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**Janet Jagan dies**  
Guyana's woman of 'firsts'...

Rickey Singh  
Sunday, March 29th 2009



FLASHBACK: Guyana president Janet Jagan gestures as she hears results of the general election at the headquarters of her People's Progressive Party in Georgetown, back in December 1997. -Photo: AP

JANET JAGAN, Guyana's most famous political woman of "firsts", is dead.

She died early yesterday morning at the State-run Georgetown Hospital of an "abdominal aneurism", according to Health Minister Dr Leslie Ramsammy. She was 88.

Widow of the late Guyanese Executive President Cheddi Jagan, the United States-born Janet Rosenberg of Chicago, Illinois, had spent most of her adult years in the party politics of Guyana alongside her husband.

Together, they had represented a formidable political duo in the turbulent politics from the 1950s to the 1990s, she as the matriarch of the People's Progressive Party (PPP) she had helped to form and which is among the oldest of political movements in the English-speaking Caribbean.

Janet Jagan would be remembered as a tough political battle-axe who had the privilege of serving in various political positions in both colonial British Guiana and post-independence Guyana.

Among them, as the first woman councillor of the City of Georgetown; first woman Deputy Speaker of Parliament; first woman Minister of Home Affairs, first woman Prime Minister.

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Eventually she rose to the climax of positions of power when she became the first woman Executive President of Guyana from 1997 (following the death of her husband in office) until 1999, when she retired due to failing health.

On learning of her passing, President Bharrat Jagdeo has cut short his official visit to Middle East countries to return home for funeral arrangements. She is likely to be accorded a State funeral.

Her daughter, Nadira Jagan-Brancier, who lives in Canada, was due to arrive in Guyana yesterday.

In brief

Janet Rosalie Jagan (née Rosenberg) was Guyana's fourth president, serving from December 19, 1997, to August 11, 1999, having previously served as Prime Minister from March 17, 1997, to December 19, 1997.

Jagan was born in Chicago, Illinois, on October 20, 1920. She was educated at the University of Detroit, Wayne University, Michigan State College and Cook County School of Nursing.

In December 1942, while working as a student nurse at Cook County Hospital, she met Cheddi Jagan, who was, at the time, a dentistry student at Northwestern University, Chicago. They married on August 5, 1943, and she moved with him to Guyana in December 1943. In Guyana, she took part in labour activism along with her husband and joined the British Guiana Labour Union.

In 1946, she founded the Women's Political and Economic Organisation and in the same year was also the co-founder of the Political Affairs Committee that was the forerunner to the People's Progressive Party (PPP).

Jagan was elected General Secretary of the PPP, a post she retained for two decades until 1970, when she was elected Deputy Speaker. She was among the political prisoners, including her husband and many others, after the Suspension of the Constitution in 1953.

In 1957, when fresh elections were held and the PPP returned to office, she was appointed Minister of Labour, Health and Housing. In 1963-64, she served as Minister of Home Affairs and Senator, following the death of Minister Claude Christian. She quit as Home Affairs Minister, citing the non-cooperation of a British-controlled police force.

Splitting her time and energy between party headquarters, Freedom House and as editor of the Mirror newspaper, Jagan returned to the Parliament at successive elections in 1973, 1980, 1985 and 1992.

In October 1992, Jagan (Cheddi) became president of Guyana. He served until March 6, 1996, when he died of heart failure. Prime Minister Samuel A Hinds then became president and named Janet Jagan Prime Minister.

After December 1997, she was sworn in as President and Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, a post she resigned due to ill health on August 8, 1999.

**Comments: Janet Jagan dies**

**She will sadly be missed**

Posted: 2009-03-29 02:56:00 AM

Janet Jagan was an inspiration to women and guyanese alike. May she rest in peace.

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