

Sri Lankan bomber kills 50 vote delayed. (1994, October 24). *The Gazette*.

Sri Lankan bomber kills 50, vote delayed

AP/REUTER

COLOMBO – A bomb blast at an election rally outside the Sri Lankan capital killed about 50 people yesterday, including the opposition candidate for president and top leaders of his party.

The assassination of Gamini Disanayake came less than three weeks before the election and just before peace talks were to resume with Tamil Tiger guerrillas. The 11-year-old civil war in the South Asian country has killed more than 34,000 people.

Dissanayake was an outspoken critic of the talks that began this month and the government warned him three weeks ago the Tigers would try to kill him.

The bomb ripped through the rally on the outskirts of Colombo shortly before midnight. Dissanayake had just finished speaking and was stepping off the stage to greet supporters at his last stop of the

day, a Defence Ministry spokesman said on condition of anonymity.

"It was a human bomb," a senior military officer said of the midnight explosion.

"There was a person in the crowd in the second or third row who had explosives. Then there was a blast which was carried forward towards the stage."

There was no immediate claim of responsibility and police said it was too early to say who might have set the blast. But the Tigers have a long history of assassinations and suicide bombs.

They were blamed for the killing last year of President Ranasinghe Premadasa and of Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in May 1991. Dozens of Sri Lankan politicians and military leaders have also been killed by bombs.

A hospital official said about 50 bodies had been taken to General Hospital in Colombo following yesterday's blast

but they were in such bad condition an exact count was impossible. The Defence Ministry spokesman said more than 200 people were wounded but he could not confirm the hospital's death toll.

Among the others killed were the United National Party's general-secretary, two former cabinet ministers and a member of parliament.

An emergency meeting of Prime Minister Chandrika Kumaratunga's cabinet decided to postpone the Nov. 9 election, in which she was to stand as a candidate for the governing alliance.

The armed forces also were put on alert to prevent rioting and President Dingiri Banda Wijetunga declared an indefinite curfew.

After 17 years in power, the United National Party lost control of the government to Kumaratunga in August's parliamentary election.

Kumaratunga, whose People's Alliance pledged to end the war, immediately offered to hold unconditional talks. The United National Party had refused to negotiate until rebels laid down their arms.

The Tigers have been fighting since 1983 for an independent homeland for the Tamil minority in the north and east of Sri Lanka, where they say they are discriminated against by the Sinhalese majority. The Tamils represent about 18 per cent of Sri Lanka's 17 million people.

Talks scheduled to begin today in the guerrilla stronghold Jaffna were to focus on a ceasefire and the opening of a land route for supplies to the rebel-held Jaffna Peninsula, one of the guerrilla negotiators, who asked not to be identified, said earlier yesterday in an interview.

The talks were called off, said government delegate Navin Gunaratne. No new date was set.