

Political BITES

With
ABENA
ROCKCLIFFE

A Guyana Standard
commentary



If Granger means well, he must do for Norton what Jagdeo did for Ali

By **Editor** - June 26, 2025

By Abena Rockcliffe

Last year, former Vice President of the United States, Kamala Harris was asked a very simple question, "Would you have done something differently than (President Joe) Biden?" Harris declared, "There is not a thing that comes to mind." This author believes Harris should have expressed profound appreciation for President Biden's support and point to the many good initiatives rolled out during his term. But, considering the fact that Biden was voted the most unpopular President in over seven decades, 75 years to be exact, this author expected Harris to cleverly make a distinction between Biden's legacy and her impending stewardship.

Harris received severe backlash, and her opponent, Donald Trump, even used her response as part of his campaign. It was clear to me then, and remains clear now, that the weight of a predecessor can easily sink a presidential hopeful unless he or she bites the bullet and creates the necessary distance.

In the Guyana context, presidential hopeful Aubrey Norton is carrying the weight of the David Granger administration. For whatever reason, Norton has not unpacked that load. Following APNU+AFC's defeat in 2020, many of the faces who were prominent in that government disappeared

from the political scene. To this extent, I cite Joseph 'no apologies' Harmon, Carl Greenidge, Basil Williams, Winston Jordan and the late Amna Ally.

With their withdrawal, Norton had a glorious opportunity for a clean slate. Further, the fact that Granger and his clique kept Norton at bay while they were in government, became a gift. There was literally no misstep of his own, during those five years, to haunt Norton.

Norton now represented the dawn of a new era. He could have skillfully admitted to the attempted rigging of the 2020 General and Regional Elections, or at the very least, abandon the narrative of being in possession of the winning Statements of Poll (SOPs). But he did not. Norton stutters to accept the mistakes of APNU+AFC.

Now, add this to the return of Granger to the media space. After years of public silence, Granger returned, vowing his continued support for the PNCr. Some PNCr/APNU supporters saw this as a good thing, an endorsement of some sorts. However, at no point, based on what was reported by Kaieteur News, did Granger offer an endorsement for Norton. He simply pledged lifelong allegiance to the PNCr.

The question now is, can Norton realize any benefit from Granger's support, for the party at least? In Guyanese parlance, is na one and two wrongs occurred under Granger. His regime came across as an incompetent, arrogant, over promising, underdelivering cabal that wanted to hold on to power at all cost.

One might say that it is not inevitable for the sins of a previous president to haunt the ambitions of another from the same clan, considering the Bharrat Jagdeo/Irfaan Ali dynamic.

Under Donald Ramotar's presidency, Jagdeo took a step back, not having an official role in government. Rumor had it, Jagdeo was supposed to become a farmer. But after PPP lost power in 2015, Jagdeo returned with a vengeance.

Jagdeo endorsed Ali just as Biden endorsed Kamala. However, Jagdeo enjoyed 12 years in office, marked by many successes, including his work on the Low Carbon Development Strategy, which earned him the title of Champion of the Earth. Jagdeo still had the love and admiration of supporters as well as the love and, primarily respect, of his comrades.

Just like Biden, Jagdeo was not without baggage, but this author covered most of Jagdeo's press conferences during his five years serving as opposition leader. The entire term was spent campaigning in some form or the other. Jagdeo made a special effort to address many of his perceived skeletons, allowing Ali to be free of that weight. Head on, Jagdeo addressed the claims of 400 black men being murdered during his reign. Jagdeo even called for a Commission of Inquiry

(CoI) into the matter. He also addressed corruption allegations. He didn't shy away from anything, even using the opportunity to highlight corruption under APNU+AFC. The rationale of voters became, if both governments are corrupt, vote for the competent one.

In those days, Ali was scarce; the media did not see him. When asked about Ali, Jagdeo often responded, "He is in the Essequibo campaigning" or, "he is working the ground."

At the time, the author worked at Kaieteur News; the newspaper poked fun at Jagdeo, saying that he had stolen the limelight from Ali. I wrote articles to this effect.

Looking back now, I understand why. Jagdeo is not a people person, he does not enjoy a regular gyaff or knocking dominoes. But he has experience with the media and could speak with authority on any area of governance. Therefore, despite what the media said, they stayed the course, Ali worked the ground, and Jagdeo handled us.

Norton does not have the luxury of a Jagdeo by his side. He is haunted by the legacy of Granger, who dared to speak recently on youth development when young people were ignored by his administration.

No one expects Norton to be completely critical of his party's work in government. But he needs to find a way to move out of the shadow of that government and assert the difference he brings to the table. This author understands the difficulty Norton faces. Even when distancing himself, he must do so strategically. Maybe Norton should hire Mercury.



Editor