

## Human bomb kills 50 at rally

Opposition candidate, top party leaders also die in blast

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

The assassination of Gamini Dissanayake 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 Sunday's blast but they were in such bad condition an exact count was



— Reuter photo

**FALLEN: Presidential candidate Gamini Dissanayake was killed Sunday in blast**

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.

Thousands of people gathered outside the hospital waiting for information. P

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 a homeland for the Tamil minority in the north and east of Sri Lanka.

