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WHAT GUYANA NEEDS TO KNOW

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On this day, in 1992, the PPP turned its back on Guyana

Oct 05, 2019 Features / Columnists, Freddie Kissoon

It is sad that that date October 5 has gone from the memory bank of this nation. It does not occupy even infinitesimal space in the continuous flow of history.

After almost three decades of the PNC in office, the iconic Cheddi Jagan won the election on this date in 1992 and became president. Any person anywhere, even the Arctic region who had even a scant awareness of contemporary politics in Guyana would have embraced Jagan. He was known throughout the world as a modest, father-figure politician that was seen as anything but autocratic and authoritarian.

The world was curious about Cheddi Jagan, president of Guyana. What would he be like? Will this man put Guyana on the map? Would he make Guyana the centre-piece of the CARICOM region? Would he finally bring lasting peace and development to a suffering people?

He died a few months short his five-year stint but his legacy was far from admirable. He left a party that felt maybe it was carrying out his inner thoughts. Maybe it felt it strayed a billion miles from what Jagan had in his soul but the pathways Cheddi went into after 1992 and the disasters that accompanied his party's use of power long after he was gone have left scars on this nation's anatomy. Those scars to this day prevent it from having that elusive peace all Guyanese from 1950 onwards wanted and still do.

Make no mistake about it, Jagan with eyes wide open in 1992 repeated the tragic errors of Burnham's approach to nation-building. Burnham ignored the essential pillars on which rest Guyana's sociology. He failed to birth a social environment that was inclusive.

On the contrary, Burnham alienated Guyana itself, thus paving the way for Walter Rodney's electrifying popularity.

Burnham did not confront the ethnic ramparts that stifled Guyana's democratic and developmental potentials. Jagan made the identical mistake. But one can debate the polemical controversy that Jagan had more to build on because of what President Hoyte left him, than Burnham had to work with. Therefore, Jagan's legacy needs to be questioned with deeper analytical focus.

The context is what Jagan inherited from President Hoyte. There is no scope here to polemicise on Hoyte's balance sheet. There is no question, he rigged the 1985 election but there is no question that he used his presidency to open up horizons that Burnham never ever believed in much less contemplated.

These offered some hope of diluting the ethnic and political brew that had consumed Guyana since the fifties.

My honest opinion is that Jagan had no use for some of the new perspectives Hoyte had introduced and felt could lead to an encouraging future. I will name a few. First, there was the move to de-politicise the civil service through the introduction of neutral permanent secretaries. Jagan did not fully emulate the Hoyte initiative.

He appointed some of his party cadres into the professional public sector. Party executive Hydar Ally became PS in the Education Ministry. Roger Luncheon became the chief public servant, head of the Presidential Secretariat, and later chairman of the NIS.

The head of the PPP youth arm, Rohan Singh became the head of the presidential guards; just to name a few examples that come to mind.

Secondly, after 1992, Jagan retained Hoyte's IMF diktats but because of his Freudian mistrust of the wealthy classes, his government reluctantly facilitated investors. Even though he had a 1991 covenant with the Americans that he must bring in business people into the governance structure, his ministers and PPP mandarins knew that their leader was distrustful of the business class thus the pace of facilitation was slow and the amount of concessions were small.

Thirdly, on the ethnic front, I think Hoyte did more than Jagan to make other race constituencies feel that the government would not discriminate against them. The crucial, almost unforgivable omission in Hoyte's perestroika bandwagon was that because of Hoyte's class nature and because of the

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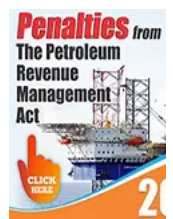
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people he had around him, he did not reach out to the Indian masses, only Indian businessmen. For Hoyte saw how counterproductive political servants can be when you allow them to have power to the technocratic class. So he was not prepared to give power to PNC apparatchiks to dictate to the professionals and managers in the state sector. Hoyte saw the disasters this policy brought under Burnham.

On assuming power in 1985, one of Hoyte's priorities was the eradication of the doctrine of paramountcy of the party. These directions of Hoyte were responsible for the growing animosities between Hoyte and Hamilton Green.

Jagan went right back to the old ways of Burnham where party politics became a dominant feature once more.

(The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of this newspaper.)

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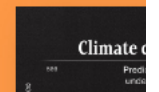
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Weekend Cartoon



Bridge Watch

Demerara Harbour Bridge

Today Tuesday, March 7

Tuesday, March 7

5:00am 05:00

Wednesday, March 8

04:45 04:45

Events shown in time zone: Guyana Time

> Berbice Bridge [...]

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