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NEWS



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NEW COMPLEX

CONCERNS RAISED OVER SCHOOL'S LOCATION

Checks also show building does not have enough firefighting equipment



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STUDENTS of the Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah religious school who survived Thursday's fire that killed 23 others will soon move to a recently renovated building about 300m from the school's damaged temporary quarters in Kampung Datuk Keramat here.

But concerns have been raised over whether the new complex, which is said to be able to accommodate up to 70 students, meets fire safety standards.

Based on the *New Straits Times*'s assessment of the building, the students and teachers may be placed at risk in the event of another fire incident.

Located near the end of Jalan Keramat Hujung, which is a narrow two-way road only wide enough for two cars to pass at one time, the double-storey school building is surrounded by houses and flats. Space is further reduced owing to vehicles parked along the road.

City Fire and Rescue Department director Khirudin Drahman, upon being shown video footage of the road and its sur-

roundings, agreed with NST's observation.

"Yes, the road is too narrow, especially with residents parking their cars on the kerbs. Should there be any emergency, this will hamper our efforts, as fire trucks can hardly go through. It is not safe."

Khirudin said developers and those who wanted to set up religious schools should study the accessibility of their premises, as well as issues such as electricity and water supplies (for putting out fires), and parking lots in their area.

It is learnt that residents in the area had, years ago, protested against the Ampang Jaya Municipal Council's (MPAJ) plan to build the flats there.

A resident, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said they knew that there would be limited parking space at the apartment complex, which would force them to park along the roads in the area.

"We protested, but our concerns were ignored by MPAJ. The council's then president once told me over the phone that it (the protest) was held because the rich did not want to share with the middle-class people. God help us if there is another



The newly renovated Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah religious school in Kampung Datuk Keramat, Kuala Lumpur. PIC BY EIZAIRI SHAMSUDIN

fire incident."

NST also noted that the new building had yet to be installed with sufficient firefighting equipment.

NST photographer Supian Ahmad, who was permitted by the school's management to enter several sections of the building, said he saw only one fire extinguisher at the school's dining area.

He said he saw no smoke detectors or hose reels in the building. Supian did, however, notice several of the 22 closed-circuit television cameras installed around the premises.

The lack of firefighting equipment may be due to the building still being under renovation, and has yet to be reviewed by fire

authorities — but concerns linger.

Outside the school, a fire hydrant is located about 200m from the premises. The fire hydrant, however, is blocked by cars parked along the road.

There is, however, an external fire escape on the right side of the building.

Asked to comment on these additional points of concern, Khirudin said fire hydrants should never be blocked.

"People should not block fire hydrants as this will hamper rescue efforts should there be an emergency... Or do you want to wait until tragedy occurs, and only then decide to follow the law?"

Khirudin said the department had carried out joint efforts with

religious schools in the city since July in a bid to create awareness on safety regulations.

Nineteen religious schools are under the department's purview.

"We have discussed safety issues with 10 schools in the city, and will approach nine other schools."

The Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah religious school has yet to meet representatives from the Fire and Rescue Department.

"For the schools we approached, discussions are underway to make them safer places.

"Our team will conduct fire safety training and ensure that the administration, teachers and students have proper firefighting equipment." **Additional reporting by Teh Athira Yusof**