



The first group of young women respond to the call to prepare for their stage debut before the selection panel.



ALYSON BROWN, choreographer for the event and a member of the selection panel, briefs the candidates on their moves once they are on stage.



PETER ELIAS (centre) discusses the morning's procedures with MAGDALENE WALCOTT and ADRIAN RAYMOND.



# The race to Miss T&T

**I**T begins with a mighty steel gate rolling up, and the young women, some coy, others shy and all hopeful, mount the stairs at Club Zen and queue with a buzz of hushed murmurs to get the numbered cards that will identify them this morning as candidates for the Miss T&T competition.

With no sponsors for the usual leisurely selection process, Peter Elias and his Miss Trinidad and Tobago team compressed the choosing of two young women to represent this country at the Miss World and Miss Universe pageants into two days under sponsorship from bmobile.

The word went out quickly, and 76 women faced the judges on the first day, their churning nerves chilled by the frosty emptiness of Zen's stage chamber.

Sixty-seven of them would leave with a gift bag at the end of the day and from midday on Monday, the nine candidates who made the cut were prepared, first with makeup by Sacha Cosmetics, then a radical hairstyling at Ashvin Bally's salon then back to Zen to face a panel of judges in an interview session and then a parade in swimsuits and evening gowns.

The results: Kesha Quash, Miss Physique, Valene Maharaj (first runner-up), Kenisha Thom (Miss T&T Universe) and Tineke De Frietas (Miss T&T World)

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARK LYNDERSAY



In their sixes and sevens, the women who would be queen face the selection panel to show their form and reveal something of their character.



The first cut. Each of the fourteen candidates to get this far puts on their best face for the selection panel.



Five sad but smiling faces later, the final nine contestants get their first stage briefing from ALYSON BROWN.



**Above:** Making the band. At Ashvin Bally's salon the makeover goes into top gear and the queen-making begins in earnest. From the top, PRIYA CHANDERBALLY and MICHELLE KURBANALI face the heat under the hair dryers, and with time running short, two of Bally's assistants take charge of TINEKE DE FRIETAS' hair.



**Top:** NIKIESHA ROJAS, Miss Carnival T&T 2006, faces a Sacha cosmetologist for a day that will begin at midday and end after ten that night.

**Above:** At the prejudging interview PRIYA CHANDERBALLY demonstrates moves from her study of Indian dance. If you tell the judges (SHARON IMBERT, GISELE LA RONDE and KAMA MAHARAJ in picture) you can do something, you'll have to put up.

**At centre, right:** In quiet moments before the big presentation. In a room drenched with red illumination overlooking the stage, KENISHA THOM entertains the candidates with tales of her Miss World adventure. From left, TINEKE DE FRIETAS, PENNY BERNARD, THOM, MICHELLE KURBANALI, VALENE MAHARAJ and PRIYA CHANDERBALLY.

**Right:** PETER ELIAS may be the National Director of the Miss T&T franchise, but when the bright lights go up and the winners are chosen, he's the official stylist, ensuring that the girls, VALENE MAHARAJ (first runner-up) KENISHA THOM (Miss T&T Universe) and TINEKE DE FRIETAS (Miss T&T World) begin their reign looking gorgeous for the cameras.

