

Freeness! I think that's what the decision makers think we want. And they might be correct. When the Minister of Sport, Gary Hunt, announced the Hasely Crawford Stadium free of charge to patrons for the World Cup football qualifiers, I immediately recalled the last qualifier game in TnT for World Cup 2006.

There were long queues of people who overnighted near the ticket outlets, and newspaper photos of fences collapsing being unable to restrain the swelling crowds and football fans resorting to scaling fences and walls to reach the ticket booth. Then when you actually got in, people were 'blocking' seats for their friends, so a ticket did not assure you of a seat, because there is never any numbered seating arrangement. And that game was not free.

I am almost afraid to imagine what would happen now when patrons are allowed free access. I will not be a part of the expected pushing and shoving madness and confusion. It seems to me that if the Government wants to play out their ability to give freeness for the football, then they could buy out the TV rights and show all the games. Then we could each relax in our chosen environment and also enjoy the replays.

The latest offer of freeness is by Justice Mustapha Ibrahim who said that PTSC was illegally receiving money from some 2,000 maxi drivers as they exited the City Gate hub. He ordered that the drivers be reimbursed the fees, which they have been paying for the past seven years. He ruled that it was unconstitutional for the PTSC to impose a mandatory \$1 user fee on maxi-taxi owners or operators for use of the maxi-taxi hub.

According to Newsday, Ibrahim said, "The Cabinet, by its actions and or inactions, has treated Routes

2 and 3 maxi-taxi owners/drivers differently and less favourably than the maxi-taxi owners/operators of other routes."

In my opinion, the Government 'look for that!' By continuing to allow the public transport industry to run on auto-pilot, they have surrendered their responsibility to administer, monitor and coordinate national transit operations. On the other hand, they have determined that they will establish a rail transit authority when massive megabuck-consuming, time-consuming, and land-consuming rapid rail metro transit system is created. No one has yet come forward to explain how that will work.

I find it difficult to understand the logic of the judgment, as the business of law often is. It however sets a very interesting precedent. What if other stakeholders involved in the transit industry take out lawsuits against the Government?

Government has never seriously sought to make transit attractive and easy to use to potential patrons; providing clean and comfortable vehicles in good condition; providing convenient and comprehensible routes, easily located stops and terminals and information sources; providing frequent and easily obtained schedules; and providing attractive, clean, well lighted transit stops and terminals; with friendly drivers, information operators, security personnel and others who represent transit service providers. Provision of adequate maintenance and personal security continues to be very poor.

There are those who must walk long distances, often without opportunities for shelter from rain or sun, in order to reach the point to await public transport, without any assurance of the arrival of any other transit vehicle. These persons are often vulnerable to assault, attack or

other anti-social behaviour, especially after dark. What if patrons decide to take the Government to court?

There is the issue of waiting facilities – called terminals and stops in the case of buses, and formal and informal taxi or maxi-taxi stands and stops. The bus terminals are all sheltered and provide some level of amenities and security. There are only two off-street maxi-taxi terminals and these have been provided with toilets and security: at City Gate and the Yellow Band on South Quay. Every other taxi and maxi-taxi stand in the entire country is on-street and have no toilets or shelters for either vehicle operator or passengers. What if the operators of these other transit routes decide to take the Government to court?

Green Band maxi-taxis have not been allowed to use the segment of the Priority Bus Route between Lady Young Road and the Uriah Butler Highway, but they must only use the PBR between City Gate Lady and Young Road. Are their constitutional rights being infringed?

But the Government also has another option. They could invest in about 500 buses or so and release them on the PBR and other routes, and relieve all maxi-taxis of their privilege of using the PBR. This might be more in their style of decision-making. Nevertheless, I support the Government desire to appeal the current judgment.

Government must see itself as being responsible for securing the provision of a well-organised public transportation system that delivers high quality passenger transport services in a safe, cost-effective and environmentally sound manner, and that provides reasonable access for all members of society, regardless of their destinations.