TROIS BOUTIQUES GOVT. SCHOOL - ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION

Mr Deputy Speaker, with your permission, I will make a second statement. It concerns the problems at Trois Boutiques Government School.

I will, therefore, make a short statement having regard to the environmental pollution at Trois Boutiques Government School caused by the spraying of pesticides by planters of vegetables in the fields surrounding the school.

On 30 April 2001, 32 pupils of Trois Boutiques Government School were urgently taken to Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital due to intoxication caused by pesticide sprayed in nearby vegetable plantations. All of them were hospitalised and 22 were discharged on 01 May 2001 whereas the remaining 10 were discharged on 02 May 2001.

A meeting was organised by the Ministry of Education on 03 May with the planters concerned in the presence of representatives of the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture. The planters undertook not to spray pesticides during school hours so as not to affect the pupils and staff of the school.
KV/20/P15A/3

Five half-day training sessions were held by AREU of the Ministry of Agriculture to sensitize small planters on the use of pesticides. However, this did not meet with success as the enthusiasm and the interest of the planters waned after a couple of days.

However, there were thereafter no problems reported at the school until 29 June, when five pupils of the school were again victims of the spray of pesticides in nearby vegetable plantations. I immediately instructed the Regional Director to approach the Police authorities for the issuing of a warning to the planters and called a meeting scheduled for tomorrow afternoon.

Further, on Friday last, officers of my Ministry had a meeting with the PTA and parents concerned where, again, representatives of the Ministries of Agriculture, Health and Environment were present.

Yesterday, to attract public attention to their plight, the parents have staged a sit-in at the school. I made it a point to receive the delegation of the PTA and parents yesterday afternoon and had a most fruitful exchange of views with them. It was explained to them that there is need to consider the various implications of the matter with the relevant authorities before any remedial action can be envisaged.

Tomorrow, Wednesday 11 July 2001, I shall be chairing a meeting with representatives of the Ministries of Health, Agriculture, and Environment, the Police, the Attorney-General’s Office and the planters concerned, together with representatives of the PTA and the local community, to analyse the problem and identify the course of action to prevent any recurrence, and find a lasting solution.

Meanwhile, we have decided, with the concurrence of the PTA, that the school would be closed until Wednesday 11 July so as not to expose the pupils and staff to any further risks of intoxication.

Mr Deputy Speaker, allow me to stress that the present state of affairs is unacceptable and cannot be tolerated, which is why I share the indignation of the parents concerned. We shall leave no stone unturned to find a lasting solution to the problem.

Thank you, Sir.