

'Bigger Biggs' road access matter is technical, not political, says PM

THE ROAD ACCESS issue concerning Leon "Bigger Biggs" Samuel is technical, not political, and while Samuel has property rights, the people in the community near his lands also have rights.

"Bigger Biggs can try and make it a political issue as much as he wants, [but] this to me never was and never is a political issue.

"I believe in having things discussed and settled, but I do not have to be involved in it. It is fundamentally a technical question. It is not a political question, it is not a policy question, it's a technical issue," Prime Minister Dr Ralph Gonsalves reiterated on Tuesday during a press conference.

In September 2012,

Samuel placed a gate at the entrance of his property in Rabacca, blocking persons who use a road through his land, from getting to the Bower Mountains where farm lands are located.

The gate was later removed by the authorities, but on Monday February 4, Samuel placed a 40-foot container at the entrance of the property, again blocking vehicular access.

The Prime Minister noted last week that Samuel has certain land rights, and persons in the area have customary rights.

Gonsalves said the State first got involved with Samuel when professionals said the manner in which Samuel was mining on the property was not environmentally sound.

The government has

since moved to have the lands surveyed, but Samuel, through his legal team has blocked the government surveyors from entering his property.

The Prime Minister said that the survey has to be done and the Ministry of Transport and Works is awaiting

further advice from the Attorney General.

"...I understand that for a solution... that you need to have a survey and that is what is being dealt with and I am absolutely sure that the public officials are prepared to have dialogue with Mr Samuel or his representatives, but as to me I don't have business to talk to Bigger Biggs about it. There are people in the state administration," Gonsalves told reporters.

He noted that while Samuel has stated that the issue is political and bogus, he still has not taken the government to court.

"Why he didn't go to court and let the court pronounce on it"

"I don't have to reply to Bigger Biggs. Bigger Biggs is the leader of a political party I must reply to him? He running against me or something like that? You think I ain't get better thing to do with my time," Gonsalves said in his usual robust style.

He said the affected farmers are hearing all the dialogue on the issue and are aware of what Samuel and others are saying.

"These matters will come in the normal course of things to their finality," stated Gonsalves.



Dr Ralph Gonsalves

RVA transitioning to 100% renewable energy by May

AN ACADEMIC institution in St Vincent and the Grenadines that focuses heavily on sustainable living will have 100 per cent of its electricity generated from renewable energy by May.

The move by Richmond Vale Academy (RVA) falls under its 10-year programme, The St. Vincent Climate Compliance (CCCP) 2012 - 2021.

Under the programme, the institution has trained hundreds of students to take action as well as inform thousands of people globally on the effects of global warming and climate change.

The programme was launched after a drought at the beginning of 2010, followed by Hurricane Tomas late that year and flash floods in 2011.

Stina Herberg, director of RVA, says that having the school transition to the use of 100 per cent renewable energy aligns with the energy policy for the government of SVG, which is pivoting to more renewable energy.

"The new solar system at RVA will make a big difference as we become a model of a 100 per cent sustainable school in terms of electricity production," Herberg said.

All the energy RVA's solar voltaic system produces is sold to the national grid for EC\$0.45 per kilowatt-hour. RVA buys electricity from the national grid at EC\$1.02 per kilowatt-hour.

"At the end of the month, the excess energy we have sold is forward-

ed to the next month and credited to the electric bill. This means that in the months where more energy is needed to charge the batteries, we can use this credit," Herberg explained.

She added: "... With this system, we can produce around 225 per kilowatt-hour per day, based on yearly average. At the moment we use 80 per kilowatt-hour per day. This will give us enough room to expand the activities with more students and programmes."

RVA consists of three buildings on a 30-acre property. Two of the buildings are connected to an off-grid solar system with 72 panels and 120 batteries.

This was set up in 2017 and can provide these two buildings with 75 per cent of their energy needs throughout the year.

The third building is the workshop building, which has a diving centre, wood and metal workshops, storage room, food processing facility and classrooms.

Because of the nature of the activities that take place in this building, it requires more energy, and is still connected to the national grid, where 85 per cent of the energy is generated using fossil fuels.

To avoid using fossil fuel for electricity and be 100 per cent carbon neutral, Richmond Vale academy will upgrade its solar electricity generation to 50kw (180 panels).

With an upgrade of the current off-grid system and a new 13kw (48 panels) solar system in the

workshop and classroom building, RVA will be able to produce all the electricity it needs and become carbon neutral in terms of energy production.

In addition to generating electricity, the upgraded solar energy generation system will allow the school to give hands on training to the students and employees at the academy in setting up the solar system.

Students will also receive training in the benefits of renewable energy and the equipment needed for its generation.

RVA will also become a unique model for the Caribbean in being the first school to cover its electricity needs 100 per cent by sustainable energy.

Since 2012, RVA has been working in a very focused way on developing a programme that helps participants to respond to the vagaries of climate change.

The St Vincent CCCP seeks to educate, raise awareness and mobilize people to take action.

It offers a practical solution to building greater resilience into vulnerable communities by implementing actions to protect the natural resources that they depend on.

Since the start of the programme, 80 students from St Vincent along with hundreds of students from all over the world have educated themselves in climate compliance -- specifically in the effects on small island nations -- and have taken practical action.



Dillion "Pigeon" Jacobs

Vincentian shot and killed in Dominica

A LOWMANS Leeward man, Dillion "Pigeon" Jacobs was shot and killed in Dominica on Wednesday, February 13.

A report from the neighbouring country said Jacobs was fatally wounded during a police and customs operation at the Marigot Fisheries Complex.

The dead man's relatives

have refused to comment on the incident that has left them in mourning. Reports are they are trying to have Jacobs's body brought back to St Vincent for burial.

Jacobs appears to have been a popular figure in his community as condolences flooded social media after persons learnt of his passing.