

Ministers: Footage of Nabarima visit supplied by Venezuela



Venezuela's state oil company PDVSA supplied this country with footage of the recent inspection done by a local team to the oil tanker Nabarima.

Energy Minister Franklin Khan and Foreign Affairs Minister Amery Browne confirmed this yesterday following the release of the video last Saturday.

The video centred around last Tuesday's tour of the Nabarima by a three-member TT inspection team. The tour followed local and international concerns about a potential environmental threat after the vessel - holding 1.3 million barrels of oil - began listing to the right and taking on water in July/August.

Then, PDVSA which operates the vessel stated repairs were done. However Government pressed for the independent verification visit and after some delay on Venezuela's part, finally obtained approval to inspect the vessel last Tuesday.

After the seven-hour tour, the team reported the tanker was upright, stable and in no danger of tilting or sinking.

But because only the three members undertook the visit – minus any TT video team- oil and gas stakeholders have queried who took video footage of the tour and the independence of such information.

Last Saturday Communication Minister Symon de Norbriga - who narrated the video- confirmed that footage of the tour was shot and sent to the Office of the Prime Minister.

De Nobriga said the video was narrated based on the information shared by Ministers Browne and Khan at last Thursday's press conference regarding the Nabarima visit.

Yesterday Browne said the video footage was received by the Energy Ministry from its counterpart in Venezuela.

Regarding concerns about using the footage which was not done by this country, he said the invitation for the visit extended by Venezuela only permitted the three local experts plus a helicopter crew which took the team to the vessel.

Browne added, "We continue monitoring this matter very closely. The ministry has sent to Venezuela the team's request for a follow-up visit next month - to see what else has been done with the vessel- and that's now in Venezuela's hands – we're not sleeping on this matter at all."

Energy Minister Franklin Khan added, "The visit was filmed by PDVSA in (TT team's) presence."

Energy Ministry sources said the TT team which left Piarco for Guiria was taken by a Venezuelan helicopter to the Nabarima and during that trip, the Venezuelan crew on the helicopter took aerial footage of the vessel.

That crew also took the footage of the local team's visit.

The team of experts who were named were senior Energy Ministry petroleum engineer Craig Boodoo, Coast Guard mechanical engineer Eisen Warner and Maritime Services certified port inspector Michael Daniel from the Ministry of Works.

Extensive talks were held with PDVSA officials whom the team met on the vessel. They included vice president (Commerce/Supplies) Colonel Antonio Jose Perez Suarez, vessel captain Carlos Gonzales, International relations official Randall Pena and vessel maritime superintendent Benito Romain.

Video commentary stated Venezuela is in the slow process of offloading oil cargo to avoid a disaster and this is expected to take up to 35 days - a time when TT's team hopes to return to get an update on the situation.