from happening again.

The early findings and observations have caused many to act quickly. There is now need for such private learning centres to be registered with a federal or state agency so that there would be more effective oversight, particularly on the matter of safety of premises and students.

The Fire and Rescue Department has also decided to inspect tahfiz centres in the country for fire safety. Parents who have children studying in similar centres would have also begun to look at the safety standards and features in the places where their children stay and study.

Finally, owners and administrators of such centres must have begun to put on their thinking caps, making "safety first" as their primary guiding principle and to improve.

The grief felt by the victims' families and friends is unfathomable and can never be adequately described. Time may be the best healer of their pain, but the memories of their loved ones can never go away.

They may get some consolation

knowing that their loved ones died as martyrs — as said by some — although deep in their hearts, they wish the victims are still alive and have the chance to grow up, pursue their dreams and enjoy their lives as they grow old.

This must surely be the overarching desire of all parents. It can be realised, as proven by many other developed countries.

Their success, however, stems from one fundamental attitude which they seemed to have but is deficient in our society — the ability to truly love and care for the young and the weak.

When this feeling of love and care is prevalent in a country, then the young and the weak are assured of a safer environment.

The stories to describe our situation are abundant. Have we not often cringed or cried reading of incidents of parents abusing and beating their own children? How about the frequent cases of adults leaving their children in locked houses while they work or go out to have a good time?

And those wearing helmets on their heads with their children sitting precariously on a motorcycle with their heads covered only by a thin *tudung* or a small *songkok*?

How on earth will children avoid serious injuries if they were to crash or tumble on the road? There is no true love and caring there!

There is also this inherent attitude among many to surrender

the whole responsibility for the safety and security of children to others, be it to a helper at home, day care centres or even schools, without so much as some monitoring and checking while they are away.

This is amounting to abandoning them to their own ends when it is known that they are still too young to fend and care for themselves.

This is the underlying malaise besetting many of us and the main reason our children are, at times, being inadvertently put in harm's way and suffer the terrible consequences.

We do not love and care enough for the safety of our young and weak. This has become pervasive and affected those entrusted to care for and look after others. In turn, they have thrown laws, regulations and even common sense into the waste basket.

And for as long as this problem is not addressed and corrected, we will continue to hear of preventable accidents and tragedies, in which the young and the weak die and are maimed.

Having good intentions is never good enough. It must come accompanied by true love and sincere care.

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