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Nine schools not ready as scheduled this year

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Nine schools, seven primary and two secondary, have not been completed on time for the new school term this year.

Fifty-four new schools were supposed to have been operational for the new school term.

The uncompleted primary schools are Sekolah Kebangsaan Mergong II, Kedah; Sekolah Kebangsaan Jitra II, Kedah; and Sekolah Kebangsaan Sri Kelebang, Perak; Sekolah Kebangsaan Berangan, Kelantan; Sekolah Rendah Jenis Kebangsaan (Tamil) Masai, Johor; Sekolah Rendah Pendidikan Khas (Baru) Cacat Pendengaran, Johor; and Sekolah Rendah Jenis Kebangsaan (Tamil) Linden in Kulai.

The secondary schools are Sekolah Menengah Seri Pekan, Pahang; and Sekolah Menengah Chalok, Setiu in Terengganu.

Education Ministry secretary-general Datuk Johari Mat said although the number of uncompleted schools was small, the Ministry was taking the matter seriously and would take steps to prevent this kind of problem.

Johari, however, could not give an estimate as to how many schoolchildren were affected by the delays.

"The schoolchildren have been temporarily placed in neighbouring schools," he told reporters.

Asked when the schools would be completed, Johari said they would commence operations "within the next few months".

Johari said reasons given included a shortage of cement, the rainy weather, and management problems.

"Some contractors have no motivation to complete the last part of the project and some encountered granite crops on the project site which take some time to remove," he said, adding that it was also sometimes difficult to hire workers.

He said errant contractors would be blacklisted. Johari, however, declined to reveal the contractors of the delayed projects.

The New Straits Times learnt that the contractors are Raza Trading for S.M. Chalok; Farmco Sdn Bhd and Dinslee Sdn Bhd for S.M. Seri Pekan; Saujana Bina (M) Berhad for S.K. Sri Kelebang; Perusahaan Binaan Makmur Sdn Bhd for SRJK (T) Masai; Tan Swee Huat & Son Construction Sdn Bhd for SR Pendidikan Khas (Baru) Cacat Pendengaran; and Pembinaan Seri Selatan Sdn Bhd for SRJK (T) Linden.

Johari added that long-term measures to eradicate the problem were to ensure that only contractors with reputable track records were given such projects and for there to be stricter supervision.

"Penalties will also be imposed on errant contractors. The contractor blamed for the late completion of Sekolah Menengah Chalok is currently being imposed a penalty of RM1,500 a day.

"It was supposed to have completed the project on Sept 22.

"The ministry had allowed it extension of time three times," he said, adding that projects could be extended for any number of times depending on the merit of the applications.

"We are giving the contractor of S.M. Chalok until March 1 to complete the school.

"They have promised to show improvement within the next two weeks."

Asked whether the contract would be revoked if the contractor did not keep up to its promise, Johari said it would not as there was a long process involved.

"The penalty will, however, continue to be imposed," he said, adding that penalties could range from "hundreds to thousands of ringgit" depending on the reasons for delay.

Johari said the cost of the delayed projects ranged from RM4 to RM5 million for a primary school and RM7 to RM8 million for a secondary school.

Johari said not all the projects were determined by the ministry's tender board.

"Some were determined by the Finance Ministry and Public Works Department's tender board."

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had on Jan 7 ticked off contractors who failed to complete their projects on schedule, especially public facilities like schools.

Johari also said there was no reported shortage of chairs and tables this year.

"In most cases, the chairs and tables were already in the schools. It is just that they have not been arranged in the classrooms yet as was the case in Sekolah Kebangsaan Seafield II in USJ 4, Subang Jaya."

In Johor Baru, State Executive Councillor Datuk Zainalabidin Mohamed Zin said the Johor Government had issued a directive to all contractors who were behind schedule to buck up or face the consequences.

He said errant contractors would be penalised according to their terms of agreement with the Public Works Department.

Zainal said: "Three school projects in Johor were behind time, while the completion dates for two others have been extended because of weather conditions last year."

He said the delays had caused a great deal of inconvenience to both pupils and the school authorities.

The contractors concerned had been summoned by the PWD to explain the delays.

"If the contractors fail to make any progress, the PWD will have no choice but to terminate their contracts," he said.

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