

Fight over REDjet



Prime Minister Stuart has accused Trinidad and Tobago of executing a smear campaign against the airline.

BRIDGETOWN, Barbados, Monday July 4, 2011 – Barbados' Prime Minister Freundel Stuart and his Trinidad and Tobago counterpart appear to be on a collision course over the twin-island republic's failure

to grant low-budget carrier REDjet permission to fly there, with the Barbadian leader warning that two can play that game.

While Trinidad and Tobago has claimed there are safety concerns about the Barbados-based carrier, Prime Minister Stuart has accused its CARICOM neighbour of second guessing the certification by his country, and launching a smear campaign against the airline.

He threw down the gauntlet in St. Kitts over the weekend as CARICOM Heads of Government met for their 32nd regular meeting.

"We in Barbados certified REDjet in Barbados as safe. We are being second-guessed on that. Other people certify their aircraft and we don't second-guess them," he told reporters.

"I made that point at the meeting but if this is the way these issues are going to be handled, I only want to know the rules. I just want to know how people are playing the game; I can play the game as well as they can play it."

REDjet currently only has approval to operate flights between Barbados and Guyana. Both Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, which own one of REDjet's competitors Caribbean Airlines (CAL), have not yet given it the green light, citing concerns about safety of the aircraft that need to be addressed.

But Prime Minister Stuart has accused Trinidad and Tobago of executing a smear campaign against the airline.

He told reporters that at a meeting last month in Port of Spain, involving transport ministers of the three countries involved in the matter, Barbados' Minister of International Transport George Hutson was shown photographs as purported evidence of the safety problems. However, Stuart said, Hutson's request for the photographs to be certified was denied.

“And the next thing we knew that they were on the Internet and the smear campaign against REDjet continued,” Stuart said, referring to photographs that were being circulated claiming to show corrosion on the landing gear of a REDjet plane.

But Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar is insisting that safety is paramount and those issues need to be dealt with before Trinidad and Tobago can go forward with the matter.

However, she also suggested that the holdup also had to do with protecting Trinidad and Tobago’s national airline, CAL, as she expressed concern about REDjet’s low fares.

The airline offers a US\$9.99 base fare, with taxes and baggage not included. It is the region’s first low-budget carrier and follows a “no frills” model similar to JetBlue Airways, Southwest Airways, Spirit Airlines and West Jet in North America, and Ryanair in Europe.

While it is awaiting permission from Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, management of the airline has been in talks with governments of other potential destinations. They recently had preliminary discussions with representatives of the Grenada Airlift Committee as a first step to making an official application for a license to service the route.