

Drones being used to map lands

ST AUGUSTINE
Aleem Khan

MAPS completed with the help of unmanned aerial vehicles, known as “drones”, will help new valuation assessors collect data for the Valuation Division of the Ministry of Finance, a senior University of the West Indies (The UWI) lecturer confirmed yesterday.

Speaking to reporters at The UWI's St Augustine campus after the closing ceremony of the university's Valuation Assessors Training Programme sponsored by

the Ministry of Finance, Dr Bheshem Ramlal explained: “Geomatics is the new term for land surveying but geomatics is land surveying plus (more) because we have geographical information systems (GIS). We do mapping using drones, and all of these other things.”

Asked if drones were already in use, he said: “Yes, we have drones. We use drones for mapping. We use satellites for mapping. We use a lot of other platforms for mapping-laser scanners and so on.”

The UWI Faculty of Engineering's Department of Geomatics Engineering and Land Management gave out certificates to young people who underwent an intense six-week (July 10-August 18) training programme in legal studies, surveying and mapping, building construction, valuation context and principles, ethics, health and safety, professionalism in the workplace, and economics.

Of the 207 shortlisted candidates forwarded to The UWI from the Ministry of Finance, 187

completed the training and passed exams to receive their certificates of achievement and transcripts yesterday.

Most of the candidates were between the ages of 18 and 30.

The Ministry of Finance shortlisted 207 men and women from among the several hundred who responded to advertisements in the three daily newspapers.

The training programme cost less than \$500,000, Ramlal said, adding that, normally it would have cost a lot more but “The UWI did

this as a service to country”.

Given that the going rate for certification like this would be \$5,000 per week per participant, “this cost the Government of Trinidad and Tobago very little,” he said.

“Of course, (property tax) will place an extra burden on our citizens but we need it,” he said.

The course was supposed to be a one-off programme but following consultation with Commissioner of Valuations Ric Javed Ali, Ramlal said a second programme may be necessary.

Don't be tempted

As for when the 170 valuation assessors and 17 supervisors will be deployed across the country, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Finance Michelle Durham-Kissoon said: “We have some preparatory work to do and when we begin, we will let you know.”

Ramlal was optimistic the assessors

and supervisors will be hired by the Valuation Division under two- or three-year contracts, as there are over half of a million properties in T&T to be valued.

Ramlal advised them: “When you go out there in the real world, it's very easy to be tempted.” He told them nothing is worth more than their good reputation.

He said: “Remember your good name. Don't lose that good name for a few dollars, not even a few million dollars.”

