

Young concerned about Dragon gas deal

... holds talks with US Embassy on impact of Rubio statement



Acting Prime Minister Stuart Young addresses the media at yesterday's post-Cabinet briefing at Whitehall, Port-of-Spain. PHOTO BY ANISTO ALVES

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Acting Prime Minister Stuart Young said yesterday that he is “concerned,” but “not uneasy” about the impact US Secretary of State Marco Rubio’s foreign policy plans will have on the Dragon gas deal and the T&T economy.

In a tweet just after midnight, Rubio said, “Today, pursuant to @POTUS (US President Donald Trump) directive, I am providing foreign-policy guidance to terminate all Biden-era oil and gas licences that have shamefully bankrolled the illegitimate Maduro regime.”

Rubio’s tweet came a day after US President Donald Trump announced the termination of US

energy company Chevron's licence with Venezuela to export crude oil.

Speaking at a post-Cabinet media briefing at Whitehall, Portof-Spain, Young said the Cabinet meeting started late because he had spent the morning engaged in conversations with Shell and officials at the US Embassy in Port-of-Spain to assess the impact of Rubio's comment on T&T.

"At this stage, there has been no indication of there being any negative effect on T&T. We have always said it is impossible to predict the future, and it is impossible to predict the decisions that certain administrations may take," Young said.

He said the T&T Government is very aware of how important the Dragon deal is to the energy security of T&T, and to the stability of the Caricom region, as well as South America, extending as far as Europe.

"We are very aware of how important it is and who the decision makers are and we will continue to do all we can. Can we provide any assurance at this stage? The answer obviously is no. Are we engaged with the right people? We believe we are. And we will continue to work and at every step of the way, if there is something to report, we will."

Criticising comments by Opposition Leader Kamla Persad-Bissessar about the announcement by Prime Minister Dr Keith Rowley that he is resigning on March 16, Young said, "This deal and this transaction and cross-border gas is not for the PNM (People's National Movement), it is not for the (Opposition) United National Congress. It is not for any political entity. It is for you, the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago."

He said the Dragon deal and the natural gas that is expected to be delivered in 2027 are going to help the country with foreign exchange.

"It is what is going to help us to continue paying the bills on your behalf, continue ensuring that there are drugs in the hospital and that children can continue to receive education," Young said.

As T&T's Minister of Energy, Young has been at the forefront of pursuing agreements with the US and Venezuela governments to facilitate the access by T&T to Venezuelan natural gas from the Dragon field, located near to Trinidad's north-west maritime border, and to cross-border gas from the Cocuina-Manakin field, off Trinidad's south-east coast.

As a result of the negotiations, the US government's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), under the Joe Biden administration, granted T&T and wholly state-owned National Gas Company (NGC) exemptions from US sanctions to develop the Dragon field, in partnership with multinational energy giant, Shell, and the Cocuina-Manakin field with energy major, BP.

Young also led the negotiations that resulted in Venezuela granting T&T a 30-year exploration and production licence in December 2023 to explore, produce and export natural gas from the Dragon field to T&T. In July 2024, T&T and Venezuela signed a 20-year agreement to develop the Cocuina-Manakin field.

During the media briefing yesterday, Young was also asked whether the Government or either of its international partners had bankrolled the Venezuelan government, which is led by Nicolas Maduro.

"The answer to that is no. We have entered into a commercial transaction or licence that has been published in the Venezuelan gazette ... and you can see very clearly there what are the cash transactions. Until the gas field starts up, and you start to pay things like royalty, we certainly don't fall into any large payments or payments made to the Venezuelan government," Young said.

Responding to another question, Young said payments have been made to the Venezuelan government, but he could not say what the exact payments were for, at this stage, "because that is

being handled by NGC and Shell.”

He compared the payments for the Dragon field with payments received by T&T from EOG Resources for two production-sharing contracts (PSCs) in January.

“Immediately on that signature of mine being put, along with the signature of the EOG representative, significant sums of US dollars were paid by EOG to the government of T&T in something called a signing bonus. The same thing has happened with all the other PSCs we do. Would that be considered significant? That is the normal course of business in the oil and gas sector ... and that is what would have been done by Shell and NGC,” said the acting prime minister.