

Sri Lanka ravaged by assassinations. (1994, October 25). *The Ottawa Citizen*.



CARNAGE: The bodies of some of the more than 50 victims of the Sri Lankan suicide bombing early Monday lie on the ground in Colombo shortly after the explosion

Sri Lanka ravaged by assassinations

By Barbara Crossette
The New York Times

UNITED NATIONS — Little more than a decade ago, Sri Lanka was a model of civic development in the Third World, with a literate voting public and an impressive crop of potential political leaders.

Now, most of those leaders are dead, victims of ethnic militancy or intense political rivalries that turned lethal in unsettled times.

The latest politician to die, in an explosion so powerful that it took the lives of at least 52 people, was Gamini Dissanayake, leader of the parliamentary opposition and a presidential candidate in an election scheduled for Nov. 9.

Dissanayake, his campaign manager, and several major figures in his United National Party were killed early Monday morning as the candidate began to walk away from the stage where he had addressed a political rally. More than 200 people were injured in the blast.

Dissanayake will be given a state

funeral on Saturday.

Prime Minister Chandrika Kumaratunga, who took office in August, said Monday that the death of her political rival was particularly regrettable, since her government was committed to "wiping out all forms of political violence and introducing democracy and decency to Sri Lankan politics."

Raja Gunasekera, a human rights lawyer in New York and a member of Sri Lanka's delegation to the General Assembly, on Monday reflected the view of others familiar with the situation when he said while the news was "a deep shock" to those who knew Dissanayake, the killing also raised the thought that "this type of political assassination doesn't come as a complete surprise."

On Monday, the Sri Lankan police said they thought Dissanayake's assassin may have been a woman with a bomb packed with metal pellets, strapped to her body. They found a female head on a nearby rooftop.

Suspicion for the bombing immediately fell on the Tamil Tigers, who are leading a violent campaign for an independent homeland in the north and east.

They were accused in the suicide bomb killings of former Sri Lankan president Ranasinghe Premadasa in 1993 and former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi of India in 1991.

However, in radio messages to their fighters, the Tigers' leaders said they were not involved in Sunday's attack.

The circumstances were similar to those surrounding the assassination of Gandhi, in May 1991, as he was about to begin a political rally. After that explosion, the partial head of a woman whom police believe was the killer was found nearby on the grass.

That case is now in court, where Indian officials are trying to prove that Gandhi was killed by ethnic minority Tamils associated with the Tamil Tigers.

With files from the Associated Press