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PM: Students being misled (HL)

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PETALING JAYA, Mon. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he believed students involved in starting fires in schools acted that way because they had been taught to resort to violence.

When the young were influenced to violate the law by taking part in demonstrations, many of them would be inclined to take the law into their own hands, believing that the authorities would not act against them, he said.

There would be chaos if people no longer respected the law.

Dr Mahathir said this even as two teenagers were detained today in connection with the alleged arson in Sekolah Menengah Taman Tun Dr Ismail on Saturday.

The two were a 17-year-old former student of the school who had been expelled in April while the other was a 15-year-old student, also from the same school who was suspended about a week ago.

Police also remanded two 13-year-old pupils today in connection with the stabbing of seven-year-old Nurulsyuhada Abdul Majid outside her school in Ampang, Selangor, last Thursday.

In that incident, Nurulsyuhada was found with two stab wounds - one on her chest and the other on her back - and bruises on her hands and body outside her school following what police believed was an extortion attempt (see report on page 3).

Dr Mahathir said there were now people teaching students not to respect the law, to take part in street demonstrations, challenge the police and beat up policemen.

"At kindergartens, the young are taught to hate the Government and not to respect anyone, including teachers. So when they grow up, they will become someone who has no qualms about going against the law.

"They are brought up that way ... thus, many would have the inclination to resort to violence," he said at the Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah Airport in Subang on his return from the G15 summit in Cairo and a private visit to Italy.

He was asked by reporters to comment on the spate of fires in schools and on students being suspected of involvement in some of them.

Dr Mahathir said he was worried that there would be disorder if the trend of violation of the law was left unchecked.

"If we don't respect the law, we will find out one day that we are no longer safe," he said, adding that emulating behaviour and practices foreign to society would only bring harm to the country.

On whether arson and cases of indiscipline in schools warranted greater attention from the police, including giving auxiliary police powers to headmasters, the Prime Minister said:

"We have to be careful in this matter as powers should not be given easily to this or that person. What should be done is to respect the law, so it means this value must be taught to students while they are still in school. (If not) it will not be long (before) we find our own house getting burnt."

The first blaze in schools was on May 6 when three classrooms of Sekolah Rendah Jenis Kebangsaan (Cina) Desa Jaya, Kepong, were destroyed by fire. Police suspected arson as the fire broke out in two areas.

On June 3, fire gutted a disciplinary teacher's room at Sekolah Menengah Section 19, Shah Alam. Six pupils were detained by police but have since

been released.

On June 19, suspected arsonists set ablaze a third floor classroom at Sekolah Kebangsaan Rawang.

On Saturday, an early morning fire damaged the staffroom at the Sekolah Menengah Taman Tun Dr Ismail, the third such incident in the school since December.

(END)