



GUYANA NEWS

Jagdeo says no to nominees for Chancellor, CJ



Justice Yonette Cummings-Edwards



Justice Kenneth Benjamin

By [Stabroek News](#) February 8, 2018



Opposition Leader Bharrat Jagdeo after weeks of deliberation yesterday relayed his disapproval to President David Granger of the latter's nominees for Chancellor of the Judiciary and Chief Justice.

In a letter to President Granger, Jagdeo said that after undertaking the requisite due diligence he could not support the appointment of Justice Kenneth Benjamin as Chancellor of the Judiciary or Justice Yonette Cummings-Edwards as Chief Justice.

Jagdeo's office released the letter yesterday after the Ministry of the Presidency posted a photo on its Facebook page of the President and Ministers Joseph Harmon and Basil Williams while stating that the Opposition Leader had been a no-show at a scheduled meeting. The Opposition Leader's office later released a statement saying that he had gotten no information from the government confirming a meeting for yesterday and had therefore dispatched letters to Granger. The Opposition Leader's office said that around 4 pm yesterday he also contacted Harmon via telephone and advised him of the letters and indicated a willingness to meet at a convenient time. Jagdeo's office said that he was therefore surprised at the statement by the Ministry of the Presidency that he had not attended a scheduled meeting.

In late December, Granger had informed the Opposition Leader that Justice Benjamin was his nominee for the post of Chancellor of the judiciary while Justice Cummings-Edwards was being proposed for the substantive post of Chief Justice. Following a meeting on January 3rd. Jagdeo, however, asked for one month to consider Justice Benjamin. As a result, a second meeting was set for February 7th (yesterday), when Jagdeo was expected to inform the president if the nominees meet his approval.

In his letter to Granger yesterday, Jagdeo also said he recognized the importance of substantive appointments.

“Please be informed that I remain cognizant of the fundamental importance of securing substantive appointments to these two high constitutional offices. As a result, I am committed to continuous engagement with your Excellency until there is due compliance with Article 127 (1) of the Constitution”, the letter said.

After years of the Chancellor and Chief Justice performing here in acting capacities, Guyana has come under growing pressure to ensure that substantive appointments are made. This matter was recently addressed by President of the CCJ, Sir Dennis Byron.

Article 127 (1) of the Constitution stipulates that “the Chancellor and the Chief Justice shall each be appointed by the President, acting after obtaining the agreement of the Leader of the Opposition.”

Stabroek News last week contacted Benjamin’s office in Belize but was unable to speak directly to him. On the advice of his secretary an email was said. Though there was an acknowledgement, the questions contained were never answered.

Since it had become known that Justice Benjamin, who is Guyanese by birth, might be nominated to the post of Chancellor, his record as the Chief Justice in Belize has come under scrutiny. Justice Benjamin has had a backlog of judgments in the CARICOM member state. This has put him at odds with the bar association there.

It was reported in the Belize media that despite assurances Justice Benjamin would be unable to deliver all 32 of his delayed judgments and this could result in the Belize Bar Association making good on its threat to file proceedings to have him removed from office for misconduct.

Amandala newspaper in a December 12th publication reported that Justice Benjamin would be unable to conclude the backlog by the end of the legal year

According to the Belize Judiciary website, Justice Benjamin received his legal training from the University of the West Indies and the Hugh Wooding Law School in Trinidad and Tobago. It stated that he returned to Guyana, where he practised privately, and served as a Magistrate and the Assistant Judge Advocate for the Guyana Defence Force.

Benjamin who is a Guyanese by birth also holds Antiguan citizenship.



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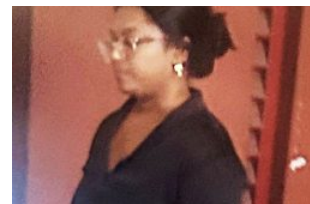
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