UNITY COLLEGE - ODOUR PROBLEM

The Minister of Public Utilities (Mr A. Ganoo): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with your permission, in my capacity of Ag. Minister of Environment, I wish to make a short statement on the problem of odour reported at Unity College, Rose Belle on 29 March 2004.

At about 11.30 hours, officers of the Ministry of Environment were informed that students of Unity College were feeling unwell and attending treatment at Jawaharlall Nehru Hospital. It was later confirmed by the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life that 37 students from Unity College attended the hospital with history of burning sensation of nostrils, eyes, headache, nausea and few of them with weakness and giddiness and abdominal pain. Out of the 37 patients, 4 were admitted for observation and their conditions are satisfactory.

The monitoring team based in the area immediately investigated the problem. At the time of visit at Unity College, there was a mild odour of vinasse. The exact cause of the problem could, however, not be ascertained. The Ministry of Health has not attributed any cause to the problem so far and no other cases of similar symptoms were reported in the vicinity of the college.
At the time of the incident, Alcodis Ltd was in operation using diesel and there was a mild odour of vinasse in the vicinity of the enterprise.

During a subsequent visit in the late afternoon, it was observed that there were several sources of odour linked to different activities on the premises of the ex-sugar factory namely -

(i) a mild odour of vinasse and alcohol coming from Alcodis Ltd;
(ii) a bad smell was emanating from a pond used to pretreat cane sets prior to be planted, and
(iii) odour of scum.

A technical team comprising the Ministry of Environment and National Development Unit, the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life, the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources, the MSIRI, the Meteorological Services and the University of Mauritius is continuing with the investigation.

I wish to remind the House that a Mobile Air Monitoring Unit of the Ministry of Environment is presently based at Rose Belle North Government School and the situation at all the schools in Rose Belle is being closely monitored.

Thank you, Sir.