

## St Vincent PM admits regional ferry service ‘not easy to execute’



St Vincent and the Grenadines Prime Minister Dr Ralph Gonsalves in the First Day Plenary Session at the 48th Regular Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of Caricom in Barbados yesterday.

PHOTO COURTESY CARICOM

While Caricom leaders are set to discuss the possibility of an inter-island regional passenger ferry, St Vincent and the Grenadines Prime Minister Dr Ralph Gonsalves believes while it is a necessary endeavour, logistically it will not be easy to execute.

Guardian Media spoke with the Prime Minister during a break from meetings yesterday on the second day of the 48th Regular Meeting of the Conference of Caricom Heads of Government in Barbados and asked if the topic of the inter-island ferry was raised during one of the closeddoor sessions.

“Not yet, but that will come up when the discussions turn to the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME) and particularly on marine and air transport.”

Taking a deep sigh Gonsalves said, “Look, we all have to be very practical. If marine transport was

easy to go between the islands, somebody would have done it already.”

Gonsalves said such transportation exists on a smaller scale between St Vincent and the rest of the Grenadines as well as trips to Trinidad and Barbados.

“But if you want to have a passenger ferry service running regularly, you have to watch the dollars and the cents. And if there was a lot of money to be made in it before, some entrepreneur from Trinidad and Tobago would have already bought such a ferry and do it,” he added.

“The State has to get involved but I don’t think it is a piece of cake,” he said.

Gonzales said there would be a lot of legislative work involved for the ease of movement of people. He said it may require a pilot programme with just a handful of countries.

“This is not a simple thing where success is assured, but the Hebrew people in the book of Ecclesiastes, it says try something in the morning and if it does not work, you try something else in the evening,” he said.

“We have to keep our heads on,” Gonsalves added.

On the private sector level, Connect Caribe, a subsidiary of Barbadian maritime company Pleion Group Inc, said it was working on a regional ferry service in January 2024.

Sailings were set to begin in August 2024 but the company said it faced delays.

The company said it now aims to begin sailings to link Barbados with St Lucia, T&T, St Vincent, Grenada, Dominica, Antigua, Suriname, and Guyana within the first quarter of this year.