MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Address of

Dr. the Honourable Tim Gopeesingh,
Minister of Education

at the

HANDOVER OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORTING EQUIPMENT BY THE PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

RUSSELL LATAPY SECONDARY SCHOOL

Monday April 27, 2015

9:00am
Salutations:

- China’s Ambassador from the People’s Republic of China to Trinidad and Tobago, His Excellency Huang Xingyuan
- Permanent Secretary from the Ministry of Education Ms. Angel Siew
- Permanent Secretary from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ms. Francis Signoret
- Mr. Victor Jones from the Ministry of Community Development
- Other representatives of the various Ministries
- Executives from the Embassy of China
- Chairmen and Executive Members of the Educational Facilities Company Ltd
- Deputy Permanent Secretary Simone Thorne-Mora
- Ministry of Education officials
- Students
- Principal
- Members of the Media
- Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen
As a former sportsman myself, having international cricket and played national cricket for Trinidad and Tobago on a few occasions, between the period 1969 to 1978, from the University of the West Indies for three years in Jamaica and then here in Trinidad, from ’73 to ’78 at Queen’s Park Cricket Club and now being Minister of Education, with the responsibility for moulding the lives of young ones in Trinidad and Tobago, it is indeed a distinct honour and a privilege, for me to be part of this handing over ceremony of a gift from the People’s Republic of China to our Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

During the last three or four years, when it came to my attention that the People’s Republic of China, had signed with the Trinidad and Tobago Government, for a grant to be given by the People’s Republic, of ten million Yuan, particularly for the Ministry of Education, I thought that the Cabinet decision on how that grant could be given and used in the Ministry of Education.

And Cabinet decided that we needed some more sporting equipment for use by our students in our primary and secondary schools and Cabinet instructed me to determine in what particular areas that we can ask the Republic of China to assist us in and it was our Honourable Prime Minister, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar’s brainchild, to have badminton and table
tennis sets, particularly, be given to our students, in both the primary and secondary schools.

So you see, these are equipment that you can have wider participation of our students, not needing very large spaces in our schools, so that we can fit these in our primary schools and of course, in our secondary schools.

And today, the People’s Republic of China, has in fact donated, approximately one thousand three hundred (1,300) pairs of poles and badminton, approximately five thousand two hundred (5,200) rackets, one thousand three hundred (1,300) barrels of shuttle cocks for the badminton, one thousand three hundred (1,300) table tennis tables, five thousand two hundred (5,200) rackets, ten thousand (10,000) sets of tennis balls, that is three balls per set, five thousand (5,000) footballs, two thousand (2,000) are sizes three and four for our primary schools students and three thousand (3,000) are size five for our students in our secondary schools.
One thousand (1,000) volleyball nets, five thousand (5,000) volleyballs, five thousand (5,000) basketballs.

And this is going to be distributed to primary schools and secondary schools and we’re also donating some to the Ministry of Community
Development and the Ministry of Tertiary Education for their tertiary learning institutions.

We have four hundred and eighty three (483) primary schools in Trinidad and Tobago and we have a hundred and thirty four (134) secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago and so we will be distributing these equipment, depending on the size of the amount of students in the schools, ranging from zero to two hundred (200), two hundred (200) to four hundred (400) in the primary schools and four hundred (400) to six hundred (600) and some of our primary schools just have a little above six hundred (600).

So depending on the size, you may get one, two, three or four of the badminton sets, with the poles of course and the table tennis tables and the racquets and so on and the volleyball nets as well. And I see the footballs and volleyballs are displayed here on the table to my right.

And the same will occur for the secondary schools, depending on the size of the amount of students in the schools, they will get between one, two, three, four or five of the equipment and we are donating some to our Ministry of Community Development for their community centres and for our tertiary learning institutions as well.
Why did we seek the support for these sporting equipment for our schools? How many sports are played in our schools? My understanding that the Ministry of Sports has about thirty four (34) national sporting organisations in various sporting disciplines and in our schools, our quarter million students, a hundred and twenty thousand (126,000) in our primary schools and about ninety six thousand (96,000) in our secondary schools and we have thirty six thousand (36,000), aged three and four, in our Early Childhood Education Centres.

So how many sports are played in our schools? My understanding from the Curriculum Department and the Chief Education Officer who has given me this information, we have seventeen (17) sports being played actively in our schools.

