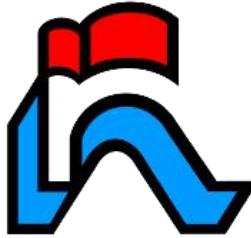


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**NIHERST**

NATIONAL INSTITUTE
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RESEARCH SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 12th, 2026

Dear Editor / Head of Department

NIHERST and Shell Launch Pilot Season of the FIRST Tech Challenge

Chaguanas, Trinidad and Tobago — January 10th, 2026: The National Institute of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology (NIHERST), in collaboration with Shell Trinidad and Tobago Ltd. (Shell), successfully hosted the **launch and showcase of the FIRST Tech Challenge (FTC) pilot season** under the 2025–2026 global theme, **"DECODE."**

The FIRST Tech Challenge (FTC) is an international robotics competition that encourages students aged 12 to 18 years to design, build, and program robots to complete themed missions. Guided by mentors and coaches, participants apply **Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)** principles while developing creativity, teamwork, and problem-solving skills.

This year's theme, *"DECODE,"* challenges teams to explore the world's artifacts and unlock hidden mysteries through innovation and discovery. Locally, the FTC Pilot Season builds upon NIHERST's successful implementation of the FIRST LEGO League (FLL), also previously sponsored by Shell, offering students a progression into advanced robotics, Java programming, and engineering design.

As the official **Programme Delivery Partner (PDP)** for **FIRST International** in Trinidad and Tobago and with the support of Shell, NIHERST is providing local students with access to a global network of STEM opportunities, enabling them to compete at international events such as the FIRST Championship. This initiative underscores NIHERST's commitment to nurturing future innovators and problem-solvers equipped for the digital economy.

The launch featured **keynote remarks** from **Senator the Honourable Emeritus Professor Prakash Persad**, Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, **Dr. the Honourable Michael Dowlath**, Minister of Education, **Ms. Julie David**, President (Ag.) of NIHERST; and **Ms. Ryssa Brathwaite**, Social Performance & Social Investment Advisor at Shell Trinidad & Tobago Ltd. The programme also included a **live robotics demonstration**, offering participants real-time engagement and insight into the global robotics community.

The event attracted participation from schools, educators, and youth organisations, all eager to be part of the transformative FTC journey that blends education, innovation, and collaboration.

"Today we stand at the edge of another exciting frontier. The FIRST Tech Challenge, or FTC, is our next bold step forward. This pilot programme goes beyond LEGO bricks and introduces students to advanced robotics, programming, and design. It's not just about building robots, it's about building futures," said **Ms. Julie David, NIHERST President (Ag.)**.

Ms. Brathwaite of Shell added, "Shell's investment in this programme is our commitment to youth. Together with NIHERST and our partners, we are creating an ecosystem where students can experiment boldly, fail forward, and ultimately succeed in ways that they surprise themselves."

Senator the Honourable Emeritus Professor Prakash Persad, Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training and NIHERST's line Minister, expressed, "if you go through the process of understanding how to code, the language itself, the mathematics or the logic behind it is very important" and thus Minister Persad challenged both NIHERST and Shell to ensure that these programmes also focus on the mathematics component.

The event was also graced by the presence of the **Minister of Education, Dr. the Honourable Michael Dowlath**, who expressed that the "FTC is not just about teaching technology...it is about teaching life skills, teaching you teamwork, and teaching you to think global and act local to affect your present situation". Minister Dowlath also thanked NIHERST's leadership and stated that "arrangements will be made to ensure that robotic clubs are embedded in all our schools, including our primary and ECCE schools."

The FTC Pilot Season will continue through 2026, culminating in the National Robotics Championship, where teams will showcase their robots and compete for the opportunity to represent Trinidad and Tobago internationally.

Photos:



Photo 1 (L-R): Ms. Julie David (NIHERST President Ag.), Senator the Honourable Emeritus Professor Prakash Persad (Minister - Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training), Dr. the Honourable Michael Dowlath (Minister of Education) and Ms. Ryssa Brathwaite (Social Performance/Social Investment Advisor -Corporate Relations Shell Trinidad and Tobago Ltd).



