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End game

By *Stabroek News* On March 20, 2020 @ 2:01 am In Editorial |

There are some things in life that are so preposterous they seem beyond belief. How is it possible in this day and age in a country where the rule of law supposedly holds sway that attempts would be made to steal an election – not behind closed doors, but in full public view? And how is it possible in this day and age that there are people who would think they could escape the sanctions attendant on electoral fraud after accredited overseas observers and foreign diplomats had deemed the results not credible? And how is it possible in this day and age that there are people who could even entertain the thought of thwarting an officially invited Caricom team from undertaking a recount of votes in order to establish which party had won? Inconceivable though it must seem to those living in more regular democracies, Guyana has such people.

Particularly in the case of more recent developments one has to ask what the longer term aims of the perpetrators of these illegalities and aberrations really are. It is possible, although by no means certain, that these evolved in response to events. After Mr Mingo, the Returning Officer for Region Four, had announced the first set of results on March 5 on the basis of an illegal spreadsheet, and the opposition obtained an injunction against an official declaration, Minister Joseph Harmon had conveyed to the press confidence that it would be discharged, and Mr David Granger could be sworn in.

Perhaps at that stage those who were conniving at fraud thought that the spreadsheet might be sufficient for their purposes – i.e. to secure the return to office of the coalition government – and while they would have expected an election petition, they might have assumed that in our court system it could be delayed and the legal process dragged out. As it was the Chief Justice voided the declaration, and in a ruling on March 11 which was clarified on March 13, Mr Mingo was required to proceed with transparency in the tabulation process utilising the statements of poll. He did not operate in line with the ruling.

From March 4 foreign observer missions had been indicating by their words and actions that they did not regard the 'declared' Region Four results as credible, and would not certify them as such. In addition to locally-based western diplomats, the US Congress, the US State Department, UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab, Common-wealth Secretary General Patricia Scotland and various others all spoke out, making it clear that the threat of non-recognition and sanctions would loom over any government which came into office via a process which was defiled by

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Perhaps it was this which persuaded President Granger to request Caricom to send a high-level team to undertake a recount, a proposal to which Opposition Leader Bharrat Jagdeo acceded. It was an acceptable route out of his dilemma and would have allowed the declaration of a result which would have more than likely not be well received by his supporters, but which at least would have saved face. So why, one has to ask, has this admirable approach to a resolution been obstructed?

The team arrived, but there were delays first over an aide-memoire signed by the two leaders which Gecom required, as well as all kinds of nonsense – for some of which the police were responsible – at the Arthur Chung Convention Centre where the ballot boxes were taken, and then because of legal advice sought from the Parliamentary Counsel about an order intended to facilitate a recount. Mr Charles Fung-A-Fatt advised the commission not to issue such an order on the grounds it would be in contravention of the Constitution and the Representation of the People Act.

As if all that were not enough, unbelievably and inexplicably an application for an interim court injunction to prevent the recount was filed. The basis for this was that declarations had been made by the Returning Officers from all 10 regions and those declarations were final, in addition to which Gecom was the sole supervisory authority responsible for the conduct of elections. The matter will be heard today. In the meantime one imagines it was a very exasperated Caricom team which flew home after three days of all this utter foolishness.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has now issued the clearest warning to all individuals who seek to benefit from electoral fraud and form illegitimate governments, saying they would be "subject to a variety of serious consequences from the United States." The full import of this cannot be lost on those who are still set on fraudulence where our elections processes are concerned, so what exactly is their end game now?

Surely they cannot believe that a government classified as illegal by the western international community could function in the face of sanctions? Unless in a kind of dreamland they have persuaded themselves that China, or perhaps even Russia could save the country from the effect of these? If that is indeed so, they are quite delusional. Alternatively, one has to speculate whether all this talk about a National Government from very well-meaning sources may not now have inspired some of the manipulators to make that the objective. It would at least give them a role in government. Enigmatic comments from at least one person with links to the government side may have given this a little traction.

Then we have President Granger himself. He asked for the recount and he agreed to the terms of that recount along with Mr Jagdeo. And after this humiliation what does he have to say for

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himself? True to form he has not managed anything more meaningful than his usual feeble mantra about always abiding by the law. What is he talking about? It was none other than Ms Ulita Moore who applied for this latest injunction, and she was an APNU candidate for Region Four. Why did he not stop her? Did he not know about what she was doing? If so, that would be very damning. And as for abiding by the law, he has a history of trying to use the law to subvert the rule of law.

It is hard to believe the President would have engaged in outright trickery against his fellow Caricom heads, and that he would have brought a team here under false pretences so the declaration of the true results could be delayed once again. That just does not seem plausible. But what has happened since Saturday suggests he does not have control of the party which he leads, that he is a poor administrator, that he did not take the kind of measures in relation to his own people which would have allowed the recount to proceed and that he is very weak.

It may be that there are those around him who feel the Mottley Agreement did not go far enough, since they recall its predecessor, the Herdmanston Accord of 1998, which as well as a recount, truncated Presi-dent Janet Jagan's term of office and set in motion the constitutional reform of 2000. Maybe they think further delays will secure more. If so, it should be said that these are different times, and they won't secure more, for variety of reasons.

Of course, the opposition and many others fear, not without reason, that the hardliners on the governing party's side are seeking delays in order to tamper with the ballot boxes and revive an old-fashioned rigging process. The security of these is para-mount, and all the parties which contested the elections, as well as observers should be satisfied with the safety arrangements.

And as for the police, the Commissioner is advised to get it clear what their role is; their recent behaviour at the Region Four office and the convention centre cannot be condoned.

So the question arises, where do we go from here? We do not know the outcome of today's court case as yet, but whatever it is, President Granger cannot allow himself to be sworn in on the basis of flawed results; that would be a travesty for which he and the nation would pay heavily. Whatever avenue is found to get to that point, there has to be a recount, and the best thing he can do at this stage for himself, his party and his country is to take a more active role to ensure that that happens. It is the only endgame that makes rational sense.

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