

Takutu bridge opens to traffic

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The long-awaited Takutu Bridge was opened to traffic yesterday in a historic decision that saw vehicles for the first time moving overland between Guyana and Brazil. It is expected that the official commissioning of the bridge will follow shortly.



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Takutu bridge

Meantime, in another significant move, the Brazilian town of Bon Fim has been declared an official port of entry by authorities there, with all the facilities in place and Guyanese businesses with the correct documentation can finally export goods to the Portuguese-speaking country through the town. However, in Lethem the multi-purpose building for use by immigration and customs is not yet ready, Vice-President of the Rupununi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI), Alfred Ramsaran said.

Contractors yesterday officially handed over the Takutu Bridge to the Brazilian state of Roraima and the state's government took the decision to allow the movement of vehicular traffic and pedestrians across the structure. The Bridge had been completed recently but vehicles and people had not been allowed to cross on it. It is not clear what arrangements are in place on the Guyana side as regards this new development but previously Brazil-registered vehicles had been allowed into Lethem.

Yesterday's ceremony was not attended by Region Nine (Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo) officials reportedly because they were not "authorized". However, representatives of the RCCI were present.

“Over two thousand people from Brazil and Guyana gathered on the Takutu Bridge to witness the granting of free access and the use of the Takutu Bridge between Guyana and Brazil”, Ramsaran said in a statement to the media.

The informal opening of the Bridge saw Governor of Roraima State, Jose de Anachieta Junior and other Brazilian representatives in attendance. At 11am yesterday on the Brazilian side, the Brazilian Army band played both countries’ National Anthems and prayers were said, Ramsaran disclosed. The Brazilian authorities also inaugurated their Customs and multi-purpose building in Bon Fim which will begin operations today with all the requirements in place to facilitate border trade. The bridge will be opened from 8am to 8pm daily.

According to Ramsaran, the Roraima State Governor, in his remarks said that the Bridge brings closer integration between the Guyanese and Brazilian peoples and it is hoped that with the official inauguration of the structure, both countries will agree to have an asphalt road linking Brazil to Georgetown for economic development which would benefit both countries. He said that the Bridge opens the way for greater development between the two countries and thanked the Brazilian military for a job well done in completing the bridge and opening the way for great development. He added that an asphalt road “to the Caribbean” will provide trade and integration with the Caribbean and further afield for the export of Brazilian products. The Governor said that the Bridge will be opened from 8am to 8pm daily.

At yesterday’s ceremony too, Brazilian Senator Remido recalled that the idea to construct a bridge was floated in the early nineties when the Brazilian company, Paranapanema constructed the road from Annai to Kurupukari. He further said that many persons in the Rupununi do not have passports and this may pose a difficulty for those wanting to visit the state’s capital, Boa Vista. He called on the authorities to closely examine the possibilities of allowing persons to use identification cards to travel between both borders.

Meantime, in a decision, last Friday the Brazilian authorities signed an order declaring Bon Fim an official port of entry and Ramsaran recalled that for years there had only been one-way traffic between the two countries with Brazilian goods entering Guyana but local businesses unable to export local products to Brazil through Bon Fim. He declared that for decades the people of Region Nine and the Lethem business community questioned this but noted that that community was not a legally declared port of entry or exit.

In this light, the business Chamber Vice-President pointed out that at Lethem the Customs and other authorities are not ready for this move though he noted that “the administration will be meeting soon to regularize the position to accommodate the traffic from Brazil”. The multi-purpose building at Lethem is still being prepared for use and it is hoped that the authorities concerned will be putting systems in place as soon as possible to accommodate this new development, he said.

Earlier this month, Regional Chairman Lucas had told this newspaper that infrastructural work was ongoing in the light of the impending opening of the Bridge. The chairman had said that the work being done included making the Customs section “more advanced” and efforts were being made to ensure that the buildings are properly equipped with phone lines, telephones and electricity and other necessities. He had said that the work was expected to be completed in a

short time and after that it would be up to the relevant authorities of both Guyana and Brazil to decide on a date for the bridge to be officially opened. The opening of the bridge has been some time coming with several previous proposed dates for its opening being postponed.