Photo 2: Senator the Honourable Emeritus Professor Prakash Persad, Minister - Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training



Photo 3: Dr. the Honourable Michael Dowlath, Minister of Education



Photo 4: Ryssa Brathwaite, Social Performance/Social Investment Advisor - Corporate Relations Shell Trinidad and Tobago Ltd.



Photo 5: Ms. Julie David (NIHERST President Ag.)

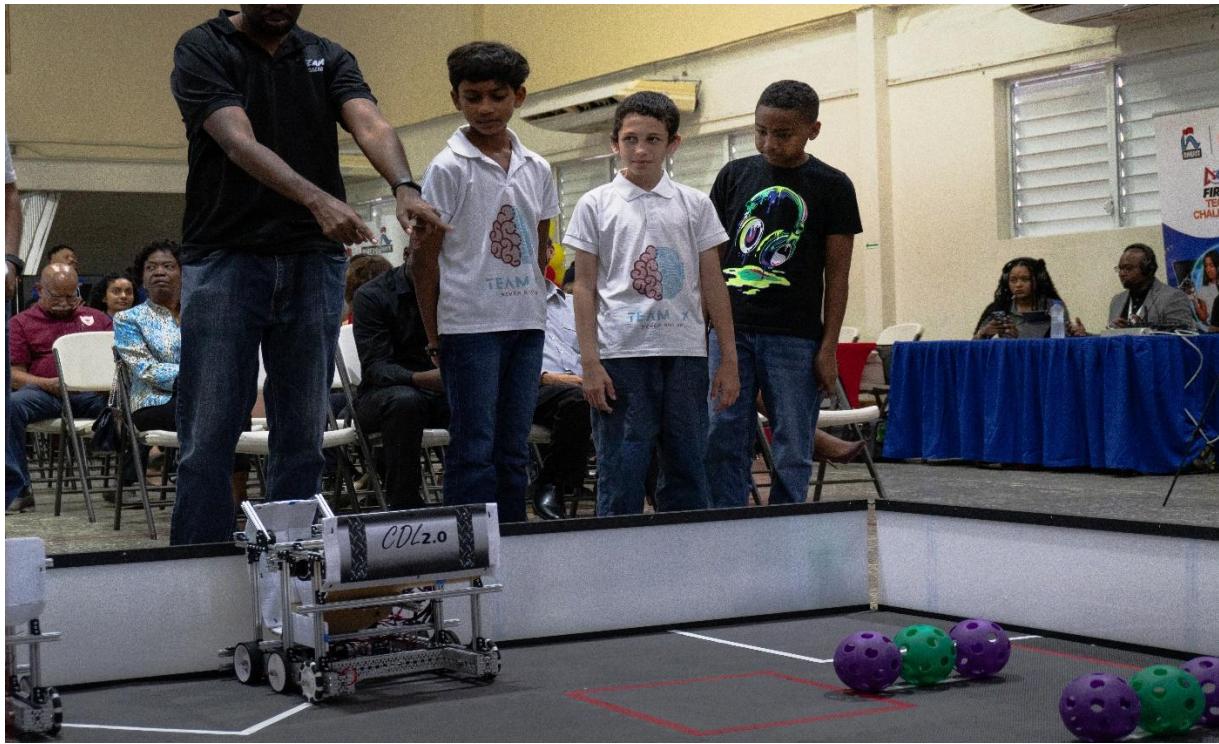


Photo 6: Students interacting with robots



Photo 7: The live robotics demonstration

END

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About NIHERST:

The National Institute of Higher Education, Research, Science, and Technology (NIHERST) has been instrumental in advancing science, technology, and education in Trinidad and Tobago for over 40 years. NIHERST remains committed to building a knowledge-driven society by supporting educational initiatives that empower teachers, engage students, and inspire a culture of innovation.

About Shell Trinidad and Tobago:

Shell has been in Trinidad and Tobago for over 100 years and has played a major role in the development of its oil and gas industry. With operations in offshore and onshore blocks (both operated and non-operated) as well as a shareholder in Atlantic LNG, the sixth largest liquefaction facility in the world, Shell Trinidad and Tobago delivers an integrated gas operation to supply the petrochemical market and Atlantic LNG.

At Shell Trinidad and Tobago Limited, we continue to work together with Government, Communities and our partners to add value and contribute to the country's further development and to maximize the benefits of Trinidad and Tobago's hydrocarbon resources to the country.