

INTERNATIONAL

Guyana president ailing, successors eyed

Bert Wilkinson
Special to Sentinel-Voice
GEORGETOWN (IPS) — Last month President Janet Jagan spent two days at a private hospital in northern Georgetown, Guyana after complaining of intense pain and exhaustion, following a busy domestic and international schedule in recent weeks.

The news that the head of state, who turns 79 in October, was in intensive care at St. Joseph's Mercy Hospital triggered rumors over the true state of her health and a possible successor, should doctors rule her unfit to continue in office.

Physicians say that Jagan is suffering from a string of illnesses associated with aging.

The list includes hypertension, diabetes and angina, a serious heart condition.

Even though her blood pressure level has been controlled through medication, doctors say they are still worried about an abnormal blood cell count.

"The party [People's

Progressive Party (PPP)] has to begin looking at the question of succession very, very seriously. It is doubtful that she could resume duties very effectively. Quite frankly, I would be surprised if she resumes and remains for a long time," said Dr. Rupert Roopnarine, leader of the opposition Working People's Alliance (WPA) and a respected member of parliament.

Yet, Jagan is planning to return to work, though officials say she will be on a vastly reduced schedule.

When asked whether the party has been discussing the succession question, Nagamootoo said this was not done formally at the most recent central committee meeting, but would have to be addressed at the level of congress.

"It is important that Mrs. Jagan stay around for the sake of unity and to avoid the feeling of insecurity in the party ranks," said Information Minister Moses Nagamootoo, one of the persons being looked at for the position.

Other names being touted are Party Central Committee Member and respected attorney Ralph Ramkarran, Cabinet Secretary Dr. Roger Luncheon and Finance Minister Bharrat Jagdeo, who had been singled out by Jagan during the December 1997 elections as her heir apparent.

Before taking ill, Jagan had participated in a cancer awareness walk, then headed to the airport to fly to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, via Miami — a combined flight schedule of about 15 hours.

She was among several Caribbean leaders who were participating in the first European-Latin American summit. In fact, she had done the Rio run twice in the last six weeks, the first time on an official visit to Brasilia.

Back home on June 30, she resumed normal duties and later in the day attended a Canada Day reception.

In between, she had travelled around the country officiating at the formal opening of several projects, a schedule that has always worried those closest to her, including her son Cheddi Jr.,

and daughter Nadira Brancier-Jagan.

When Cheddi Jagan, Sr. died at the Walter Reed Memorial Hospital in the U.S. two years ago, the torch passed to Prime Minister and First Vice President Samuel A. Hinds. But under a complex plan worked out before the 1992 elections, Hinds stepped down and allowed Janet Jagan to become the party's candidate.

American-born Janet Jagan, who married Guyanese East Indian dentist Cheddi Jagan in Chicago in 1943, came to Guyana the same year and plunged almost immediately into local politics, helping her husband to establish the governing PPP.

Cheddi Jagan was later to become the country's first local head of government in colonial Guiana and later president at the turn of the 1990s.

He died at a U.S. hospital in March 1997 of heart-related diseases. Nine months later, his wife decided to run as the party's candidate in elections.

WORLD BRIEFS

U.N. STUDY REPORTS RURAL WOMEN THE MOST NEGLECTED

UNITED NATIONS (IPS) — Rural women often have higher productivity than their male counterparts, but still remain the most neglected in society, according to a U.N. report recently released. The 13-page study, titled "Improvement of the Situation of Women in Rural Areas," said that women make the most significant contributions to rural economies despite the fact they are mired in poverty and lack productive assets and resources. "By not counting the unpaid work of women on family farms, official figures have consistently undervalued the contribution of women to agricultural production," the study notes. "Women are among the poorest of the poor," said U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan at the recent annual meeting of the Economic and Social Council in Geneva. "They work long days, walk long distances to fetch water and must find time and energy for informal sector activities which are their only source of income. Their jobs are truly never done."

WORLD GROUP PROPOSES 13-MONTH CALENDAR

SAN JOSE (IPS) — An international organization plans to request the Vatican and United Nations' support in promoting international use of the Mayan calendar, replacing the 12-month Gregorian calendar. The World 13 Moon Calendar Change Peace Movement believes the world should adopt the Mayan "tzolkin," a calendar with 13 months, each 28 days long. The promoters hope that the new millennium will begin with a calendar that is not based upon human error and which mirrors the cycles of nature, putting the world in greater harmony with natural rhythms. "The problem with the calendar the world uses now is that it has a poor distribution of days," explained Alonso Urrea, the movement's Latin American spokesman. "Every year, the moon rotates around the earth 13 times." The current time measurements are therefore irregular and incorrect, because "one month is cut" every year, causing perpetual confusion, Urrea maintained.

Sierra Leone seeks help disarming

FREETOWN, Sierra Leone (AP) — With hundreds of rebel soldiers streaming into the capital following the signing of peace accords, the government on Sunday asked for help in disarming the fighters and returning them to society.

"The government has no funds available and can't go it alone," Information Minister Julius Spencer said in an appeal to the international community.

Spencer urged foreign nations to give all they could so the fighters could be properly disarmed, fed and housed in the West African nation.

Western governments have promised assistance and international lenders are expected in Freetown soon to put together an emergency aid package for the bankrupt government.

The July 7 signing of peace accords formally ended eight years of civil war that

killed and maimed tens of thousands. But two previous peace agreements signed this decade have failed, and many people fear fighting could begin again.

Freetown newspapers have been filled with stories over the past few days of hundreds of rebel soldiers coming into the city. While they have brought no guns with them — apparently hiding them in the countryside — neither have they disarmed as the peace agreement requires.

Late last week, the government broadcast an appeal on state television and radio, urging the fighters — who were granted amnesty by the peace agreement — to hand in their weapons and register with authorities.

"Combatants should not be roaming around Freetown or any other location," the statement said, listing centers where the soldiers of the Revolutionary United Front rebel movement could turn in their guns.

Miss Universe inspires pride, scorn

Special to Sentinel-Voice
MAUN (AIA/GIN) — Botswana's women's groups are finding themselves at a crossroads following the crowning of Mpule Kwelagobe as Miss Universe.

Should they join in the display of national pride — which is bordering on hysteria — or should they continue to condemn beauty contests as little more than meat markets?

Such is the public ecstasy over the 19-year-old's selection that few activists will even discuss the issue on

the record, afraid of being branded unpatriotic.

One of the few feminists who agreed to be identified is Anne Sandenbergh, founder of the country's only rape crisis center, and even she agreed to talk only in a personal capacity.

"Mpule has given the morale of Botswana a tremendous boost," she said carefully, "But quite frankly, beauty contests are no more than cattle shows and the way women are judged is frightful. How much better it would

have been if she had won a sports title." Yet, Emang Basadi, one of the country's oldest and largest women's organizations, has officially welcomed Mpule's win with an advertisement in the national press.

"To all young Botswana women we say: 'The sky is the limit, Mpule has set the pace. Mpule has proved that women can take Botswana to greater heights, especially in the next millennium. Cast your vote for a woman in the coming general elections.'"

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