

8 NEWS

# Now police set up canine academy

**CORDIELLE STREET**

WHILE the United Kingdom is set to "loan" local government police officers to aid in the fight against crime, a new unit of the T&T Police Service has been established with the assistance of the United States government.

The fully-functional T&T Canine Academy was officially launched yesterday with a graduation of its first class of 11 tactical narcotic dogs and certified handlers, held on the academy's training grounds in Tucker Valley, Chaguaramas.

Feature speaker Minister of National Security Martin Joseph announced at the graduation that the new unit was not part of a "new crime fighting plan."

"The realisation of this academy is an asset for our ministry and citizens as a whole. It represents a further strengthening of the Police Service and law enforcement," Joseph said.

"This institution will boost our law enforcement capabilities, as we will now be able to execute our own in-house canine training programme on a sustained basis," he added.

The US Embassy, through its International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Programme, began the project in 2005 by purchasing four explosive detection canines for the Police Service and Customs and Excise, Joseph said.

Charge D'Affairs at the embassy, Eugene Sweeney, said the four canine units at the time were prematurely called to action due to the spate of bombings in Port-of-Spain.

"At the time some were sceptical, claiming it was just another needless expense. Eleven days later the first of a string of bombs went off in Port-of-Spain. The rest, as we say, is history," said Sweeney.

The US funded the project at a cost of US\$125,000. This included the training by US-based group CSI International of one certified instructor Cpl Lenford Blades to command the academy and two assistant instructors, PCs Jason Donawa and Sunil Vijay Baboolal.

"This academy can serve as a training hub within the Caribbean as it now offers our regional counterparts the opportunity to receive quality training of



A police tactical narcotics dog chases a mock suspect during a demonstration exercise at the Canine Academy, Tucker Valley, Chaguaramas, yesterday. **PHOTO: BRIAN NO FATT**

international standard within the region itself," said Joseph.

Commissioner of Police Trevor Paul said there was a failed attempt at establishing the unit in 2000 but this "re-established" unit would be an invaluable aid to the country during the Cricket World Cup 2007.

Joseph added that the unit had been mandated to target criminal activities involving illegal drugs such as heroine, cocaine and marijuana.

The canine units will also be called upon for deploy and conduct tracking, building searches, article search and apprehension, crowd control and protection of citizens and officers.

CSI International president Anthony Piegro was also on hand for the graduation and facilitated mock altercations in which the dogs were used to detect drugs, find a runaway suspect and detain an armed attacker.

Paul said plans had already been put in to place to expand and relocate the facilities.