

Father of the Guyanese Nation.



When the casket arrived at the Babu John Cremation site the sun was shining, and the Drum Corps of the GDF was playing a steady march. The casket for the last time was lifted on the shoulders of the GDF soldiers. As they moved towards the entrance to the crematorium, there was a sudden downpour of rain. People felt that it was as if the gods had spoken! The body was lifted out of the casket in a white sheet and placed on the pyre by Dr. Jagan's son, his brothers, his son-in-law, and a few members of the PPP leadership. After laying his body on the pyre they continued to hold up a tarpaulin over him until the rain had stopped. At around 12.30 p.m. while the pyre was being prepared, the final prayers were said by representatives of the Christian, Hindu and Muslim religions.



Mrs. Jagan placing flowers on the pyre.



At around 1.15 p.m. after all preparations had been made, Dr. Jagan's children, Nadira and Cheddi (Joey) together holding on to a single torch made of wood with cloth wrapped around the end, set the pyre alight. The empty casket was then placed on the fire. At around 1.30 p.m. President Jagan was accorded a military flypast by a fleet of five planes and helicopters.



The entire proceedings had been a simple ceremony in a simple rural burial ground, something Dr. Jagan would have wanted. There was no pomp, except for some of the usual military ceremonial that are associated with funerals for presidents, but even these were kept to the barest minimum, as he had done while still alive. The silence and reverence with which the mourners gathered at the cremation site was phenomenal!



On Monday, March 17, Janet Jagan along with her two children departed Georgetown in an army helicopter. Cheddi Jagan's ashes were scattered into the Berbice, Essiquibo and Demerara Rivers.

Farewell! You will never be forgotten.



After this very moving and heart-wrenching ceremony, the casket was escorted out of the Public Buildings by Members of Parliament for first a short stopover at Freedom House, the place he had spent a great part of his life working out of, and then for the long trek to Berbice, where he was scheduled to be cremated on March 11, 1997.

Janet Jagan, her children and their spouses, along with other leading members of the PPP followed the truck bearing the casket on foot to PPP headquarters, Freedom House. People lined the streets along the way, and joined in the march. By the time it stopped in front of Freedom House the entire street was filled with people, packed close together (above). Party banners were handed out to be worn, the Party song was sung and the Party flag was draped over one half of the casket, the Guyana flag remaining on the other half. People were crying and weeping as they continued to sing freedom songs that Dr. Jagan had loved so much.

It took five-and-a-half hours to traverse the 67 miles from Georgetown to the Rosignol stelling on the West Coast of Berbice. Thousands of people lined the main roadway along the entire route, waving black flags, clutching his posters and strewing the path of the truck with flowers and showering the coffin with more flowers and rice. When we arrived at the New Amsterdam stelling at 6.20 p.m. it had already turned dark. People lined the roadways from the stelling with candles held in the palm of their hands. People running on foot and on bicycles followed alongside as far as they could. As we drove along the road to Albion, we saw candles lit inside of endless numbers of brown paper bags that had been placed by residents on the grassy roadside. Diyas, bottles and emergency lamps were also used along the roadside to light the way to Albion.

Because the size of the crowd on arrival at the Albion Sports Club Ground at around 9.30 p.m. was so unbelievable, it was decided to extend the hours of viewing to continue throughout the night and into the next morning.



Scenes at the Albion Sports Complex, where President Jagan lay in state for 36 hours of non-stop viewing. It was unbelievable that people would continue to pay their respects during the late hours of the night and early hours of the morning. This beautiful banner says it all!

By about 8 a.m. the next morning, March 11, 1997, the queues stretched for about two miles and still people kept joining the lines. We realised that it would be impossible for all these people to have a chance to pay their last respects to Dr. Jagan by the scheduled noon deadline originally planned for the cremation. It was decided to postpone the cremation for the next day and to extend the viewing right through the day and night until 8 a.m. the next day, March 12, 1997.

Shortly after the viewing had tapered off at 8 a.m. the casket was again placed on the truck for a short journey from Albion to the head of the road that would take them to Ankerville, Dr. Jagan's birthplace, where all the members of his family spent some quiet and private time with him.



After viewing the body, most of the people traveled the four miles to the cremation site, on foot, by truck or bus. They did not seem to care that the cremation had been postponed for the next day. They just wanted to be there! Thousands, many who had traveled from all parts of the country, remained throughout the entire night into the next day until after the cremation, not wanting to lose a spot! The cremation site itself was all open space, there was no shelter from the rain or the sweltering sun, except for a few coconut trees and the special stands built for the dignitaries. President Jagan's people showed their love for him, again, in this show of endurance.

The US Government accorded President Jagan a full military Guard of Honor farewell on Friday, March 7. Earlier in the day, the Guyana Airways plane had arrived at Andrews Air Force Base with a 40 member Honor Guard, members of Dr. Jagan's family, Government Ministers and other senior State and political functionaries, to escort him home. Above US military personal bear his casket draped in the Guyana flag.



His family view the body lying in the open casket for the first time on arrival in Guyana (above). Thousands of Guyanese lined the entire route from Timehri Airport to State House in Georgetown.



