

■ After a missed Guyana deal, Moonilal says...

## T&T seeks to reclaim regional energy role

■ Vivian Bowen

[vivian.bowen@trinidadexpress.com](mailto:vivian.bowen@trinidadexpress.com)

REFLECTING on past policy missteps of the previous administration, Minister of Energy Dr Roodal Moonilal disclosed that Trinidad and Tobago had once voluntarily walked away from a near-certain energy infrastructure contract in Guyana-not due to failure, but by choice.

Speaking at yesterday's post-Cabinet news conference at the Red House, Moonilal said the National Energy Corporation (NEC) had submitted a strong bid to develop onshore gas infrastructure in Guyana, but was later instructed by the former administration to withdraw.

'They had a very good chance to win a significant contract to establish the gas infrastructure onshore because, as you know, they are taking gas offshore in Guyana... and they were instructed by the government of Trinidad and Tobago at that time to withdraw, that they ought not to go further and participate in the energy sector in Guyana,' Moonilal said.

He added that the new Government is now working to reverse that approach, aiming to re-establish Trinidad and Tobago's energy presence across the region and reclaim its role as the Caribbean's leading energy player.

According to Moonilal, the move is part of a broader strategic push aligned with Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar's vision to reassert Trinidad and Tobago's leadership-not only through resource development, but through deliberate diplomacy and regional collaboration.

The minister also confirmed Trinidad and Tobago will dispatch a high-level delegation to Washington, DC, from May 28 to 30, for meetings with senior officials from the US Departments of State, Treasury, and Energy, as well as with executives from Shell Global, the Americas Council, and the Inter American Dialogue.

The announcement followed Persad-Bissessar's disclosure that she had earlier held talks with officials from the United States Embassy.

Moonilal said the main objective of the upcoming visit is to discuss mutual interests in energy security and to deepen energy cooperation with the United States.

In tandem with US engagement, Trinidad and Tobago is also laying the groundwork for renewed partnerships with fellow Caricom States, most notably Guyana, Grenada and Suriname.

Moonilal said contact had been made with regional counterparts, including Guyana's Ministry of Energy, which responded positively. Guyana, now a major player in the oil and gas sector, has proposed reviving a dormant bilateral working group that previously facilitated joint energy initiatives.

'They've already raised that as an item we could look at resuscitating... it may not be called by the same name, but it will involve working together in real time on significant partnerships with Guyana. We have also reached out, of course, to other areas and we expect in the coming days to get involved in discussions with them,' Moonilal said.

He noted Trinidad and Tobago's energy companies, including Phoenix Park Gas Processors, are already exploring opportunities in Guyana, with the Government actively supporting these efforts.

Moonilal spoke about the challenges facing the local energy sector, describing it as having been inherited in a 'state of significant decline' in both oil and gas production, which has had ripple effects on the petrochemical industry.

'One of the startling realisations of becoming Energy Minister was that the government, until now, played no role in the energy sectors in these neighbouring territories that are now becoming global players,' he said, adding that this will now change.

Continuing on Grenada, Moonilal expressed interest in deeper engagement and confirmed informal talks are already under way. He said a visit is planned to explore how Trinidad and Tobago can assist with that country's gas sector.

Suriname, meanwhile, is set to host a major gas conference in the coming weeks, which Moonilal described as another opportunity for Trinidad and Tobago to reassert its place in the regional energy landscape. As regional players like Guyana and Suriname rapidly expand their energy industries, Moonilal warned that Trinidad and Tobago cannot afford to remain idle.

'Until 2015, Trinidad and Tobago was the Caribbean energy leader. We lost that position,' he said. 'But the path to regaining it is through partnership, presence, and purpose-and that is what we are now pursuing.'