

NO CASUALTIES

KLANG TAHFIZ GUTTED BY FIRE

First-floor male dormitory of religious school razed in afternoon incident

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LESS than a month after the deadly Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah religious school inferno in Kuala Lumpur, and less than two weeks after the Sekolah Tinggi Islam As-Sofa blaze in Rembau, another religious school in the country was gutted by fire.

The first-floor male dormitory of the Nur Al-Quran Learning and Tahfiz Centre in Jalan Pengkalan Rantau Panjang here was razed about 2.30pm yesterday.

There were no casualties as all 25 students, aged between 10 and 19, were attending a Quran recital class on the ground floor when the fire broke out.

It is believed that the blaze began in the middle portion of the 150sqm dormitory, which had four rooms. From there, it spread to the entire floor.

Sungai Pinang Fire and Rescue Department chief Zaidi Ahtan said a team of 26 firefighters from the Sungai Pinang, Kota Raja and Kapar stations doused the flames in 20 minutes.

"We are investigating the cause

of the fire," Zaidi said, adding that the ground floor was unaffected.

Student Ahmad Sudais Noor Azmi said he smelt smoke while in class, and thought there was rubbish burning nearby.

The 16-year-old teen said once he and several classmates realised what was happening, they tried to douse the fire with the help of neighbours but in vain.

"The fire had destroyed our cupboards and mattresses. When we failed to put out the fire, we ran out of the building to save ourselves.

"Some of the neighbours removed gas cylinders from the kitchen," he said.

Kapar Umno division chief Datuk Faizal Abdullah said assistance would be rendered to the students, who were left with just the clothes on their backs.

"We will mobilise the Youth and Women's wings to bring the students to buy essential items as well as clothing," he said.

Faizal, who is also the political secretary to Urban Wellbeing, Housing and Local Government Minister Tan Sri Noh Omar, said 284 religious schools registered with the Selangor Islamic Religious Department (Jais) have been listed to be checked by the state Fire and Rescue Department to ensure that safety requirements were adhered to.

"So far, 149 have been checked and there are 135 premises to go by Wednesday.

"The department conducts safety audits in accordance with



Fire and Rescue Department personnel inspecting the damaged building of the Nur Al-Quran Learning and Tahfiz Centre in Kapar, Klang, yesterday. PIC BY MUHAMMAD SULAIMAN

the list of tahfiz schools furnished by Jais.

"But, we call on the public to also let us know if they know of any other tahfiz school in their community, which may be not registered," he said.

Selangor Fire and Rescue Department Klang Zone chief Sam-sol Maarif Saibani said the Nur

Al-Quran Learning and Tahfiz Centre would have failed the safety audit check if one was conducted.

"There are several safety aspects undertaken by the school that do not meet the basic requirements.

"The emergency exit is not up to specifications and the emer-

gency staircase mounted outside the building is unsuitable. There are also no exit signs in the dormitory.

"I noticed that there are also sliding windows with grilles that cannot be opened.

"The dormitory is overcrowded, with 15 bunk beds," said Sam-sol.

Owners too 'busy' to register school

KAPAR: The Nur Al-Quran Learning and Tahfiz Centre in Jalan Pengkalan Rantau Panjang, which was razed in a fire yesterday, is an unregistered school despite being in operation for almost four years.

Fawaz Abdul Hamid, whose family owns the religious school, said they had yet to register the institution with the Se-

langor Islamic Religious Department (Jais).

"We are in the process of registering the school," he said at the scene yesterday.

Asked why it had yet to be registered, Fawaz said the family had been "busy with matters", which resulted in the delay.

Fawaz claimed that the Public

Works Department was supposed to check on the school on Oct 11 after he made a request, following the Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah religious school fire last month in Kuala Lumpur that killed 23.

"Forty tahfiz schools in Klang have been inspected. We are among the six or seven that have yet to be checked."

ALLOCATION FOR TAHFIZ SCHOOLS

Zahid: RM30m must be used only for upgrades

PUTRAJAYA: Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi yesterday said he would ensure the RM30 million allocation to upgrade tahfiz centres would be used solely for such purpose.

He was referring to the allocation announced by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak after he visited the Darul Quran Itti-

faqiyah religious school in Kampung Datuk Keramat, where a pre-dawn fire killed 23 people, including 21 students, last month.

"I know it may not be enough, but it is a start. Previously, the RM30 million allocation for tahfiz schools (allocated under the 2017 Budget) was mostly used to pay salaries, about 80 per cent of it.

"But, I am making sure that this

(newly approved) allocation will be used only for the upgrading of these tahfiz schools," said Zahid, who chairs a permanent coordinating committee to monitor all religious schools, including Sekolah Agama Rakyat and maahad tahfiz, nationwide.

The deputy prime minister said this at the launch of the Human Capital Psychology Conference.

Currently, 941 private tahfiz schools, comprising 9,470 teachers and more than 150,000 students, have registered with Persatuan Madrasah Tahfiz Al-Quran Malaysia.

The need to improve and upgrade the tahfiz schools had been highlighted lately following the Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah religious school fire.

There have been 40 fire incidents with 56 fatalities involving tahfiz schools since the 1989 fire that killed 27 students at SM Taufikiah Khairiah Al-Halimiah, also known as Pondok Pak Ya, in Yan, Kedah.

The latest incident saw fire razing a female students' hostel at Sekolah Tinggi As-Sofa in Rembau last month. No one was injured.