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PM: DON'T TAKE FIRE SAFETY LIGHTLY

Najib wants dept to check on fire safety of tahfiz, religious schools nationwide

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THE cabinet has tasked the Fire and Rescue Department with inspecting tahfiz and religious schools nationwide to assess their fire safety standards.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said this was to prevent a repeat of the deadly fire that engulfed a religious school here last Thursday, which resulted in the deaths of 23 people.

He said the department would submit a report of its findings to the government.

Najib said schools that failed to comply with fire safety recommendations within a certain period of time could be shut down.

"If any of these schools fail to comply (with the fire safety recommendations), they will be asked to do so within a time frame.

"If they still refuse to comply, they can be asked to cease operations. This is for the sake of our children's safety," he said at the national-level Maal Hijrah celebration here yesterday.

He said the safety of all students was of paramount importance and that the issue of fire safety should not be taken lightly.



Police officers directing traffic outside the Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah religious school at Kampung Datuk Keramat in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. PIC BY ROSHAN WAHID

"We cannot compromise on our children's safety. Otherwise, it is like a ticking time bomb waiting to explode.

"This is about our children's lives.

"It is our responsibility to make sure their safety is taken care of."

Najib said this in the wake of the Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah religious school fire last Thursday, which killed 21 students and two teachers.

The Fire and Rescue Department has classified the case as arson, and submitted its report to the police on Wednesday.

Seven boys, aged between 11 and 18, were detained one day after the fire.

On Tuesday, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi announced a proposed amendment to the Education Act 1996 (Act 550) to enable federal coordination of private religious schools' management and easier distribution of financial aid.

Meanwhile, Fire and Rescue Department director-general Datuk Wan Mohd Nor Ibrahim said the department had conducted checks at more than 300

tahfiz schools nationwide following the tragedy.

Wan Mohd Nor said the department had formed a special task force in every state to ensure that all tahfiz schools in the country meet the safety standards set by the department.

He said the department had identified 941 tahfiz schools nationwide, including 329 that were not registered, with a total number of 150,000 students.

He said the department would be able to complete its report on the checks at all the identified schools nationwide within a

month.

"There are various safety aspects that the department has identified at the tahfiz schools that were inspected.

"The schools' management were given between one week and a month to solve the issue, depending on the type of offence.

"The management of the schools may face legal action should they fail to comply with the order.

"However, schools found to be unfit to accommodate students will be ordered to close down immediately."

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