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Lalshwar Singh

Memorial Service for the Late President Jagan  
held at St James's Church, Piccadilly,  
on Sunday 25th May 1997

Your Excellencies  
Distinguished Guests  
Fellow Guyanese  
Ladies and Gentlemen

Tomorrow, as you know, we celebrate Guyana's 31st Anniversary of Independence. We will mark this auspicious occasion, this year, with some sadness. I say sadness because the man who has been in the forefront of our noble and patriotic struggle for independence and the restoration of democracy; the man who has ignited and sustained the fire in us, for over 50 years, for freedom, justice and self-dignity is not with us to celebrate this important date in our country's history.

What a cruel turn of history it has been. Today when Guyana is experiencing such important and significant strides in the transformation of our country, we have lost such an outstanding leader and distinguished statesman. A leader who, through his indomitable courage and relentless struggle, earned the accolade, as the father of the nation.

But amidst the grief and anguish, we take heart for Dr Jagan has left us an enduring legacy. The challenge facing us now is to work assiduously to fulfil his dreams for Guyana, and the people to whom he devoted his entire life.

It is said that Dr Jagan's early days of life on the sugar plantation and his experience of grinding poverty and lack of opportunities moulded his destiny. But it was the seven years that he spent, as a student, in the **United States** that made him even more political conscious. Returning to Guyana in 1943, it was in 1946, with his wife, Mrs Janet Jagan, that he made a formidable impact as he entered the political arena. Through his tireless struggle in Guyana's Legislative Council, he served notice on the political establishment of the day. He made it clear that the Guyanese people's interest must be paramount in the pursuit of independence and the development of Guyana. Often alone, he struggled single-handedly to secure and protect the fundamental rights of the working people. **Yes, his adversaries knew then, the struggle was on; the battle lines were drawn. Alas, the people found in Dr Jagan a leader in whom they could place their confidence and trust. A true champion of the working people.**

He made the people aware that we shared the same world, but, unfortunately, we did not share the same opportunities. His belief in universal freedom from poverty and hunger, disease and discrimination, as well as access to free education and a clean and safe environment struck a chord in the hearts of the Guyanese people. But he warned that these cherished rights could not be achieved without struggle.

It was in the 40's and 50's, in those early years, that he first inspired us by his total commitment to the struggle that we Guyanese must assert ourselves and unite for our rights and self-dignity. **Dr Jagan's contribution in this particular period of our country's history has been most inspiring, courageous and outstanding.**

His dream of freedom and vision of the future led to probably one of the most important developments in Guyana, and amongst one of his greatest achievements - the formation of the People's Progressive Party (PPP) in 1950. He was the fountain of inspiration in creating a multi-ethnic political party which was the architect of Guyana's independence and subsequently, with other political parties, responsible for the restoration of democracy in Guyana on 5 October 1992. The history of the PPP and its achievements over the past 47 years must be considered a glowing tribute to this extra-ordinary man. **Even moreso, when every imaginable excuse was used to denigrate or destroy the PPP, and thus tarnish the image of Dr Jagan.**

His faith in the people and the people's confidence in him did not end with the removal of his popularly - elected government in 1953. In 1957 and again in 1961 he led his party to victory. Incidentally, this was a period of real progress in Guyana. **The country at this particular period enjoyed one of the highest standards of education and one of the highest standards of living in the Caribbean Region. The simple truth is that on every occasion Dr Jagan was in Government, Guyana prospered.**

On his election, on 5 October 1992, as Guyana's first democratically elected President since Independence in 1966, he inherited an economy in a state of prolonged decline for more than two decades, a ruined physical and social infrastructure, an unmanageable burden of debt and a demoralised people. In the 4 1/2 years of his Presidency, he has turned the economy around, improved the image of the country and has given hope to Guyanese disillusioned with what had become of their beloved country.

In the last four years, Guyana has been singled out for considerable praise by the International Financial Institutions, the European Union and other countries for the way the government has managed the economy and democratised the country.

**Dr Jagan, as promised, restored to the Guyanese people democracy, human rights and unprecedented economic growth with social justice.**

**It is therefore a great tragedy for Guyana, the people of Guyana and even the Caribbean Region that he was denied his legitimate democratic right to serve his country and people for 24 years.**

In spite of the removal of his first Administration in 1953, the destabilisation of his government in the 60's and having been kept out of power for 24 years, Dr Jagan remain convinced that there could be no justice without democracy. And where there is no justice there can be no secure peace.

He knew, however, that democracy, like liberty, justice and other social and political rights is not "given", it had to be earned through courage, resolution and sacrifice. It is largely due to his democratic instincts that he survived those long years in opposition and retained the confidence, respect and admiration of the people.

But Dr Jagan's concept of democracy was much wider and deeper than the formal word connotes. He stressed and worked tirelessly for a dynamic, comprehensive and responsive conception of democracy - one enriched by the existence of different cultures and traditions; one which takes account of the needs and aspirations of all of Guyana's citizens. As I speak, I can distinctly hear him emphasising again and again that democracy cannot be meaningful unless it is representative, consultative and participatory.

The same applies to his concept of human rights - which is flowering in Guyana today. For over 50 years he fought for basic human rights which would guarantee a tranquil, dignified existence - free from want and fear. He saw and recognised people as a precious component of the state. These are principles and beliefs which he advocated and which made him a formidable politician and a distinguished leader.

There were other qualities that made Dr Jagan an outstanding statesman. He was a man of great warmth and charm. It was a sign of his greatness that he always carry himself with great humility and integrity. He cared deeply and passionately for the working people and the rights of the individual, about the suffering of others and making a better world for us all to live in. These qualities endeared him not only to the Guyanese people, but the people of the Caribbean and world over.

**It is a tremendous tribute to him that at the end of the cold war he was the first Socialist to be popularly and democratically elected to such high office.**

**Most importantly he stood out for decency and honesty in public life. Many might not have agreed with his views, but never would they question his sincerity and integrity.**

This is truly reflected in what the Washington based Council on Hemispheric Affairs had to say about the late President:

QUOTE

“Amidst a desert of third world corruption Jagan deserves to be recognised for what he is - a world class leader of impeccable integrity who is indisputably motivated by a genuine concern for the fate of his fellow citizens rather than seeking fortuitous blips in popularity polls .... Jagan has maintained his position as Latin America’s most admired political leader and the one most attuned to the suffering of the bulk of his country’s inhabitants.”

END OF QUOTE

This brings me to yet another important quality of Dr Jagan. A quality we have seen during his Presidency. **It was not his appetite for power, for revenge and destruction but rather demonstrated a genuine desire to find consensus in addressing national issues. Moreover, he was magnanimous in victory and kind and respectful to his adversaries.**

It is difficult to speak about Dr Jagan’s life-long struggle without mentioning his continued search for unity in Guyana. It was his earnest dream and desire to recapture the spirit of 1953. This, as you know, was a crucial period in our country’s history in our struggle for independence. **That this unity was sabotaged and destroyed is now admitted history.**

In his short term of Presidency, Dr Jagan demonstrated, by example, that all humanity has the potential to produce a result which will confirm that racism has no future, that the domination of one people by another has no place in Guyana, that it is possible for a multi-cultural society to thrive in a situation of peace and harmony and that the people of our dear land have as much a capacity, as any other, to achieve racial harmony. He has left us with the realisation that we share a common destiny which we must shape together, as equals.

Dr Jagan was not only a political legend in the Caribbean. He was a politician of international repute. A true internationalist.