

# Fire started at only way out

By Kenneth Tee

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**KUALA LUMPUR** — The Fire and Rescue Department has pieced together how the deadly fire at a religious school in Kampung Datuk Keramat on Sept 14 got started.

Describing the incident allegedly committed by seven teenagers as "arson", the department's director-general Datuk Wan Mohd Nor Ibrahim yesterday gave a chilling account of the department's findings.

▶ A cooking gas cylinder was aimed at the door of the dormitory on the second floor of the building with its valve opened. It was the only entrance.

▶ Petrol was doused on shoe and cloth racks, and the wall in front of the dormitory's door, and set alight.

▶ Fire took less than five minutes the fully engulf the hostel.

▶ There were no emergency exits. The windows were all secured by metal grilles.

"The source was an incendiary fire after the petrol was set alight" Wan Mohd said.

"It spread quickly to the ceiling and filled the entire room. The victims succumbed quickly to the flames."

A total of 21 students, aged six to 16, and two teachers were killed in the Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah tahfiz school fire.

Wan Mohd said 43 firemen and 17 officers from four fire stations were deployed to the scene after receiving an emergency call at 5.41am.

The first responder from Keramat Fire and Rescue Station arrived six minutes later.

They did not hear cries for help as they fought the blaze, which was brought under control by 6.29am.

The victims' charred remains were only seen after fire fighters entered the hostel.

During their investigation, the department sent four sniffer dogs and they found the residue of the fuel allegedly used by the suspects.

Investigators also found two empty gas

■ Sept 14, 2017  
 ■ 23 dead:  
 21 students  
 2 wardens/teacher  
 ■ 7 injured  
 (one a passer-by who lent help)

LEGEND: ■ Bed ■ Locker ■ Door



Floor plan of the religious school where the bodies were found.

cylinders which were tampered with.

Wan Mohd said their findings were reinforced with the testimony of witnesses and survivors, as well as the damage to the wall and clean burns around the dormitory's entrance.

Police arrested the seven youths, aged

between 11 and 18, two days after the incident. Six of them tested positive for drugs.

Police are expected to extend the suspects' remand order today.

The government has assembled a special task force to probe the tragedy. The government has also drawn up new

guidelines for the operation of tahfiz schools nationwide including making amendments to the Education Act.

The tragedy was the second major fire involving tahfiz school in Malaysia after a 1989 incident in Kedah which claimed the lives of 27 students.

## Prime suspect brought to scene of crime

by Jerry Choong

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**KUALA LUMPUR** — A 16-year-old suspect in the tragic tahfiz school fire was brought back to the scene of the crime yesterday to assist in the on-going investigations.

Police sources told *Malay Mail* he was the "prime suspect".

From 9.45am onwards, a team of 10 personnel from Bukit Aman's forensics department could be seen at the school collecting evidence from the scene, including dusting the school's rear fence for fingerprints.

At 11.50am the suspect arrived in a beige Pajero, clad in a black shirt, short pants and barefoot. His face was covered with a surgical mask and his hands cuffed behind his back.

His arrival was not immediately noticed by a crowd of curious onlookers, but as realisation slowly crept in they could be seen whispering to one another and pointing at the suspect.

For over an hour, the suspect led police around the building and to the second floor dormitory where the fire started.

He also went near the fence at the back, facing Taman Tasik Datuk Keramat where he and his accomplices allegedly gained entry into the school early last Thursday morning.

Shortly before 1pm the suspect was quickly rushed out of the building by plain clothes police officers, with his head draped in sarong, and into the waiting Pajero which drove off immediately.

The suspect is one of seven boys, aged 11 to 17 remanded on Saturday in connection with the tragedy which claimed the lives of 21 students and two wardens.

Meanwhile, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Seri Azalina Othman Said urged the public to stop speculating over the tragedy, and give the authorities room to conduct their investigations.

She said in a statement that since the seven suspects were underaged, they would be investigated under Section 302 of the

Penal Code for murder and Section 435 for mischief by fire.

"However if they are found guilty, Section 97(1) of the Child Act 2001 states the death penalty cannot be carried out on offenders aged 18 and below. In lieu of this, the court can impose an imprisonment sentence at His Majesty's Pleasure.

"Additionally the offender can be penalised under Section 91(1) of the Child Act, whereas Section 94 empowers the court to fine the offenders' parents or otherwise order them to pay compensation," she said.

Azalina said the tragedy should serve as a stark reminder to everyone especially parents in preventing crime involving children.