

Moonilal defends Venezuela energy engagement



Minister of Energy and Energy Industries Dr Roodal Moonilal during the sitting of Parliament yesterday. PHOTO COURTESY OFFICE OF THE PARLIAMENT

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Energy Minister Dr Roodal Moonilal has dismissed Opposition criticism of the Government's handling of energy negotiations with Venezuela, insisting that active discussions remain ongoing and that Trinidad and Tobago continues to work closely with major energy stakeholders to advance cross-border gas projects.

Speaking during debate on the Finance Bill 2026 in the House of Representatives yesterday, Dr Moonilal responded directly to concerns raised by former prime minister and former energy minister Stuart Young, who accused the Government of failing to engage meaningfully with Venezuelan authorities on matters critical to the country's energy future.

During his contribution to the debate, Young argued that the Government's inability to directly engage decision-makers in Venezuela was placing T&T at a disadvantage in ongoing energy negotiations.

Young contended that T&T was being excluded from key discussions on gas allocation and pricing and was instead being forced to rely on multinational energy companies to negotiate on its behalf.

“The fact is nobody here is persona non grata, and how it hurts Trinidad and Tobago is if you are not sitting at the table where the decisions are being made, you will not get the best deal for Trinidad and Tobago.”

Young further claimed that the country was being left to accept terms negotiated by multinational corporations.

“So I know as a fact what Trinidad and Tobago is being saddled with is whatever the multinationals, whatever Shell and BP tell them they have to take, because they're not sitting at the table with the people who own the gas and are determining allocation of gas, cost of gas, price of gas, who will get it and where it will go,” he said.

Young has repeatedly warned in recent months that T&T risks being marginalised in negotiations involving Venezuelan gas if the Government leaves discussions primarily in the hands of multinational energy companies.

In response, Dr Moonilal rejected suggestions that the Government was

absent from the process, saying substantial work was being conducted through technical meetings and ongoing engagement with industry partners.

“We are working with our partners and every single week we get a report. In this case, it is our legacy partners, BP and Shell. We are working with them, NGC is working with them and with the officials in Venezuela,” Moonilal said.

The minister criticised what he described as a culture of equating overseas travel and photo opportunities with effective diplomacy.

“This notion that somehow you have to board a jumbo plane, a jet plane, and land in some country and take out 25 pictures and that means you’re working. But if you are in Trinidad, you are in touch with people on a daily basis, you are conducting meetings, business, doing all the technical work, you’re not working. That’s not considered work.”

Dr Moonilal also took aim at the previous administration, saying extensive international travel had failed to deliver meaningful results for the country.

The Energy Minister maintained that energy projects involving Venezuela remain on the table despite geopolitical challenges and continued uncertainty surrounding international sanctions.

The Government has consistently said it remains committed to pursuing opportunities linked to Venezuelan gas reserves as it seeks to address declining domestic gas production.

Dr Moonilal also used his contribution to provide an update on the future of the Petrotrin refinery, revealing that the Government has received significant interest from potential investors.