

EDITORIAL

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Sunday 05th February 2006

SAVE OUR CHILDREN

The murder of 11-year-old Akiel Chambers in 1998 remains the blackest blot on the record of the Police Service. To be sure, there are many other cases where police officers have been lackadaisical or incompetent or corrupt. But the Akiel case is especially egregious for several reasons: it was a child who was murdered; that child was being sexually abused; the police had evidence which could have identified the abuser but did not follow it up and, later, let it be destroyed; and the belief in some circles that all this happened because the suspected abuser has some social prominence.

To add insult to murder, several high-ranking members of the Police Service, including the then Police Commissioner, attended a cocktail party held at the swimming pool where Akiel's body was found. It has been described as gross insensitivity and to date there has been no apology from the police top brass.

The present Police Commissioner Trevor Paul has said that the Akiel case is still open, but seven years have passed with absolutely no progress. Now another boy has been buggered and drowned. The body of 12-year-old Dane Andrews was found in a pond at New Grant last Thursday. When the autopsy was performed, it was discovered that Dane had been sexually assaulted.

The police have only just begun their investigations, so it is too early to say if this death falls into the same pattern as the Akiel murder. But we hope that CoP Trevor Paul understands the importance of getting this case solved.

The police already have some information to work with, since it is known that Dane went to the pond with three other boys. So at least there will be eyewitnesses in this case who the police should not be reluctant to question thoroughly.

The Akiel case had witnesses too, since Akiel went to a children's party before he was murdered. But those persons were on the upper rungs of the country's social ladder, and that apparently helped make the officers' questioning less incisive. Perhaps, since the Dane Andrews case just involves average citizens, the police will find their job easier.

Dane's murder also puts the spotlight on the most hidden crime in our society — the sexual abuse of children. Such incidents are probably not so widespread that parents need to worry constantly about their children's welfare. At the same time, the incidents that we do hear about are surely much less than the actual occurrence. The vast majority of the cases that come before the courts, for example, involve individuals from the lower strata of society.

But are paedophiles more common amongst the less well-off or is it that the well-off are less likely to be discovered?

Since parents cannot monitor their children all the time, they must tell them about right and wrong touches and what to do if an adult touches them wrongly. Unfortunately, since in our conservative society there are too many parents who will not talk to their children about sexual matters, the schools, churches, mosques and mandirs must also educate children about child abuse. Given the investigative powers of the police, this may be the most effective way to reduce child abuse in our society. Such information may even save a child's life.

