THE formal opening of the border Takutu Bridge between Guyana and Brazil on September 14, 2009, will mark a major milestone for this country and its Caribbean Community (CARICOM) neighbours. While it further cements Guyana’s ties with the rest of South America, President Bharrat Jagdeo says that this will not be at the expense of traditional links with its other partners in the 15-member CARICOM.

Asked last year amid disagreements with some governments in the regional grouping whether Guyana should not now more eagerly push for its ‘continental destiny’, his response was firm.

“Guyana has to pursue its continental destiny but not at the expense of CARICOM”, he said.

Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Presidential Secretariat, Dr. Roger Luncheon, last week maintained that position when he announced that Brazil President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and President Jagdeo will officiate at the bridge opening.

“We have always said that the western border with Brazil is where CARICOM starts”, Luncheon told his weekly post-Cabinet media briefing.

He said a signboard proclaiming ‘CARICOM BEGINS HERE’ is likely to be put up at the bridge site.

He said it was not yet known if Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez or Suriname President Runaldo Venetiaan will be at the ceremony but expected that top officials from the CARICOM Secretariat and accredited diplomats in Guyana will attend.

Mr. Jagdeo has said that the road and bridge links with Brazil and plans for a deep water harbour in the Berbice River are vital to further development.

At a Private Sector Commission dinner on August 28, he said he plans to seek assistance from Lula to pave the road from Linden to Lethem.

Before leaving for a meeting last month in Ecuador of UNASUR (Union of South American Nations) President Jagdeo said, “This is a very important meeting for the South American integration process. We have spoken for a very long time and we are hoping to cement closer relations with the countries of South America and the rest of Latin America.”

Luncheon said the bridge will offer “untold opportunities” for economic development and integration of the economies of Guyana, Brazil and of CARICOM and South America.

The Lethem-Linden road continues to be an “abiding source of interest for us to maximally exploit the bridge adjoining the two countries”, he told reporters.

He said the government is “aggressively” pursuing resources “to bring the dream to fruition to have a quality highway linking Lethem and Linden”.

Plans for a deep water harbour on the Berbice River are similarly on the front burner, he indicated, adding that “it makes sense to the Brazilians, Guyanese, and the private sector…even more sense, it makes money and so that continues to be assiduously pursued.”

After the formal opening of the Takutu Bridge, the two countries will finalise arrangements to ensure a smooth flow of the burgeoning traffic across the bridge in both directions, specifically for customs and land transport, he said.
The bridge across the Takutu River has been long in the making and was completed with funds from Brazil’s federal government.