Now, how many students participate actively? We have a few thousand students, I cannot get the exact figures but still too low for our satisfaction from the Ministry of Education. We want more and more of our students in active participation in our sports, in our schools and the seventeen (17) sports, under different sporting organisations, school sporting associations linked with the national sporting associations. We have, of course, Track and Field, Cricket, those are the Secondary Schools Leagues, Football, Secondary Schools Volleyball League, Secondary Schools Badminton
Association, Trinidad and Tobago Secondary Schools Netball Association, Trinidad and Tobago Schools Basketball Association.

We have students participating in Swimming, Gymnastics, Tennis, Hockey competitions, organised and managed by the national sporting organisations and we have the school national sporting organisations, affiliated with the respective national sporting organisations.

And let me express my sincere thanks, to all those teachers in our schools who have been giving the yeoman service and giving their time, dedicated to assisting our students, with different sporting events and activities in our schools.

Now how does the Ministry support these teachers? You know that Physical Education is one of the compulsory subjects now, in primary schools. So our teachers in the primary schools are now trained, to some extent, in helping the students in Physical Education in our primary schools. And that is now an active aspect of the Continuous Assessment Component of our Primary School Curriculum.

You know we have had significant reform in our Primary School Curriculum, subsequent to a number of National and District consultations where thousands and thousands of participants, indicated to us that we
should introduce Physical Education and Visual and Performing Arts in our primary schools. And this is what we have done now, nearly four years ago.

And of course, it includes Ethics, Morals, Values, Citizenry Development, Character Development, Agri-Science, Health and Family Life Education, well of course, Physical Education and Visual and Performing Arts.

Now in our secondary schools, Physical Education is an important component of our Secondary School Curriculum. Physical Education students, those of you who have been through Forms 1 to 3, know that Physical Education is compulsory from Forms 1 to 3. And you all have been doing it very well.

So that, a subject for the CSEC Level, let me give you some information as to the student participation and doing Physical Education, as a subject in our School Curriculum and as a CSEC Examination.

In 2009, one thousand and fifteen (1,015) wrote the Examination, with an eighty eight (88) per cent pass rate and now last year, up to 2014, we have increased the amount of students doing Physical Education from a thousand and fifteen (1,552) to one thousand, five hundred and fifty two students, doing Physical Education as a subject, in Form 5, with a ninety five (95) per cent pass rate.
So students, this is an opportunity to add a subject to your CSEC Examination, Physical Education and we see fifteen hundred and fifty two (1,552) doing it last year, 2014, but there is scope for many more thousands of you to write that subject.

Now part of that Physical Education, the theory, it provides the fundamentals which are applied to various sporting disciplines and the practical subject areas are taken into various disciplines. And we have most of the students participating in Cricket, Football, Volleyball, Basketball and of course, Track and Field.

How many schools have Physical Education teachers? All our secondary schools have Physical Education teachers, some have one and some have two. The co-educational schools have both a male and a female PE teacher. We have two hundred and fifty three (253) Physical Education instructors and teachers in our secondary schools, so many of our secondary schools have two Physical Education teachers. Then, we use coaches in our schools as well, to help with the various disciplines. And 104 out of our 123 in Trinidad have coaches in various disciplines. We have 138 coaches in various disciplines across the country. Track and field we have 10 football 67, cricket 28, netball 11, volleyball 13 and in the other sporting discipline we have two to five coaches.
Last week the Minister of Sport approached us at the Ministry of Education to help us more with the coaches he has in the Ministry of Sport that would be more adequately utilized in our school system and therefore we are working on having these coaches attached to the ministry of education. I also want to thank publicly the corporate body in our sporting programme throughout Trinidad and Tobago. The former President of the United States, President Bill Clinton in Abu Dhabi Last year, brought a strong component of business backing education and he spoke at length of the role of business in the education system worldwide. And President Obama two years ago appealed to I.T. Companies in the Unites States, Sprint Verizon, Version, AT&T Etc.to assist in providing ICT to schools that were in under privileged areas. And 10 companies had put up close to one billion US dollars to assist with ICT in education. Well Trinidad and Tobago as we all know, and is a fact that undoubtedly we are a world leader in ICT in education. With the IT infusion in our curriculum in our secondary schools all the students have been given laptops, about 95000 (Teachers Principals and School Supervisors) and they are using them in the classrooms. We also have 20 schools in our country with 21st century smart classrooms. And so the issue of ICT is undoubtedly a tremendous area of prominent in our education system. Now there are these national corporate entities who
have been giving us supporting in our education programme in sport, I want to express my sincerest thanks and gratitude to all of them.

