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Editorial

Irfaan Ali and his qualifications

February 12, 2020



THE Irfaan Ali qualifications scandal has reached boiling point. Since his controversial appointment as the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) presidential candidate, Ali has been wrangling with his alleged entanglement in fraudulent conspiracies. In addition to the 19 fraud charges Ali is currently facing, he has also been accused of academic fraud in relation to his numerous qualifications.



The matter has become somewhat of a joke in the public sphere and the use of the moniker 'Irfaan Ali' has become commonplace in local vernacular. Yet this is no laughing matter. Academic fraud is a serious, yet uncommon, crime to be accused of in our modern world. Although it has always been accepted that people often overstate their academic achievements when applying for work, there has always been a higher standard applied to those who are appointed to certain roles, especially as it pertains to governments and politics. So, for a presidential candidate to be accused of fabricating an entire academic career or key elements of said career is not only worrisome, but warrants further investigation and harkens back to a time we all hoped was truly behind us.

This elections season has highlighted that Guyanese have become quite litigious. So much so, that recently, two citizens Diana Deravinee Rajcumar and Marcus Phillips who are registered voters and Guyanese citizens, have launched an application at the High Court in order to bring light to the matter. The respondents in the matter are PPP/C General-Secretary Bharrat Jagdeo and the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM). The particulars of the application are that the applicants are seeking a declaration that they are entitled to know the qualification antecedents of Ali, that he must produce certificates and transcripts for his first degree and a Certificate of Graduation from the now infamous (but non-existent) Business College, West Demerara Chamber of Commerce.

The application also requires production of certificates and transcripts from the University of Sunderland in the UK, where Ali allegedly obtained a Bachelor of Arts in Business Management. Finally, the applicants are also seeking an order against GECOM to release the above documents, which will be examined by them.

Although elements of Ali's qualifications have been made public through various sources, what becomes clear upon close inspection of the documents is that the timeline does not add up and leads to even more questions. According to a certificate from the University of Sunderland, Ali was awarded a Bachelor of Arts in Business Management in September 2006. However, by this time, Ali had already completed a Master's degree in Human Resource Planning Development from the Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University of India. This is highly unusual, as the prequalification for a master's programme is usually predicated on the basis that the candidate has already completed an undergraduate degree in a relevant field. If Mr Ali did indeed study at the University of Sunderland in 2006, a simple Freedom of Information request can be made to the university in order to find out his status as an alumnus.

Since the accusations surfaced, Ali has been able to evade the issue of his allegedly fraudulent qualifications with relative ease. He has however maintained his innocence, stating that; "I will not give credence to such organised slander to discredit my wide-ranging academic progress by responding to every single element of the mischievous information being peddled and which objective is to undermine my effort to serve as the PPP presidential candidate."

The Guyanese public deserves to know the truth. Academic fraud is a serious crime and one which points to an inclination towards dishonesty. This, coupled with the 19 fraud charges Ali is currently facing sends the wrong message to electors. But Guyanese have proved that we are willing to pursue all reasonable avenues in the pursuit of truth and honesty, especially as it pertains to the forthcoming elections.

Ali's qualifications can be likened to Erwin Schrodinger's famous thought experiment involving the cat that is said to be alive and dead at the same time. Like Schrodinger's cat, Ali's qualifications might exist or might not. It is hoped that the Court will take this quandary out of the realms of thought and into the realm of reality by enforcing their orders so that

these documents can be made public, so that they are verified in full. We cannot contend with evasiveness, especially as it pertains to the assumption of the highest office in the land. Presidential candidates and indeed all holders of public office must be honest and transparent. The stakes are too high for anything less.

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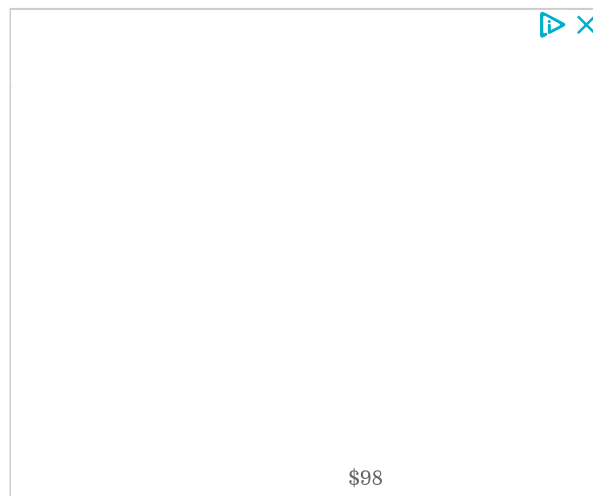
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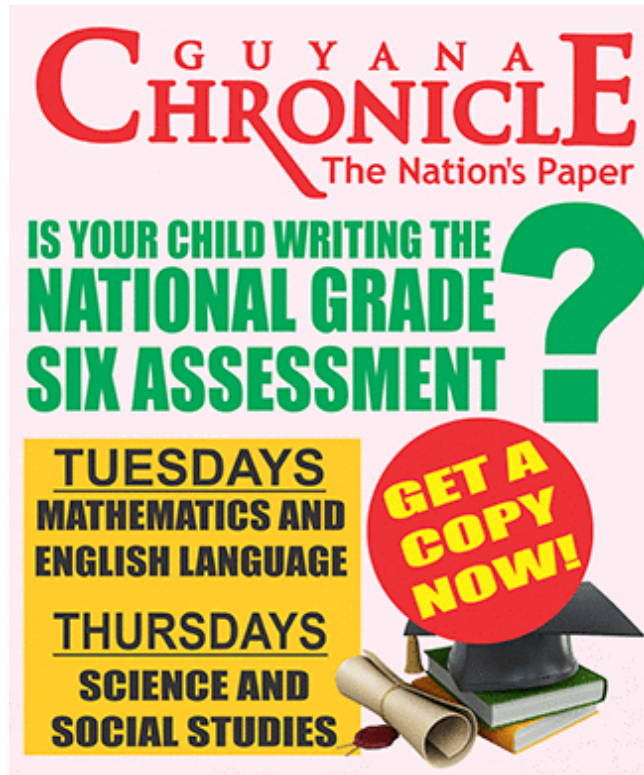
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