



Customs officer Sunil Baboolal, left, receives his graduation certificate from Acting Comptroller of Customs Leonard Watty, centre, who is flanked by US Ambassador Roy Austin and Anthony Piegaro, Director of Enforcement at Consolidated Services International.

Customs dogs join war on crime

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THE Customs and Excise Division is no longer just a revenue collector but has now embraced another role as a law enforcement agency to stem the flow of illegal narcotics and combat terrorism.

This according to Leonard Watty, acting comptroller of the Customs and Excise Division, during a graduation ceremony yesterday of the "Explosive Dog Handler Team" comprising customs and police officers who recently completed training in handling bomb sniffer dogs.

The ceremony took place at Customs House, Nicholas Court, Independence Square, Port of Spain.

Watty said the three recent bomb attacks in the capital were "haunting and destructive", and the trained dogs and their handlers could not have come at a better time.

"Crime has a particular motive," he said, describing that it was the means to an end for monetary gain. "Now there is terrorism which is meant to destabilise a country."

Watty remarked that Customs started to develop its enforcement branch years ago with the re-establishment of its Marine Interdiction Unit.

He said that as early as July 1, they began the training of bomb detection dogs.

"This type of crime fighting is detecting a finished product. The instructions (to build bombs) are available and the legitimate components are also available so now the last line of defence is to detect the device," said Watty.

"It is important to note that crime fighting is a co-operative effort," he said, adding that, "there are people out there making sacrifices so people can sleep or walk down the streets and not be in fear".