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Cape Times

Afrikaans rule not rigid, Blacks told

Own Correspondent

PRETORIA.—The State is prepared to back down on its rigidly enforced so-called "50-50" Afrikaans language tuition principle at African schools—in a stopgap bid to restore law and order in the African areas.

This is the message which emerges clearly from talks in Pretoria on Saturday between a seven-

man team headed personally by the Minister of Bantu Administration, Mr M C Botha — who flew specially to Pretoria for the meeting—and 11 community leaders of riot-torn Soweto.

A joint statement issued after the talks started, among other things, that schools could "apply to deviate from this principle". It said the Minister had "reiterated that there is no departmental compulsion to the so-called 50-50 basis".

The statement added that the "tragic occurrences in Soweto were caused by misunderstanding and confusion" over application of the principle.

URGENCY

It was decided to hold two further meetings, the first as a matter of urgency: To thrash out objections and difficulties over the application of the principle at African schools and to discuss "other matters".

These meetings will be held at what is described as "just under ministerial level".

The first will be held next Friday between the Secretary for Bantu Education, Mr J Rossouw, top members of his Department and Education and other leaders of Soweto to "submit recommendations to the Minister so that he can come to a final decision before schools reopen after the winter holidays".

The second — and clearly wider-ranging — meeting will be held on the following Tuesday between a team headed by the Secretary for Bantu Administration, Mr I P an Onselen, and community leaders of Soweto.

RELUCTANT

A striking feature of Saturday's talks was the reluctance of the 11 Africans present to be identified.

One unnamed member

said they feared repercussions "at the hands of thugs".

Members of the White group at the talks, which lasted three hours, were the Minister, the two departmental secretaries, Mr Manie Mulder, chairman of the West Rand Bantu Administration Board, his deputy, Mr Carel Venter, his chief director, Mr Japie de Villiers, and the board's director of housing, Mr Thys Wilsenach.

Among the African members were Mr T J Makhaya, chairman of the Urban Bantu Council of Soweto, and some of its members, representatives of the Soweto School Board, and of other educational and religious interests.

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