

NEW STRAITS TIMES
FOUR-DAY CLOSURE

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MIS 04

16 JOHOR SCHOOLS ORDERED SHUT

Shutdown over suspected air pollution affects 20,180

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A TOTAL of 16 schools in a 6km radius of SA Taman Mawar here have been instructed to close for four days beginning today following back-to-back incidences of schoolchildren falling ill due to suspected air pollution.

The closure involves 20,180 schoolchildren and teachers from the 16 schools, the Ibrahim Sultan Polytechnic, as well as 69 kindergartens and preschools.

On Thursday, 15 pupils from the school, as well as nearby SK Pasir Gudang 4, were hospitalised over suspected exposure to air pollution.

The incident worsened yester-

of breath.

Khuzzan said the Department of Environment and other agencies, including the National Disaster Management Agency and National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, were identifying the cause of the latest incident.

"The schools were closed to prevent more people from becoming victims of the suspected air pollution here.

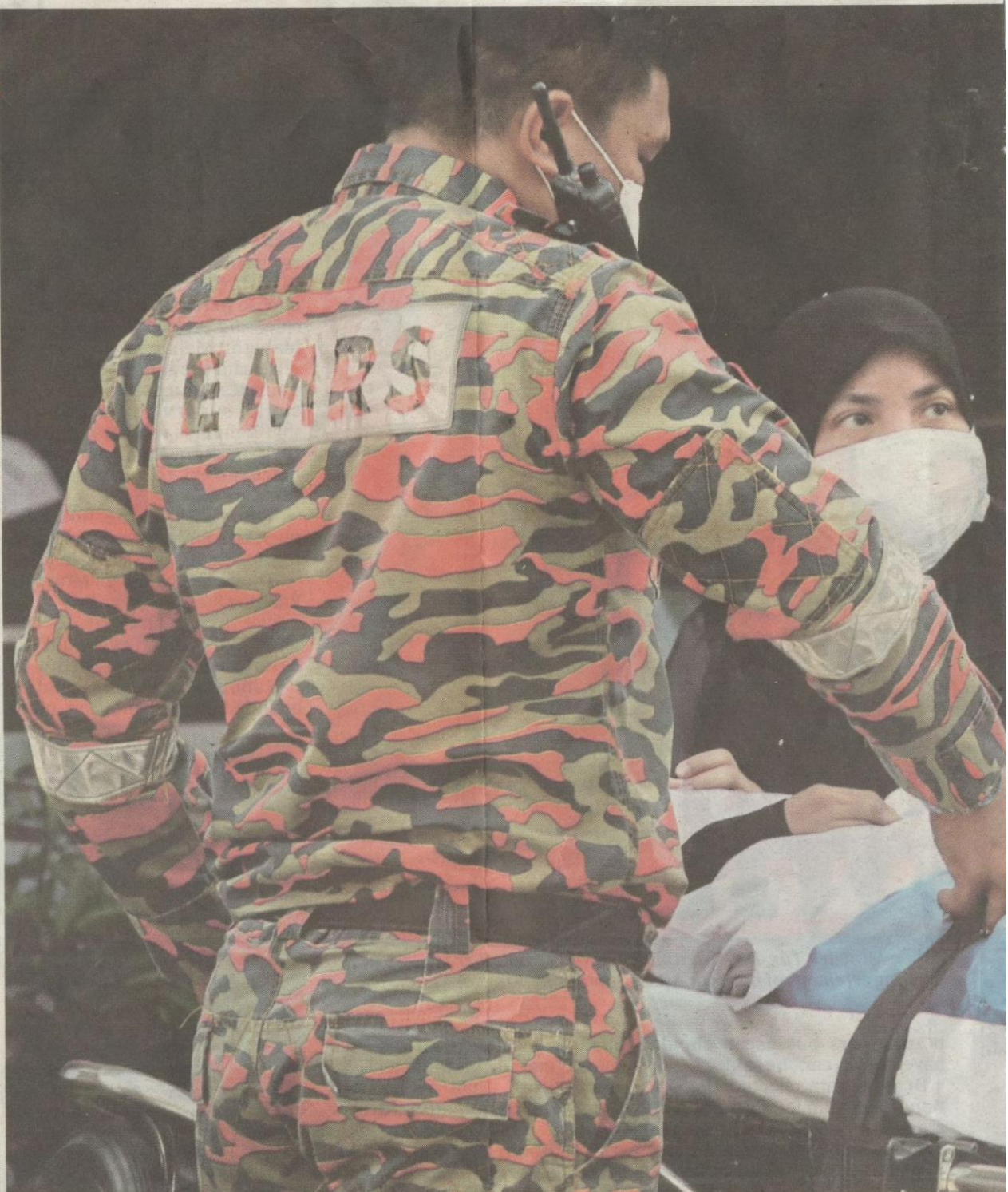
"Most of the victims are schoolchildren, who were on the third and fourth floors of their schools.

