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EIGHTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

TUESDAY 18 MARCH 2025

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

PRIMARY & SECONDARY SCHOOLS – DEPLORABLE STATE – CIVIL WORKS AUDIT

(No. B/157) Mr A. Ramdass (Third Member for Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resource whether, in regard to primary and secondary schools, he will state if he has been made aware of the deplorable state of some of these schools, indicating if his Ministry is planning to carry out an audit to gauge the civil works required to bring the physical infrastructures and hygienic facilities thereof up to norm.

Dr. Gungapersad: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the hon. Third Member for Vieux Grand Port and Rose Belle. To be brief, yes. In fact, most of the primary and secondary schools are in a deplorable state. Also, the physical infrastructure and the hygiene facilities are deplorable.

I wish to inform the House that there are currently 208 government primary schools and 63 state secondary schools. Most of the primary schools date back to some 50 to 70 years, while our secondary schools date back to some 15 to 20 years. I have to add that my Ministry has injected funds to the tune of some Rs775 m. over the last three years in the maintenance and upgrading of our school infrastructure.

Unfortunately, there has been only an ad hoc management of infrastructure over the recent years where only nominal maintenance has been undertaken. In fact, no infrastructural audit of old buildings has been carried out. As yet to find out, the state of the buildings in terms of a structural stability and soundness. The Ministry has embarked on a primary school renewal project which was implemented over three phases.

However, from records available, the programme did not bring the intended outcome and there is a need to have an overall review in collaboration with the Ministry of National Infrastructure.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, based on the financial position situation of the current financial year and since most buildings date back to some 50 to 70 years, a few of them might require major upgrading or full revamping. Accordingly, I intend to propose a comprehensive consultancy for an audit of all civil and electrical works required, not only for classrooms, but also for other amenities, for example, washrooms, demonstration rooms, in the next budget.

The audit will also be extended to cater for the diminishing number of students joining the primary and secondary education sectors so as to have a clearer picture of the actual space requirement.

At the same time, one of the terms of reference of the audit would be to propose a segregated action plan ranging from short-term to long-term, extending to five years. During this mandate, I intend to ensure that at least 60 to 70% of the infrastructure is brought to acceptable norms which would satisfy SDG 4 – ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities overall.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as regards hygienic facilities, it is noted that Occupational Safety and Health Officers posted at my Ministry carry out regular site visits in all government primary schools and state secondary schools. It has been reported that there are serious hygienic shortcomings in some schools.

However, the lacunas are looked into as and when the issues are reported. It is to be highlighted that my Ministry has a contract with Mauri-Facilities Ltd for the daily cleaning of the school premises, including the cleaning of toilets. I am informed that there are 135 technicians responsible for the cleaning of toilets and 435 technicians for yard cleaning.

However, numerous complaints have been received pertaining to service delivery. This is taken seriously by my Ministry.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am sure, after the audit, my Ministry would be in a better position to have a relook in the sector in terms of infrastructure and as well as associated cost including all HR requirements.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Mr Ramdass: I thank the hon. Minister for his reply. Could the hon. Minister enlighten the House – obviously, in the light of the answers provided by he himself – as to any concrete remedial measures, if

any, taken by himself, by his Ministry, since he assumed office with a view to tackle, to mitigate those problems enumerated by himself?

Thank you.

Dr. Gungapersad: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, yes, we have a lot of problems. When I joined this Ministry, I went to Cabinet, and fortunately, my colleagues agreed to provide Rs75,000 for primary and Rs100,000 for secondary schools – for each – in order to mitigate, in the first instance, the shortcomings.

But, also, I wish to inform the House that with a view to ascertaining proper implementation of maintenance and upgrading of schools, visits have been carried out in at least some 15 primary and secondary schools, by myself and other colleague Ministers, Junior Ministers and backbenchers and they reported the matter, and in some cases, we remedied the situation. Subsequent visits will be carried out in order to see to it that our kids benefit from the best infrastructure and hygiene facilities in primary and secondary schools.

Mr Deputy Speaker: You have a question, hon. Seeburn?

Mr Seeburn: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, will the hon. Minister also consider extending this exercise to the MITD Educational Institutions as well, being given that the students are meant to be treated equally and some of those schools need urgent attention, in particular, the one in Rose-Belle?

Dr. Gungapersad: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, yes. MITD institutions fall under the purview of Ministry of Education and the kids who go to these institutions are our kids and definitely, we should look after them as well.