

## Our judicial system—a disaster

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Congratulations Madam Justice—oops, Madam Chief Magistrate, you have done the nation a most valuable service, albeit unwittingly.

What's that service? you ask. Well in this modern, developed country of ours, you have exposed to us all the fact that the Honourable Chief Justice and the Judicial and Legal Service Commission (JLSC) still depend on word-of-mouth reporting on outstanding matters in court as part of the process of making appointments!

And this is not simply any word of mouth, but the word of mouth of the person(s) being interviewed for appointment! Unbelievable!

Don't the Chief Justice and the JLSC have at their instantaneous beck and call staff capable of accessing computerised databases of all matters before the courts, identifying at what stages the various matters are and who is dealing with what?

Come on. What database? you ask. Surely, you jest. As recently as the fiscal year 2013-2014, the Judiciary was allocated half a billion dollars (\$517,150,050) for recurrent and capital expenditure. Today, even with the cuts that have been applied everywhere, its allocation is still over \$350 million—(\$357,638,600). So money to facilitate simple, basic management decision-making systems is not an issue. Whatever computer systems the judiciary needs it can buy—if it hasn't done so already.

What is at issue is accountability for a horrendously inefficient, punitive and dysfunctional judicial (non-) system. It is still a system where (Express, October 15, 2016)—as an example of some 900 prisoners in remand—one of them was faced with the following situation: “Charged with assault, Terrence Pierre spent more than nine years in prison awaiting trial in a case for which the maximum penalty is five years' imprisonment”!

So nine years in prison without trial. No apology, no explanation. And what follows is adding salt to an open wound. The freed man must now report to a probation officer for the next three years! Is this for real?

So no one should be surprised when there was a “near riot” at the Port of Spain magistrate's court on April 26, when the presiding magistrate “informed attorneys and several of their clients, who are charged for murder, that she was unable to preside over their matters and had no choice but to adjourn them to a later date “for further instructions” on how the matters were to proceed (Express).

If I were in the shoes of any of those prisoners, I too would not have been amused. Meanwhile, the unconscionable incarceration of young men in inhumane and degrading prison conditions—year after year after year—continues at the mercy of a hopelessly mismanaged and disastrously inefficient judicial system.

This fiasco with the appointment and “dis-appointment” of a judge is merely symptomatic of the - man-made disaster that is this judicial system.

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