

CARRIBEAN CONNECTION

Guyana's government refuses to meet Black U.S. representatives



by **Bert Wilkinson**
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Credit: Image by Ronny K from Pixabay

Guyana's Indo-dominated government has said it will not meet with a delegation of U.S. African American state representatives headed to the country this week to investigate allegations of racial discrimination against Guyanese of African descent.

Comprising several state assembly members and senators from a number of southern states, including Texas, Georgia, and the Carolinas, the delegation had asked to meet with President Irfaan Ali and other government officials, but the cabinet said it will not in any way treat with the delegation and its obvious bias toward the political opposition and its persistent narrative of racial discrimination against Blacks.

This is the second high-level delegation of American political and Congressional delegations to have visited this economically thriving oil- and gas-rich Caribbean Community (Caricom) headquarter nation of about a million people in two months. The country has been traditionally bedeviled by tensions between Indians at 37% of the population and Afros at 34%, with both groupings voting for electeds representing strictly along racial lines.

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More than a month ago, the government did engage with a previous New York State delegation that included representatives such as Senator Roxanne Persaud and Assemblymember Alicia Hyndman. Several rounds of high-level meetings were organized with Ali, Prime Minister Mark Phillips, and other top officials.

This time around, officials appear to be angry with the New York-based Guyana Caribbean Institute for Democracy (GCID), headed by New York attorney Rickford Burke. They said the visit by the delegation this week clearly stemmed from an early September forum in Washington that was organized by the GCID and related organizations and individuals, to which the government was not invited.

Lawmakers and other politicians from Guyana did make presentations to Congressional groups, including the Black Caucus. Democratic House Leader Hakeem Jeffries did bless the forum but Georgetown said that enough is enough.

“This one-sided engagement (in Washington) presented the platform for opposition politicians to spew concocted and fabricated narratives about the government of Guyana, including their usual diatribe about racial discrimination and extra-judicial killings, without any fact-checking mechanism and without the government being afforded a hearing or the facility of a response. It is obvious that these jaundiced, baseless, and unfounded narratives of these Opposition Politicians, unsupported by any evidence whatsoever, have influenced this delegation. The government of Guyana will not be engaging this delegation acting in their private capacities as this is a clear interference in Guyana’s domestic politics with a bias toward the political opposition in Guyana,” a statement said.

Opposition, rights groups, and social activists have been railing against the Guyana government, blaming it for excluding a large section of the population from senior positions, state contracts, and other forms of

largesse, contending that only a small group of friends, family, and preferred foreigners are the ones with access to major state jobs and awards.

For his part, Burke said in a separate statement that “the delegation intends to use the insights gained from all of the available information to inform and guide its discussions with relevant leaders in Congress and the White House upon their return to the United States.” The group said it also “plans to advocate for positive change and promote inclusivity and equality at both national and international levels.”

For the September forum in Washington, President Ali and other top officials rushed ahead to DC to preempt the conference and meet with some of the same officials with whom the Guyanese lawmakers had interacted to explain its side of the political narrative, particularly in regard to racial discrimination against Black Guyanese.

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