

Statement by an involved elder on the Suspension of Normalcy

**By Eusi Kwayana
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President Donald Ramotar has officially called off the so-called Return to Democracy before it could happen. In his latest act of State he seems to combine an actual power to suspend or prorogue the National Assembly with an assumed power to convene the Assembly after a recess. The Minority status of the President's party in the Assembly pushed him in this direction, into this excess, presumably on the expert advice of his unique and eloquent Attorney General, more prepared for other roles.

Viewed from the standpoint of Guyanese constitutional history the President has slapped down the most important reform of the 1980 Constitution, a reform approved by all parties in the National Assembly on the recommendation of a semi-civic, all-party Constitutional Reform Commission (CRC), chaired by the PPP. It was given force in which allows a no confidence vote compelling the government to resign and to call elections. This had not been possible in the original 1980 Constitution. It was a democratic advance consented to by the PPP, the PNC and the WPA and non-party opinion. In undermining and blocking, with strong arm tactics, the debate on the AFC's no confidence motion, the President has undermined the main measure since 1992 towards democracy. And he does this, as he claims, in order to allow negotiations with the opposition parties and a return to normalcy.

Observers may recall that the results of the November 2011 general elections gave a mandate to be shared between the President and the National Assembly. When asked in an interview with Sunday Stabroek on December 2011 for my opinion I expressed the view that the voters had voted for a healing of the nation. The President had the option in that situation of opening negotiations with the opposition parties for a government of national unity, reflecting the decision of the voters. When I argued the case for such an administration in one of several letters, a Guyanese constitutional expert wrote to me privately saying that the argument was "clear and convincing."

The best remembered response of the President was that the opposition had rigged the elections. Later, and independently Member of the Elections Commission, Mr. Vincent Alexander, confirmed publicly, without denial by the PPP, that he had exposed and prevented an attempt to juggle the results to give the new president an overall majority. He did not go beyond blaming an official of the Commission.

The political parties in Guyana will no doubt keep to their horse race notions of politics. Agreement is ruled out. It is win or lose. In their view agreement is a sign of weakness. The Guyanese electorate, they think, has no right to vote that way, they must give one party the victory or "suffa!" This is a race for thoroughbreds, seems to be their argument. However, with no disrespect to horses trained for the track, I dare to suggest that our people need human political relations generally, and especially in matters of governance

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