

A Fast Ferry? Yes, Caricom, Yes!

By: Lorna Callender, SKNVibes – St Kitts/Nevis

BASSETERRE, St. Kitts – The news of a proposal by Trinidad and Tobago's Prime Minister Kamla Persad Bissessar that she would seek support from her regional colleagues for a fast ferry system that she believes would further strengthen the integration movement, was welcome news indeed.



There is no need for a feasibility study on this proposal. Ever since the demise of the Federal boats – the Federal Maple and the Federal Palm – there have been urgent calls for their replacement.

Just two weeks ago small businessmen in St. Kitts stated that “transportation” was a major problem in getting their goods to other

Caricom countries and this lack of transportation also hampered their ability to import goods from their Caricom neighbours as well.

Persad Bissessar, who arrived here to attend the 32nd Heads of Government Conference, told reporters that a foreign interest, which she did not name, was prepared to launch the ferry using Port of Spain as the base.

“It will bring us closer together, it will help the integration movement, it will assist in moving people across the region,” she added. She said the ferry, if it became operational, could cost travellers US\$15 to travel from Trinidad and Tobago to Barbados and later to other Eastern Caribbean countries.

Rapid support for this proposal came from Hon. Stevenson King, Prime Minister of St. Lucia. He told reporters: “It’s indeed a good idea, very encouraging. I think we’ve taken much too long to get to that stage. Regional integration cannot be successful without transportation, be it air or sea.”

He further added: “It will give the opportunity to move not only people, but goods and services for the kind of trade that is necessary and seems to be diminishing in the region. There were vessels which plied the area providing businessmen and hucksters who traded and developed themselves that way.”

Caricom leaders, as well as the rank and file of Caricom nationals are acutely aware that Caricom must come with new strategies to justify its existence to the common man. None other than George Lamming, noted Barbadian author, referred to a gaping disconnect between the intellectuals of Caricom and the majority of the ordinary folk.

This same issue was well expressed by President of Guyana, Bharrat Jagdeo, during this 32nd Caricom Summit. He said: “The only way we can change the perception of CARICOM is not that it is vibrant and relevant, it is not just to do a public relations job, but the more ordinary people can feel regional initiative impacting on their lives...then they will start to say Caricom is working”

The new drive to ensure that Caricom is now “results-oriented” and that it must move with a sense of urgency is most welcome. Providing a fast ferry to serve the Caricom region will satisfy Caricom nationals and leaders in all of these ways.

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