

■ Picked for US summit during meeting with State Secretary...

## PM: Rubio to help reopen refinery

PORT OF SPAIN

■ Stories by Anna Ramdass

[anna.ramdass@trinidadexpress.com](mailto:anna.ramdass@trinidadexpress.com)

UNITED States President Donald Trump has invited Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar to a leaders summit in Florida, USA, on March 7.

The Prime Minister disclosed this to the media yesterday following her oneon- one meeting with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio in St Kitts and Nevis.

The meeting was held on the margins of the 50th Regular Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (Caricom).

According to international media reports, Trump has invited Latin American leaders to participate in a summit in Florida, USA, on March 7.

The reports noted that the gathering comes at a time when the US administration is spotlighting what it considers concerning Chinese influence in the region.

The *Express* understands that special invitations were extended to select Caricom leaders-Persad-Bissessar and Guyana President Irfaan Ali.

The Prime Minister and members of her delegation including Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs Sean Sobers met with Rubio and members of his team.

She previously met with him in September 2025 in Washington, DC, following her attendance at the United Nations General Assembly, New York.

Speaking with the media after the meeting yesterday, Persad-Bissessar said talks with Rubio centred on several key matters and indicated that further details would be shared after her meeting with Trump next week.

'Today with (Rubio), we talked about Haiti, we talked about Cuba, of course, we talked about the engagements with Venezuela and the way forward, and he committed on (March 7) when we meet President Trump, more details will be shared on several things that I raised with him today,' said Persad-Bissessar.

She said energy co-operation between Trinidad and Tobago and the United States was on the agenda during the bilateral meeting.

Rubio indicated that support would be provided through the US Department of Energy regarding the reopening of the former Petrotrin refinery, which was shuttered by the former People's National Movement (PNM) government in 2018, she said.

The Prime Minister said her Government was 'very serious' about reopening the refinery, adding: 'Secretary (Rubio) agreed that they will put us on to their Department of Energy to assist us in seeking to get the best partner to open that refinery.'

She continued: 'We had several persons so far with expressions of interest; of course, at the end of the day, we will choose the best that we think that we can get.'

Persad-Bissessar also recalled that Energy Minister Dr Roodal Moonilal met with Oando and that a meeting was scheduled with another interested party in St Kitts.

Shortly after assuming office, the Persad-Bissessar-led Government set up a committee to explore the reopening of the refinery, tasked with assessing what is required to reactivate operations.

An interim report from the restart committee was reviewed, with Government officials saying the findings indicate restarting the Guaracara refinery was technically, commercially and financially viable, despite years of closure and deterioration.

The Energy Ministry was directed to evaluate the report and present restart options to the Cabinet.

Following her first meeting with Rubio last September, T&T was granted an Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) licence by the United States Treasury Department—a key regulatory approval that allows the country to engage in energy negotiations with respect to Venezuela's offshore Dragon gas field that would otherwise be restricted under US sanctions.

Following the US military's ousting of Venezuela President Nicolas Maduro in January, there have been questions as to the way forward for T&T and Venezuela energy cooperation, especially since Delcy Rodriguez is Venezuela's acting president and she had been among those who previously criticised Persad-Bissessar and her Government.

**'Making partnership stronger'** The Prime Minister has focused attention on T&T's partnership with the US to pave the way forward.

She described her meeting with Rubio as 'great', calling him a brisk, bright and articulate leader.

She noted that he was highly familiar with issues affecting the region, as demonstrated in his address yesterday.

Secretary Rubio took to X (formerly Twitter) later yesterday where he hailed T&T's support.

He posted, 'In my meeting with Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar we talked about making our partnership even stronger to make our people more prosperous and safe.

Trinidad and Tobago's ongoing support for US military operations in the South Caribbean Sea is one example of many and is helping us protect both our citizens from the scourge of drug trafficking.'

The Prime Minister thanked Rubio, responding, 'Thank you Secretary Rubio for the productive engagement. Trinidad and Tobago values its strong partnership with the United States, grounded in mutual respect, shared security, and regional stability. Our co-operation reflects our joint commitment to combating drug trafficking, protecting our borders, and ensuring a safer, more prosperous future for our people. Together, we are stronger.'

Since September 2025, the Prime Minister and her Government have lent strong support to the US government and military in actions against transnational crime.

She reinforced that position in her address at the opening ceremony of the Caricom meeting on Tuesday, declaring that T&T stands with the United States and has already benefited from a lower murder toll.

Asked about US kinetic strikes on drug boats and whether she viewed them as extrajudicial killings, Persad-Bissessar said she did not, noting that her position was based on legal advice received.

She said while there were reports of Trinidadians and St Lucians being killed in the strikes, there was no evidence to substantiate those claims.

'We have no evidence whatsoever, I don't know if St Lucia has, that there were Trinis on that boat.'

She continued: 'It's not an easy time for any of us in the Caricom region, it is not an easy time for anybody in the world; the whole geopolitics has changed and will continue to change. We can't keep doing things the same old way and expect to get change.'



TRUMP SPEECH: US President Donald Trump, left, applauds with Vice-President JD Vance, centre, and House Speaker Mike Johnson as he delivers the State of the Union address on Tuesday to a joint session of Congress in the House chamber at the US Capitol, Washington, DC, USA. -Photo: AP