

Tarouba Sports Complex: Another Piarco Airport Fiasco?

I would like to make a few points in connection with the recently announced Cabinet approved \$850M sports facility to be built at Torouba.

First I am happy to see that the seventeen business organisations swiftly issued a strong response indicating their “shock and concern” about government’s allocation of \$850M for a sporting facility and calling for a review of national priorities. Since then others, including Anil Roberts, have joined the ranks in an attempt to bring sanity to this issue. Despite Minister Saithe’s valiant attempt to provide damage control I salute the firm stand taken by Christian Mouttet on behalf of the business community suggesting that government had ‘lost the plot’.

That introduction brings me to my main point. I note that on page 3 of the Guardian issue of 26 May 2005 that Minister Boynes stated “...this project will not be a repeat of the Piarco International Airport terminal building project”. Minister Boynes does not seem to understand the main issue about the Piarco Airport scandal: it wasn’t just the mismanagement of public funds but the corruption of transparent procedures. The only difference that I can see here is that no one has yet raised the issue of corruption on this project. Actually I am beginning to wonder if we are not heading down that very same road again, so I will ask a few pointed questions that I am hoping those in authority will have the conscience to provide honest answers.

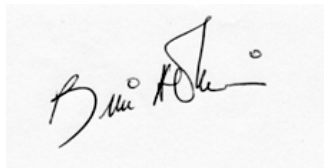
1. What procedure was used by UDECOTT to appoint a foreign firm of consultants for this project schedule to expend \$850M of public funds and how was this procedure essentially different from the one used to appoint Birk Hillman Inc for the airport?
2. What is the reason for appointing a foreign firm to design this sports facility when we have a handful of perfectly acceptable sports facilities designed by local firms?

We certainly do have the professional expertise and experience in this country to design any sports facility and I, for one, question the need for foreign consultants to be in charge of this project. I regret to say that I have come to the conclusion that for us to appoint a foreign firm to carry out this project means that we are indeed proceeding down a similar path to that adopted for the Piarco Airport project and, if so, then there are perhaps only two possible conclusions: the first is must that this government lacks a clear vision for human develop of this country or the second is that the government is willing to set aside locals in order to meet foreign objectives.

I wish to make it quite clear that I support the need to develop of sports facilities in this country for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago but I am more concerned about the issue of sustainability and the cost to future generations. It would seem that as a nation we are 'hell-bent' to throw up enormous new buildings based on outmoded design criteria that will result in massive recurrent expenditure for future generations. We should have learnt some valuable lessons from the last boom that left us in an economic depression for almost two decades. Trinidad is blessed with a second chance to get it right. Shouldn't we striving to convert the current but temporary economic windfall into income generating opportunities by investing in sustainable projects?

It is not too late to hand over this project to suitably qualified local consultants and to scale down the project to be more in line with a rational approach to national development. These two actions would go some way towards addressing the concerns expressed in this letter and by others.

Local Professional

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian Lewis", written in a cursive style.

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