From 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, people, young and old, from all walks of life, from every political persuasion, from all religious backgrounds and from all races, came from every corner of Guyana to file slowly past President Jagan as he lay in state under a green and white striped canopy, at State House. Some would walk by crying, some would linger on and sing a prayer or two, many would place a single flower or mala on the casket but most would hug or shake the hand of the family member, standing at the head or foot of his casket. Most of the time the queue stretched beyond the gate of the Main Street entrance and onto the street, reaching as far as two to three blocks to the north and south of the entrance. People, including many with small children waited patiently in these long lines, during the blazing sun and pouring rain for the two days.



Photo of some his grandchildren, standing guard over him. They spent many hours standing there, thanking everyone for coming. Sometimes they would cry, but on the whole they were very strong. Many of the older mourners would stop and hug and kiss them, telling them what a great man their grandfather was, and all that he had done to better their lives.



On Monday morning March 10, Dr. Jagan's casket was taken on a gun-carriage down Main Street on the way to the 9 a.m. State Funeral ceremony held at the Public Buildings, formally known as the Parliament Buildings. It was a fitting place to hold such a ceremony for in December of that year he would have celebrated the completion of 50 years as a Parliamentarian. The news of Dr. Jagan's passing was received with great sadness in Guyana, and around the world. Messages of condolences from world leaders began to pour into Guyana immediately following his death.



With former Tanzanian President, Julius Nyerere, Chairman of the Geneva-based South Centre, and poet Martin Carter, November 1996.



President Jagan addressing the World Food Summit held in Rome from November 13-17, 1996 (above). There he was in the final years of his life devoting all of it for the economic and social upliftment of the lives of not only the Guyanese people, but especially also of those of the poorer countries of the world. He was an inter-nationalist in the truest sense. He was a statesman who lived for this time and beyond.

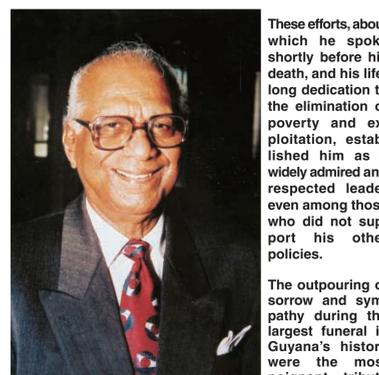


On the evening of February 14, 1997, Dr. Jagan had a heart attack that proved to be fatal. The photo below was Dr. Jagan's last goodbye to the people of Guyana, taken on February 15, 1997 as he leaves the Georgetown Hospital by ambulance. At the request of the Guyana Government, the US administration made all the necessary arrangements to have him flown out for medical care, to the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington D.C. where he persistently battled through until he passed away on March 6, 1997, just 16 days short of his 79th birthday. Here was a man never refusing to give up, even in his final hour. Here was a true warrior. A fighter to the very end.



Cheddi Jagan's contributions to Guyana as a political leader, Chief Minister, Premier, Opposition Leader and President are profound and multi-dimensional. As Guyana's first working-class political leader, he saw before anyone else the fundamental necessity for political unity.

Hence, his most important legacy, the PPP, started as a movement of the united working-class allied to farmers and professionals and business people. Unfortunately, the political unity established in 1950 with the formation of the PPP was destroyed in 1955, but Cheddi Jagan's political career after that was marked by continuous and painstaking efforts to recapture the unity of 1950-1953.



These efforts, about which he spoke shortly before his death, and his life-long dedication to the elimination of poverty and exploitation, established him as a widely admired and respected leader even among those who did not support his other policies.

The outpouring of sorrow and sympathy during the largest funeral in Guyana's history were the most poignant tribute to his memory. He has left behind an unblemished political career. He earned a reputation as a man of honour and decency. Because of his political dominance and fiery rhetoric, his spirit will continue to be with all Guyanese for a long time to come. No Guyanese can claim that they were not touched by this master politician - this true son of Guyana. He will forever remain the Father of the Guyanese Nation.



Despite his long years in the opposition before 1982, Cheddi Jagan maintained his stature as an international figure of renown. Following his Presidential victory, he firmly established himself as a world statesman, and his ideas for a New Global Human Order are winning support in all corners of the world. His proposal for a Regional Integration Fund for the smaller economies of the Americas has already won the total support of the CARICOM and Central American nations.



On November 8, 1996 President and Mrs. Jagan completed national registration for the 1997 elections.



With President Sam Nujomo of Namibia.



With Prime Minister of Canada, Jean Chretien in June 1996.



This photo was taken in November 1996 when President Jagan led a delegation to a number of Arab States including Kuwait, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Syria.



With the Emir of Kuwait (above) and the Emir of Bahrain in November 1996 (below).



This photo was taken in August 1996 during the International Conference on a New Global Human Order held in Guyana and organized by President Jagan.



Cheddi Jagan influenced the political life of Guyana for fifty years, and in so doing, established standards of personal conduct, ideals, and principles which will guide Guyana's destiny far into the next century. His life was marked by controversy mainly because he was a pioneer, and the ideas he propounded and the course he charted were innovative. Frequently, he advanced ideas long before they obtained general acceptance. Hence, he developed a reputation, justly deserved, as a controversial fighter. His proposal for a New Global Human Order, which is attracting wide support, confirmed his standing as a statesman of profound intellect and international stature. Indeed, his life's work had already earned him a level of respect and prestige which was accorded to few Third World leaders.



With Prime Minister of Canada, Jean Chretien in June 1996.



With Archbishop Desmond Tutu in South Africa.



With Chairman of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, Yasser Arafat while on an official visit to South Africa for the inauguration of President Nelson Mandela.



Meeting with Pope John Paul II in October 1996 at the Vatican.