



**High-level talks:** Dr Ahmad Zahid chairing the meeting on the task force for tahfiz schools in Putrajaya. With him is Rural and Regional Development Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob (second left).

## Stricter regulations for private religious schools

**PUTRAJAYA:** Stricter regulations, including compulsory fire safety plans, will be imposed on religious schools and childcare centres before they are allowed to take in students, said Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi.

Such centres included private religious schools, orphanages, childcare centres and homes for the aged.

These are among the recommendations that the task force on tahfiz centres will submit to the Cabinet today as it looks for ways to resolve safety issues in these facilities.

Dr Ahmad Zahid said that regulators, including local authorities, fire and rescue services as well as welfare departments had been tasked to draw up these lists.

“We don’t want the lack of concern for safety by the management of tahfiz schools to result in any untoward incidents,” he said after chairing the inaugural meeting of the task force here yesterday.

Some of the proposals were adopted from the recommendations of a Royal Commission of Inquiry in 1989 that probed the fire at Pondok Pak Ya religious school in Yan, Kedah, which killed 27 female students.

“We made some adjustments and improvements to the recommendations to suit today’s situation. What we want is for tahfiz and private religious schools to operate in a safe and conducive environment.”

The meeting was attended by seven Cabinet

ministers and Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Mohamad Fuzi Harun.

The task force was formed to probe the Sept 14 pre-dawn fire at the Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah tahfiz in Jalan Datuk Keramat in Kuala Lumpur.

According to police records, from 1989 to date, 39 fires were recorded at tahfiz schools, resulting in 56 deaths.

The Deputy Prime Minister said another possible step was amending the Education Act 1996 (Act 550), which involves the registration of private Islamic education institutions.

Currently, the Act does not define schools which solely teach religious subjects as private schools

“We will engage with state governments. Islamic affairs come under their purview, so making it compulsory for the schools to register will be the state-level decision.

“We hope to get them on board for the common good,” he added.

Currently, there are 941 tahfiz schools nationwide with more than 150,000 students.

Dr Ahmad Zahid said the task force also wants the curriculum in religious schools to be monitored to ensure that the subjects taught are permitted by the Government.

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