

DARUL QURAN ITTIFAQIYAH RELIGIOUS SCHOOL FIRE

'BLAZE STARTED AT DORM'S ENTRANCE'

It was arson and victims died quickly, says dept

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EVIDENCE shows that last week's fire, which claimed 23 lives at the Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah religious school in Kampung Datuk Keramat, started at the entrance of the third-floor dormitory. The fire spread rapidly, killing the victims within a short span of time.

In summarising its findings of the incident yesterday, the Fire and Rescue Department said this was based on the spalling (break

down of masonry's surface layers) of the wall near the dorm entrance, as well as damage to nearby areas.

Its director-general, Datuk Wan Mohd Nor Ibrahim, said the first indication that the fire was arson came about at 1pm, seven hours after the fire broke out.

Wan Mohd Nor said his team had found petrol residue on a towel and shoe racks, and on a nearby wall.

"Two key pieces of evidence were discovered. Two liquid petroleum gas (LPG) cylinders were found in front of the dorm entrance. Both cylinders were empty with their valves open.

"Another evidence was gleaned from the K9 Unit, which detected seven spots; seven samples were collected from the front of the dorm entrance.

"Four sniffer dogs were used (one after another) and all pointed to the same spot," he said here yesterday.

It was the first time the department issued an official statement on what they had established from the incident, which made global headlines.

The incident has triggered authorities to revisit the issue of safety in similar schools that do not come under the purview of the Education Ministry.



Fire and Rescue Department director-general Datuk Wan Mohd Nor Ibrahim (centre) showing the report on the Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah religious school fire in Putrajaya yesterday. PIC BY ABD RAHIM RAHMAT

Wan Mohd Nor said four samples were found to contain fire accelerant residue.

"The fire spread quickly because of the LPG gas that had been released.

"In addition, there were many fire loads (items that increase the chances of a fire spreading) inside the dorm, which caused the blaze to spread rapidly and raise the heat, killing those sleeping in a short time," he said, adding that the fire had spread to the ceiling and razed the door of the third-floor dorm.

Asked if it was true that the dorm's door was jammed shut with a spanner, as some reports had claimed, Wan Mohd Nor replied in the negative.

He said the department had submitted its full report to the police on Wednesday.

Last Thursday, the nation mourned the loss of 23 lives, 21 of whom were students, at the Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah religious school.

Seven boys, aged between 12 and 18, were detained a day after the incident.

Investigations show the boys started the fire to seek revenge against some of the students, whom they had a disagreement with.

Page 1 pic: A 16-year-old suspect is taken to the Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah religious school by policemen yesterday.

Dept: No cries for help heard

PUTRAJAYA: The victims of the Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah religious school fire had most likely died before firemen arrived at the scene.

Firemen, who made their way up to the third floor of the building in Kampung Datuk Keramat in Kuala Lumpur, did not hear children's voices, despite taking only six minutes to arrive at the scene.

Fire and Rescue Department director-general Datuk Wan Mohd Nor Ibrahim said the department's operation centre received the Malaysia Emergency Response Services (MERS) call at 5.41am.

"At 5.47, a team from the Keramat station arrived at the scene, followed by those from the Wangsa Maju and Hang Tuah stations. Forty-three firemen and 17 officers were deployed. The fire was controlled by 6.29am."

Wan Mohd Nor said firemen managed to put out the blaze and they found the victims' charred remains inside the dormitory.

"The firemen did not hear any sounds or voices from victims while battling the blaze. When they managed to enter the dormitory, they found the remains," he said here yesterday.

The department's account of the incident corresponded with forensic findings that the victims had died of smoke inhalation and poisonous gases.

Wan Mohd Nor said the firemen used a ladder to rescue a family of five, who were staying in one of the wardens' rooms.

He said firemen managed to save 23 people.

A total of 23 people died in the fire, which occurred in the early morning of Sept 14. Of the 23, 21 were students while the others were wardens.

Seven people were injured, one of whom being a member of the public who came to help.

Wan Mohd Nor said the tragedy was the second worst fire-related incident involving religious schools in the country. The worst, he said, was the 1989 accident which took place at the Taufiqiah Khairiah Al-Halimah in Padang Lumut, Kedah. Twenty-seven students died in that incident.

On Wednesday, Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr S. Subramaniam said three students out of the initial seven, who were admitted into Hospital Kuala Lumpur, were still warded and are in stable condition.

THE DARUL QURAN ITTIFAQIYAH RELIGIOUS SCHOOL FIRE FLOORPLAN

1. Petrol residue was found on the shoe and towel racks, as well as the wall in front of the door of the students' dorm.
2. Firemen found two LPG cylinders in front of the entrance door with one lying on its side. Both cylinders were empty and their valves were opened.
3. Firemen managed to put out the fire at 6.29am. They discovered charred remains, mostly near the windows.
4. Fire engines from Keramat and Jalan Tun Razak were deployed at 5.43am after receiving the distress call at 5.41am. They arrived at 5.47am, followed by Fire and Rescue units from Wangsa Maju and Hang Tuah.
5. 60 firemen were deployed to the scene.
6. The Fire and Rescue Department has classified the case as arson.

