NORTHERN COLLEGE - DISTURBANCES

Mr Speaker, Sir, I propose to make a statement concerning the state of affairs at Northern College, further to information just received.

As the House is aware, following disturbances which occurred at Northern College last month, I availed myself of the powers conferred upon the Minister of Education by the PSSA Act to give directives to the PSSA to set up a Fact Finding Committee to hear all interested parties and, thereafter, submit its findings and recommendations as appropriate concerning Northern College.

The Fact Finding Committee, chaired by Mr A. Radhakissoon, Barrister-at-Law, with Mr C. Gopee and Mr D. Merven as assessors, was set up on 29 March 2001 and requested to submit its report within three weeks.

However, the last few days have brought very disturbing information as to persistent problems of indiscipline and vandalism on the school premises.

The latest incident occurred yesterday 9th April and clearly indicates that management is no longer in a position to ensure the safety of staff and students of the college.
I am advised that, in the circumstances, the PSSA has this very morning issued a letter to the Manager instructing her not to hold classes as from today until 13th April when the school holidays start. This is a precautionary measure to prevent any further deterioration and will be reviewed before resumption of studies in the light of the Fact-Finding Committee's report.

Thank you, Sir.
DR/D09/P17/4
(STatement Cont'D)
(MR OBEEGADO0)

NORTHERN COLLEGE - FACT-FINDING COMMITTEE -
REPORT

The second statement, Mr Speaker, Sir, concerns the Northern
College. Members of the House will recall that following student unrest at
Northern College in March, a Fact-finding Committee was appointed which
concluded that the school cannot normally be allowed to operate unless the
following remedial measures were taken -

(i) Pupils should not be allowed on the school premises until the
Authority, that is, the PSSA is satisfied that security therein is
restored;
(ii) The registration of the present Manager be cancelled;
(iii) The owner/employer shall appoint a Manager acceptable to the
following parties, PSSA, staff and parents at latest by 21 May
2001 failing which grants should be withheld and subsequently
the school shall be de-registered.

Mr Speaker, Sir, immediately after the report, the PSSA tried to
negotiate with Mr R. Jaypal, President of Société Santa Jaypal, the owner
of the school for a new Manager. Mr R. Jaypal only proposed himself and that
was not acceptable to either the PSSA or the Union of Private Secondary
Establishments Employees as Mr R. Jaypal had already been de-registered in
the past by the PSSA.

A formal proposal was made to Société Jaypal for MEDCO to take
over as a going concern against payment of a rental for the building but
Société Jaypal did not turn up at a meeting foreseen to discuss the terms and
conditions of the takeover by MEDCO and PSSA.

In parallel, Mr R. Jaypal had offered to sell his premises which was
not acceptable to PSSA; as at to date students have missed classes for 16
days. Attempts to find an acceptable solution "à l'amiable" have failed and
students continue to miss classes.
Mr Speaker, Sir, a copy of the reform document has been placed in the Library of the National Assembly, copies distributed to all Members of the House and a briefing session intended for Parliamentarians of both sides of the House held earlier today in the National Assembly building with your permission.

I shall renew my appeal to all colleagues of the House to consider the reform plan from a non-partisan perspective and for my part as Minister of Education, I undertake to remain attentive to all positive ideas and suggestions that may be formulated from both sides of the House.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the reform process in education is now at long last under way. Let no one doubt Government's resolve in forging ahead for, at this moment in time, such is our duty vis-à-vis our children and the future generations.

Thank you, Sir.
The State Law Office has been consulted and the PSSA has now initiated procedures to de-register the school. The PSSA has already announced that the school will not operate as from this week until further notice and has put in place a hotline to provide assistance to students wishing to join another school.

I have provided the Union of Private Secondary Education Employees with a guarantee as to the security of employment of the staff of Northern College who will eventually be re-deployed. I have also appealed to the staff for their cooperation to work extra days during the next school holidays for students of Northern College to be afforded tuition to catch up on lost time.

Thank you, Sir.