Ladies and gentlemen and students sport is undoubtedly an important aspect of education. It helps you to accept defeat, it helps you to thrive in your successes, and it builds your physical strengths and ability. It builds your mental ability and concentration. It builds discipline into you because you have to listen to the referee and you have to listen to the empire. You are able to focus more on your academic studies when you are physically fit, and therefore we urge you to continue in your sporting areas in your respective schools. And therefore we are now extending the amount of sports to include table tennis and badminton, although badminton had been played in a number of the school before, but all the school now will have the ability to include badminton and table tennis more into their sporting activities.

What else has the Ministry of Education done as far as co-curricular and extra circular activities to help our students? We have brought about a national nutritional programme; do you know we serve approximately 155,000 meals per day to all our students? About 55,000 breakfast and 100,000 lunches. So for the 200 days for the year we serve close to 3 million meals per year at a cost close to 216 million dollars. So our school
nutrition policy is going to come 15% of our students are obese and close to 20% overweight.

So what would help you to have a better mind to study? You eat properly, you sleep properly you exercise and you through off all the unwanted food from your diet, the fast foods and the soft drinks and the high fructose content in your juices. So for you to participate in sports you must be agile, you must be fit, you must be mentally alert and therefore it starts with your diet. We want within the next year or two that we must have zero percentage of our students with obesity. And you must educate your parents as well on their diet to ensure that your parents are not overweight. So Sports will help you to focus on how you manage your own self and how you can study more actively.

So the Ministry of Education now has in 20 of our secondary schools state of the art gymnasiums. We are in the process of having another 20 put into secondary schools. Where we have 85 government secondary schools and 40 board secondary schools. And as we get more funding we will try to extend it to all 125 secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago. At the moment we have 20 schools with state of the art gymnasium so that our students can exercise properly. We have more school now with cadet services; we are getting more school with girl guides and boy scouts. Pretty
shortly, my Deputy Permanent Secretary is moving to institute and implement martial arts for our students in our schools, in addition to the various sports. So students this exercise today is a symbolic exercise to six schools out of the 134 secondary schools and 475 primary schools. So we will be handing over these, over the next two and three weeks to the different schools throughout the country. But this morning is the symbolic handing over ceremony for six of our secondary schools.

So in closing, let me thank his Excellency the Ambassador for the People’s Republic of China and the Government of the Republic of China and the officials of the Chinese Embassy, together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who have worked acidulously in bringing about this conclusion to the grant from the People’s Republic of China to bring about this gift of sporting equipment. And let me thank all those who have worked, EFCL, for storing these and now we have to distribute these to the various schools. And I make a public appeal to all of my principals and Physical Education Teachers and coaches to preserve the equipment, use them well protect them, avoid damage to them, so that our students can continue to use them over a long period of time. And we want to see more thousands of students actively participating in sports and widening the amount of sporting events from the 17 to the possible 34 in our schools.
As the minister of education and as a former international sportsman myself, I give you my fullest support and I pledge my instinctive support to the continued development and thrust for our students to excel, not only academically, but in sports and in the other aspects like visual and performing arts and the other co-curricular activities in your school.

So students this is your opportunity to combine you academic and your sports, you can manage it. I was an international cricketer, playing for Trinidad and Tobago when I was a doctor already. I believe I am probably the only medical doctor in the Western Hemisphere to have played international cricket which I played in 1978 now 37 years ago, I stand to be corrected. So it is a matter of management of your time. And when I was a medical student in Jamaica I played for the combined University of the West Indies against Australia and New Zealand. So I had to work, I had to study for Postgraduate work and I played sports. And you can be better than I was. And right here our Minister of Sport, has told you how he had to manage his University career while playing football. And thousands will give you their own history; you students are no less than anyone else. You are capable, you are competent, you have the ability you have the opportunity, grasp the opportunity. So I want to sincerely thank our
Republic of China, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and all those who assisted us in bring this symbolic ceremony and gift this morning of six of the schools.

May God continue to richly bless you students, bless your parents, your family, principals, school supervisors and educators and may God continue to richly bless our people of Trinidad and Tobago and our country.

Thank you very much.