

# TMJ checks out Johor forest fire

## Two schools forced to close temporarily as flames continue to rage on

By MOHD FARHAAN SHAH  
and REMAR NORDIN  
newsdesk@thestar.com.my

**ISKANDAR PUTERI:** What started as an ordinary small bush fire about six days ago has destroyed about 16ha of forest in Kampung Pekajang along Jalan Tanjung Kupang.

Thick smoke from the fire has forced two nearby schools to close.

Firemen from the state Fire and Rescue Department have been battling the forest fires for about a week now, and so far, about 60% of the fire has been put out.

The situation caught the attention of Johor Regent Tunku Mahkota Ismail ibni Sultan Ibrahim, who inspected the area yesterday for first-hand information.

A similar forest fire was put out near Legoland Malaysia and a hotel in the same district on Saturday.

State Fire and Rescue Department director Datuk Yahaya Madis said firemen had put out 9.6ha of the Kampung Pekajang fire but new hotspots caused by strong winds appeared in nearby areas.

Yahaya said 79 personnel and



Inspecting the area: Tengku Ismail visiting SMK Tanjung Adang in Iskandar Puteri.

officers from 11 fire stations were deployed to fight the fire.

He added that five 20,000-litre capacity water tankers were being used to get water from nearby fire hydrants.

"Based on the current situation, we expect to take another four days to douse the fire. But if a 'total flood-

ing' technique can be done immediately, then the fire can be put out in a much shorter time," he added.

Meanwhile, Tunku Ismail has directed temporary closure for SMK Tanjung Adang due to the forest fire near the school.

A statement posted on Sultan Ibrahim ibni Almarhum Sultan

Iskandar's official Facebook page said that Tunku Ismail also visited SMK Tanjung Adang, which has 200 students.

He directed the school to be temporarily closed for the sake of the students' health.

Meanwhile, Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Dr Sahrudin Jamal said that all state government departments and agencies located within Kota Iskandar, which is located about 12km away from the burning forest, were still operational despite the state administrative centre being covered with haze over the last few days and Air Pollutant Index (API) reading was 81.

"The state government is looking at doing cloud seeding to help prevent the fire from spreading to other areas.

"Most of the areas destroyed by the fire are privately owned agricultural land beside the forest," he added.

State Local Government, Urban Wellbeing, and Environment Committee chairman Tan Chen Choon advised villagers living near the forest fire to seek immediate medi-

cal treatment if they showed any symptoms of breathing difficulties.

He said the forest fire was caused by the prolonged heatwave affecting the peat soils in the area.

The Johor Education Department has confirmed that the two schools in Iskandar Puteri would be closed for two days due to the forest fire.

Its deputy director (school management) Ab Rahim Lamin said the action was taken following advice by the Johor Disaster Committee.

"For the safety of students, teachers and staff at SMK Tanjung Adang and SK Tanjung Adang, which is located near the forest fire, the department has decided to postpone school session on Aug 26 and Aug 27.

"This means the students do not have to be present at their respective schools while teachers and staff must report to schools near to their homes," he said.

Watch the video  
thestartv.com



## Group concerned over environmental impact of fire

**JOHOR BARU:** The Malaysian Nature Society (MNS) has raised concern over the environmental impact from the forest fire near Kampung Pekajang in Iskandar Puteri.

It's vice-president Vincent Chow said the burning forest had caused haze in the area.

"The ash from the burned trees can release carbon particles and it is not good for those suffering from asthma or breathing difficulties," he said.

The forest is located less than 15km away from Kota Iskandar, the state administrative centre, and the Tanjung Pelepas Port (PTP).

The surrounding areas have also been engulfed in smoke from the burning trees.

The Air Pollutant Index (API) in

the area was recorded at 81 yesterday.

The API reading of between 0 and 50 is good, while 51 and 100 is moderate, 101 and 200 is unhealthy, 201 and 300 very unhealthy, and 301 and above is deemed hazardous.

Chow said the fire could spread quickly underground and the forest terrain could hamper firemen's efforts to contain the blaze.

The firefighters had been battling the forest fire for about a week but they were facing difficulty in channelling water to the forest to douse the flames.

About 16ha of forest was engulfed by the flames and about 60%, or 9.6ha of the fire has been successfully put out, but strong winds cause new hotspots to appear in nearby areas.



Up in smoke: An aerial shot showing the forest fires in Kampung Pekajang near Iskandar Puteri, Johor.

## Thick smoke making villagers restless

**ISKANDAR PUTERI:** The thick smoke caused by the forest fire along Jalan Tanjung Kupang near Kampung Pekajang here has made villagers in Kampung Tanjung Adang restless, especially at night.

Among them is Mohd Zulkarnain Johar, 26, who said the haze would get thicker at night since the fire broke out on Wednesday, causing breathing difficulties for his wife and child.

"The first night was like living in an oven because my house is about 100m away from where the fire started," he said.

"Every corner of the forest was ablaze that night, and my wife and our six-year-old son became sick."

He said he took his wife and their son to sleep at his in-law's house in Kampung Ladang about 3km away.

"So far, she is still able to cope by using an inhaler, but if her condition worsens, we will go to the hospital to seek treatment," he said.

Another villager, Khirman Talib, 47, said the fire broke out about 50m behind his house.

“When I saw fire in the forest behind, I quickly called for the villagers to help put out the fire.”

Khirman Talib

“When I saw the fire in the forest behind my house, I quickly called for the villagers to help put out the fire to prevent it from spreading.”

“But due to the strong wind and heat, the fire spread quickly. We then called the Fire and Rescue Department,” said Khirman, who added that even with firemen's efforts, the fire could not be contained.

“We could not let the firemen do things on their own, so we decided to help them by providing water and other necessities that they needed,” he said.

Map of forest fire in Gelang Patah, Johor



## Five students taken to hospital

**JOHOR BARU:** Five students were taken to the Sultanah Aminah Hospital for breathing difficulties during a fire at SMK Bandar Baru Uda yesterday.

In the fire, which occurred at an empty storeroom belonging to the school's co-operative, the five complained of breathing difficulties while standing under the hot sun, said Johor Baru Fire and Rescue Department operation commander Lasidin Nariano.

He said the schoolgirls were among other students who assembled at the school field when the fire alarm was raised.

"The incident has nothing to do with the current forest fire and haze that blanketed the city," he said.

"Firemen took two hours to put out the flame which destroyed 60% of the store," he said, adding that the fire occurred at 9.30am.

The department is investigating the cause of the fire.