

Tahfiz Fire: What is wrong with our generation?

News:

On September 14, 2017, a fire broke out at the Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah Tahfiz School situated in the Keramat area of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. For years, this is one of the biggest fire incidents that had plagued tahfiz schools throughout the country. 21 students and 2 teachers died in the fire, which had raised veracious debate on the fire safety level in tahfiz schools. Since 2011, there had been at least 31 reported fires at various private tahfiz schools in Malaysia. Most of these schools lack fire safety requirements and are prone to fires especially due to electrical faults. However this time, the fire at Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah School is different. A few days after the fire, after blames had been flung against tahfiz centers around the country for their poor safety levels, the true story surfaced. The fire was not due to electrical faults but was the result of arson committed by teenagers who were under the influence of drugs. And these teenagers burnt the place just because they had some arguments with the tahfiz students!

Comment:

This shocking incident is clearly an indicator of how we have failed our younger generation. Since the truth appeared in the media, debates arose even though the case had been considered closed by the authority. Obviously, the case is far from closed. The arrest of the teenagers does not solve the real problem, far from it. Many blamed the perpetrators directly and the parents of the teenagers for 'not educating their children properly'. Also, others keep arguing that the children could have been saved if the school had met the fire safety requirements. However, very little discussion ensued concerning the real issue of why we have failed our younger generation. The development of the younger generation is built upon the environment in which they live in. This, among others, include the socio-economic conditions that they live in and the education they went through. Parents no doubt play a very important role in their education but the ability of the parents to educate their children will also depend on the socio-economic condition of the family. The teenagers were born in economically lower tiers of the society and in today's capitalist system, these lower income tiers have to really struggle to make ends meet. Coupled with a lack of Islamic education, the parents of these families have the propensity to neglect educating their children. Most parents who live in this condition have to hand over the responsibility of educating their children to the schools. But are the schools prepared to take up the full responsibility?

The Malaysian National Education Philosophy (NEP) carries the necessary objectives of an education system. The philosophy describes that education in Malaysia is 'an ongoing effort towards further developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated approach so as to produce individuals who are intellectually,

spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonious, based on a firm belief in and devotion to God'. If implemented properly, it would certainly produce such individuals. However, many are beginning to see that the Malaysian education system have failed miserably in educating the youths of today. Social problems related to youths are on the increase and this latest episode corroborates the failure of the education system. The problem is not the philosophy itself but the basis upon which the education system is built upon. The capitalist secular education system we have today emphasizes only on material and quantification of academic success. The focus is not to produce a holistic and integrated individuals but rather slaves of capitalism. The secular education system is simply not designed to be in line with the said NEP, what more with the Islamic education system! It is due to this that schools in Malaysia have failed miserably in producing individuals with morals and integrity in character (*akhlak*) but are successful in producing individuals with materialistic and individualistic tendencies. The nuance borne out of the secular education system which focuses only on quantitative academic success, will cause students who are unable to compete and viewed as failures by the system to drop out of schools and involve themselves with various social problems. All the teenagers involved in this crime are school dropouts.

A short comment is certainly unfair in giving a comprehensive picture of how a failed education system would bring about such tragedy. Suffice to say that living in a capitalist system that disregards the spiritual aspect of life brings about neglect in the righteous facets of life. An education system that aspires to bring about a society that is 'holistic and integrated' but implements a structure that in actuality negates these values is doomed to fail. Struggling lower income families in a capitalist society make the situation worse. These ingredients are enough to characterize problematic youths such as those responsible for the fire. And for an ideological Muslim, it is easy to see that the youths, the parents, the education and the economic situation are only manifestations of the real problem – the non-implementation of Islam – a holistic and integrated solution to all of life's problems.

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