

NEWS

Khan stresses: No danger posed by Nabarima

YVONNE WEBB FRIDAY 23 OCTOBER 2020



Energy Minister Franklin Khan. –

ENERGY Minister Franklin Khan and Foreign and Caricom Affairs Minister Dr Amery Browne sought to assure the nation on Thursday that there is no danger posed by the Venezuelan-registered oil tanker FSO Nabarima, which is anchored in the Gulf of Paria.

With 1.3 million barrels of crude oil in its storage tanks, there has been growing unease both locally, regionally and internationally after claims that the vessel was listing to one side and slowly sinking.

However, at a virtual press conference to reveal the findings of a TT team of experts who boarded the vessel on Tuesday, with permission from the Venezuelan government, Khan and Browne said there is concrete evidence the vessel is upright, stable, with no visible tilt and no imminent risk of tilting or sinking.

However, Browne said images taken during the visit to the vessel will not be shared because it is a “sensitive asset” for Venezuela and its petrochemical industry.

The activist group Fishermen and Friends of the Sea (FFOS) has been pressing government to make public video evidence of the vessel’s stability because of what the group said were doctored pictures which were issued recently.

Khan said he is satisfied with the findings of the TT team, who were the first visitors outside of Petrosucre employees.

His only concern is the slow pace of the transfer of the crude from the Nabarima to an onshore facility via barges and the Incaro vessel, which has limited capacity. He said the Venezuelans calculate it will take 35 days to transfer the oil from the Nabarima to an onshore facility.

Khan said he would have preferred larger tankers to speed up the process to two-five days. “Don’t get me wrong, the process of emptying the vessel is safe, but the extended period of time with which this activity will take place will pose some sort of challenge which we need to monitor,” Khan said.

He said Browne’s ministry has already contacted the Venezuelans for a follow-up visit within a month.

Khan said the team which visited the vessel was headed by senior petroleum engineer Craig Boodoo and included coastguard officer and mechanical engineer Lt Esain Warner and IMO-certified port state inspector from the Maritime Services Division, Michael Daniel.

He said the team spent about three and a half hours on the ship and toured the engine room, generator room, boiler room, machine control room, tank control room, the main deck, pumps, bilge tanks and other relevant areas. From all indications, there was good housekeeping, he said, and the maintenance of the vessel satisfied the team.

Khan said the inspectors were allowed to take samples of the stored crude oil and Venezuelan officials showed the team their oil-spill response plan, which was found to be acceptable.

“The technical team has put a relatively positive perspective of what is happening out there.

"I know the population has been very antsy and quite concerned, and with just cause, because an environmental disaster of the scale that was envisaged would have hurt TT significantly. “The result of the team has indicated a genuine risk of that nature does not exist. However, we will continue to be vigilant.”