



President gives no specific reason for not confirming Chancellor, Chief Justice

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Acting Chancellor of the Judiciary Justice Yonette Cummings-Edwards (right) and Acting Chief Justice Roxanne George-Wiltshire (left).

President Irfaan Ali on Tuesday refused to give a specific reason behind his administration's decision not to confirm judges Yonette Cummings and Roxane George-Wiltshire as Chancellor of the Judiciary and Chief Justice.

He seemingly suggested that he was harbouring concerns about the incumbent office holders. "There's a process to be followed and, as the President, I would follow the process, taking into consideration all the circumstances that exist to ensure that we have a Chancellor and Chief Justice that would continue to take the judiciary into a place that all of us will be proud of, all of the region will be proud of," he told a news conference.

Attorney General Anil Nandiall at the weekend told a news conference that "I've advised the President that he should choose his candidates carefully and the decision is his provided that it finds agreement with the Leader of the Opposition." Asked by Demerara Waves Online News whether he considered judges Cummings and George-Wiltshire good candidates, he said "it's not my place, it's the President's position."

Ms. Cummings was appointed to act as Chancellor to succeed Justice Carl Singh who retired in 2017 after acting in that position for 12 years. Ms George-Wiltshire has also been acting as Chief Justice since 2017.

Opposition Leader Aubrey Norton has already formally informed the President that he supports judges George-Wiltshire and Cummings for confirmation. Article 127 of the Constitution states that "The Chancellor and the Chief Justice shall each be appointed by the President, acting after obtaining agreement of the Leader of the Opposition."

The President acknowledged that the time had come so that "we have to move ahead with this".

Dr Ali was asked whether government's previous concerns about Guyana Court of Appeal decisions especially on political cases had prevented him from appointing substantively Acting Chancellor Cummings and if not what was causing the delay in confirming both her and Acting Chief Justice George-Wiltshire.

In response, the President said "I'm not going to comment" on concerns by government but said "that has no impact" because litigants have a right to appeal to superior courts such as the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ). "That has no impact on our decision-making. The impact of that is the judiciary itself and what happens at different levels of the judiciary," he said.

"That has no impact on us or the government appointing a Chancellor or a Chief Justice," he said.

At the same time, he said the judiciary has to examine the quality of its decisions to ensure that branch of government is "always held in high esteem and to look at the reasons why you might be having a high rate of overturn of decisions at the CCJ."

A New and United Guyana (ANUG) political party said in its New Year's 2025 message that, "The protracted non-substantive appointments of our Chief Justice and Chancellor of the Judiciary leads to a crisis of confidence and the "status quo" is unpardonable."

CCJ President Adrian Saunders and his predecessor Sir Denys Byron had separately called for the Acting Chief Justice and Acting Chancellor to be appointed substantively.

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