"This incident occurred randomly and it changed based on the direction of the wind, making it difficult to identify its source.

"Nevertheless, the Technical and Scientific Committee has narrowed down the number of possible sources in its investigation.

"We expect to identify the source of the pollution in the next day or two," he said.

He said this at the Pasir Gudang Indoor Stadium here yesterday. Present were state Local Gov-



Rescue workers securing a student to a stretcher after she was affected by suspected air pollution in Pasir Gudang yesterday. PIX BY MOHD AZREN JAMALUDIN

day when 20 students from another school — SMK Taman Nusa Damai — displayed symptoms of air pollution exposure and were rushed to hospital.

The school is located about 5km from SA Taman Mawar. Checks at the school yesterday morning showed that at least six ambulances from Sultan Ismail Hospital were in the school's compound.

State Health, Culture and Heritage Committee chairman Mohd Khuzzan Abu Bakar said the closure of the schools was agreed upon by the Technical and Scientific Committee as a precautionary measure.

It is understood that the two schools — SA Taman Mawar and SK Pasir Gudang 4 — are located about 7km from Sungai Kim Kim, the site of a massive chemical pollution, which left 5,848 people ill after inhaling toxic fumes from the river in March.

That month, 111 schools here had to be closed for two weeks.

The chemical pollution made thousands sick, with symptoms such as eye irritation, chest pain, vomiting and shortness

of breath, dizziness, coughing and sneezing, Urban Wellbeing and Environment Committee chairman Tan Chen Choon.

On Thursday, 15 schoolchildren and two adults from SA Taman Mawar and SK Pasir Gudang 4 had breathing difficulties and were vomiting, before being rushed to Sultan Ismail Hospital.

Three schools and two kindergartens — SA Taman Mawar, SK

Pasir Gudang 4, SMK Pasir Gudang 2, Pasti kindergarten and Pintar Bistari kindergarten — were subsequently ordered close yesterday, affecting some 3,000 students and staff members.

Yesterday, 20 students from SMK Taman Nusa Damai were rushed to hospital when they displayed symptoms of air pollution exposure.

Khuzzan said 13 people have been referred to the hospital, while 49 others have been treated at Pasir Gudang Health Clinic, as well as at the stadium which had been converted into a monitoring operations centre for the case.

"Blood tests on six people ward- ed at the hospital turned up neg- ative for toxic substances. The

monitoring radius has been ex- panded since Saturday to ensure that safety is preserved.

"The public have been advised to seek verified information.

"Any inquiries can be directed to the Pasir Gudang Fire and Res- cue Department at 07-2513444 or the state Fire Department's op- erations movement centre at 07- 3409999."

'This is the second time my daughter fell ill due to air pollution'

PASIR GUDANG: "This is the sec- ond time my daughter has fallen sick due to air pollution," said housewife Nurshahila Abd Raof.

Nurshahila said her daughter, Nursyakila Adawiyah Roslan, 11, who is a pupil at SK Kopok, vom- ited in class at 11.30am and was taken to the Pasir Gudang Indoor Stadium here which was convert- ed into a monitoring operations centre for the case.

"During the Sungai Kim Kim pollution incident at Taman Pasir

Putih, she, along with my hus- band and I, fell sick and had to go for three follow-up visits at the nearby health clinic.

"I was at home when the schoolteacher contacted me. She told me Nursyakila had vomited and fainted, and was taken to the centre in an ambulance.

