

New president pledges peace

KANDY, Sri Lanka (Reuter) — Sri Lanka's new president pledged to lead the strife-torn island to unity and peace Monday as a powerful Tamil rebel group vowed to continue its separatist rebellion.

Ranasinghe Premadasa, prime minister for the last 11 years, was inaugurated Monday at a Buddhist temple in the sacred city of Kandy, the island's former capital, about 110 kilometres from Colombo.

The new president was sworn in at 10:40 a.m. local time, a time deemed auspicious by astrologers, to thunderous applause from tens of thousands of people who chanted "Sadhu, Sadhu" (blessings, blessings) as hundreds of firecrackers exploded.

Commando troops and hundreds of policemen enforced tight security as an estimated 500,000 people thronged the picturesque city nestling in the central highlands.

Premadasa, 64, succeeded Junius Jayawardene who retired after nearly 50 years in politics.

Jayawardene had been beset in the last six years by a revolt by the minority Tamil community in the north and east, and by attacks by a violent Marxist group from the majority Sinhalese community in the south.

Premadasa, in a speech from



—Reuter photo

Premadasa responds to cheering crowds at ceremony

the balcony of the temple, pledged "to lead my people to unity and amity ... to peace and harmony."

Dubbed the "common man's president," Premadasa repeated his invitation to the rebels to join in the democratic process.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the biggest Tamil rebel group, has rejected a pact signed by Jayawardene and Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in July 1987 and is continuing an armed campaign to set up an independent state.