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Stop, PM tells illegal ferries

**By DERRICK VINESH and YENG AI CHUN**

KEPALA BATAS: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi wants all illegal ferries to stop operations immediately.

Upset over Saturday's ferry tragedy in Mersing, Johor, where four passengers drowned and three are still missing, Abdullah said it was dangerous to operate ferries without a licence.

"I am very unhappy with what has happened and I wish to express my condolences to the relatives of those who died.

"Action has to be taken. We cannot allow this to happen," he told reporters at his Hari Raya open house at Dewan Milenium here yesterday.

In the incident, the *Seagull Express*, with 106 people on board, caught fire and sank while on its way to Pulau Tioman.

Abdullah said the Transport Ministry would inspect all ferries used to transport passengers and goods to prevent such an incident from recurring.

"I also want to know how the authorities missed the necessary inspections on this particular boat," he said, adding that Transport Minister Datuk Seri Chan Kong Choy would give a full report on the incident today.

Abdullah chided the ferry operator for defying an order not to use the vessel as a ferry as it did not comply with specifications.

"And, it seems the owner decided to operate despite that.

"Now the accident has occurred and many have died. That poses a very serious problem. That requires very tough action," he said.

Bernama reports that the tragedy

has authorities and ferry operators redoubling efforts to ensure the safety of passengers.

A check showed there was no cancellation of tickets or travel plans by holidaymakers using ferries in various states.