

US hopes Lankans will together fight terrorism

An editorial broadcast by the Voice of America on May 7 reiterated what President Bill Clinton said in response to the assassinations of President Ranasinghe Premadasa and Lalith Athulathmudali that the United States hopes "the people of Sri Lanka will join together at this difficult time to renew their commitment to the fight against terrorism and to underscore their support for their democratic institutions."

The editorial said political assassins have struck again in Sri Lanka. On May 1, President Ranasinghe Premadasa was murdered on his way to a political rally in Colombo, the Sri Lankan

capital. He was killed by a suicide bomber who detonated explosives strapped to his body. About two dozen other people were killed in the bombing, and several dozen more were wounded.

In a statement released by the White House, President Bill Clinton condemned the assassination of the Sri Lankan President as a "brutal act of terrorism". Clinton said that "President Premadasa served his country with great distinction. As Prime Minister and then as President, he worked tirelessly to promote his country's development and raise the standard of living of all Sri Lankans. His efforts made a real

difference to his fellow citizens."

The murder of President Premadasa was the second major political assassination in Sri Lanka in recent days. Only about a week before, Lalith Athulathmudali, a prominent opposition leader, was gunned down at a political rally.

Such political violence has plagued Sri Lanka for the past decade. The violence has included assassinations of political leaders in Colombo and other cities, as well as massacres of thousands of ordinary citizens in villages throughout the country.

About 74 per cent of Sri Lanka's 17 million people are ethnic Sinhalese, and about 18 per cent are Tamils. Most Sinhalese are Buddhists and most Tamils are Hindus, although sizeable minorities in each group are Christian. About 7 per cent of Sri Lanka's people are Muslims. In the 1980s, a gradually escalating conflict broke out between the government of Sri Lanka and separatist elements among the Tamils. The separatists entered negotiations with the government in April 1989 but broke them off about a year later. Since the insurgency was resumed thousands of Sri Lankans have been killed.