"There has been no directive to close SK Kopok. I am worried be- cause it disrupts my child's daily school routines," said Nurshahi- la, who lives in Taman Perdana

Rakyat Perdana here.

Government officer Rafizah Rasib, 30, said her son, who was also a SK Kopok pupil, was not asked to leave for home early as the morning session was almost over.

"At 12.30am, a teacher in- formed me that a pupil had faint- ed, but the situation was under control.

"When my son reached the transit nursery, I was informed by the guardian there that he vom-

ited. I took him and sent him for treatment at the centre.

"My son had complained of breathing difficulties. He ap- peared weak.

"The medical authorities have not been able to identify the cause," she added.

It is learned that the centre at the Pasir Gudang Indoor Stadium had received patients from SK Kopok, SK Taman Bukit Dahlia and SMK Taman Nusa Damai.

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Student saw friends losing consciousness

M/S 05



JOHOR BARU: Several students of SMK Taman Nusa Damai affected by the latest suspected air pollution incident here, claimed that their eyes smarted, and they felt dizzy and nauseous after smelling a pungent gas.

Kasih Sofea Mohd Zull Ihsan, 13, said she had just seated herself at the bus stop in front of her school when she felt ill.

"It was recess time, about 10am, and, normally, I can be found at the bus stop. I had just sat down when I smelled toxic gas. It was then that I had breathing difficulty, a headache and cough.

"When I turned around, I saw some of my friends had lost consciousness," she said at the Pasir Gudang Indoor Stadium, which had been converted into a monitoring operations centre for the case yesterday.

Kasih Sofea said despite being in a state of confusion, she found her way back into the school compound and informed her teachers about the incident.

Her teacher called for an ambulance, which arrived after several minutes.

"When I was waiting for the ambulance to arrive, my hands were shivering as it felt cold," she said.

Another student, Zareen Faridha Zulkfilee, 13, said her eyes also immediately smarted and she felt dizzy after she sniffed the gas.

"I made a beeline for the school's health room before I was

referred here (the stadium)," she said.

Mohd Hairi Nick Sham, 40, the father of a student, said he was informed about the incident by his daughter's teacher via WhatsApp.

"Coincidentally, I was returning home to Taman Scientex from my workplace in Larkin when the teacher messaged me to pick up my daughter (Nur Airisa Zafify, 13) at school because she had breathing difficulties. I hastily went there, but when I arrived my daughter had been taken here (the stadium)," he said.

Hairi said he did not smell anything weird in his daughter's school area or their home in the past several days.

"It is different today (yesterday)," he said.

Fendy Saharan, 38, said the incident not only took place at the secondary school, but also at SK Taman Nusa Damai.

"My wife experienced cramps in her legs and had breathing difficulties upon sniffing the gas this morning.

"At that time, she and I were at the school to look at my daughter's report card in conjunction with the school's open day."

Bernama

Page 1 pic: Rescue workers and teachers attending to a student who fainted following a suspected air pollution incident in Pasir Gudang, Johor, yesterday.



An ambulance carrying schoolchildren leaving SK Taman Nusa Damai in Pasir Gudang yesterday.

State govt to study need to create industrial area

JOHOR BARU: The state government will look into the suitability of creating an integrated industrial area following a suspected air pollution incident, which affected schoolchildren in Pasir Gudang on Thursday, as well as the contamination of Sungai Kim Kim in March.

Menteri Besar Datuk Dr Sahrudin Jamal said a discussion would be held with the Town and Country Planning Department to study the matter.

"We will discuss the matter.

"We will conduct an investigation and, maybe, set up a committee," he said in reply to a question on whether the state government had plans to create an integrated industrial area following the two incidents in Pasir Gudang.

He said this at the topping-off

ceremony of the Johor Baru City Council Tower here yesterday.

In a related development, Dr Sahrudin said he was waiting for the results of the blood samples from the authorities to identify the cause of Thursday's incident.

He said the results were expected to be available today.

"We still do not know (the cause of the incident).

"The students became nauseous, started vomiting and fainted.

"In the previous case, we managed to identify the source of the pollution, which is Sungai Kim Kim. But in this case, we are not sure.

"We must wait for the results. Only then can we determine its root cause."