

Kumaratunga takes oath – Promises peace. (1994, November 14). *Sri Lanka Politics.*

11/14 1730 SRI LANKA-POLITICS: KUMARATUNGA TAKES OATH, PROMISES PEACE

by Rita Sebasfian

COLOMBO, (Nov. 12) IPS -- Chandrika Kumaratunga today took oath as Sri Lanka's first woman and fourth executive president in Sinhala, Tamil and English, signifying her desire to bring harmony to a nation torn apart by ethnic strife.

Dressed in a royal blue saree, the Sorbonne-educated Kumaratunga, 49, was sworn in by Chief Justice G.P.S. de Silva amidst the blowing of conch shells and beating of traditional drums.

Addressing the nation soon after the ceremony, the new president said, "The people in all their diversity had spoken in one loud voice" to give her government the mandate to resolve the country's ethnic question.

Lashing out at the opposition United National Party (UNP) that had held power for 17 years, Kumaratunga said her government "had brought an end to the time when politicians were a law unto themselves" and had "debilitated every civilized institution we held sacred."

President Kumaratunga then inspected a guard of honor as rain lashed the red canopy where she stood outside the presidential secretariat.

Immediately thereafter, she met the press in her first official function after being sworn in.

Kumaratunga, who defeated her nearest UNP rival by a record 2 million votes, reiterated that her government had won an overwhelming mandate for negotiating peace with Tamil Tiger militants waging an 11-year war for independence in the island's north and east.

"It was endorsed by 90 percent of the minorities in the north and 85 percent in the east, and what is touching is that the Sinhala people have also given their approval to the peace process," she said.

Kumaratunga took a series of steps to negotiate peace with the Tamils soon after being sworn in as prime minister after parliamentary elections in August. A four-member government delegation held a crucial first round of talks with the Tigers in the northern rebel stronghold of Jaffna last month.

But the second round of talks, scheduled for Oct. 24, had to be put off following the assassination of UNP leader and presidential candidate Gamini Dissanayake by a suspected Tiger suicide bomber on the very same day.

She said there was no time frame for resuming talks with the Tigers, specially in view of the assassination.

And she also seemed to hold out a warning for the notoriously intractable Tigers as she said, "it will be a peace that will not abandon the principles of equity, fair play and justice on all sides of the political divide."

Asked what message she would like to give to the UNP, the president quipped, "tell them to close up and sleep."

Kumaratunga, who has relinquished the prime ministerial post, has decided to place her mother, a former prime minister, in the saddle, instead. Srimavo Bandaranaike will take oath as prime minister tomorrow.

The president dismissed all charges of nepotism, saying that her selection of her mother to be prime minister was indicative of her "choice".

Kumaratunga has pledged to abolish the UNP-created post of executive president that confers authoritarian powers on the incumbent, by July 1995. COPYRIGHT 1994 IPS/GIN

11/14 0906 SRI LANKAN SECURITY FORCES REMAIN ON ALERT

COLOMBO (NOV. 14) XINHUA - SRI LANKA'S SECURITY FORCES WILL REMAIN ON THE ALERT DESPITE A WEEK-LONG UNILATERAL CEASEFIRE DECLARED BY THE LIBERATION TIGERS OF TAMIL EELAM (LTTE), MILITARY SOURCES SAID HERE TODAY.

SINCE THE LTTE HAS NOT YET INFORMED THE GOVERNMENT ABOUT THE CEASEFIRE, THE SECURITY FORCES WILL MAINTAIN A FIRM MILITARY POSTURE ON THE NORTHERN FRONTLINE, THE SOURCES SAID.

NEITHER THE GOVERNMENT NOR MILITARY OFFICIALS WERE ABLE TO CONFIRM THAT THE LTTE HAD FORMALLY DECLARED A CEASEFIRE ALTHOUGH REPORTS FROM THE NORTHERN JAFFNA PENINSULA ON SATURDAY INDICATED THAT A WEEK-LONG SUSPENSION OF HOSTILITIES MAY HAVE UNILATERALLY BEGUN BY THE TIGERS.

A LTTE'S RADIO REPORT MONITORED BY THE DEFENSE MINISTRY IN COLOMBO HAS INDICATED THAT A MESSAGE OF A UNILATERAL CEASEFIRE OF ONE WEEK WAS SENT OUT TO TIGER CADRES FROM JAFFNA.

ACCORDING TO MILITARY SOURCES, THE DECLARATION OF A CEASEFIRE COMES TWO WEEKS PRIOR TO THE BIRTHDAY OF TIGER LEADER PRABHAKARAN ON NOVEMBER 26, THE LTTE'S "MARTYR'S DAY," WHICH IS THE USUAL DAY THE TIGER SUPREMO ANNOUNCES POLICY STATEMENT.

LTTE, AN ARMED TAMIL GROUP, HAS BEEN FIGHTING FOR A SEPARATE TAMIL STATE IN THE NORTH OF THE ISLAND COUNTRY. MORE THAN 30,000 PEOPLE HAVE BEEN REPORTEDLY KILLED IN THE 11-YEAR CIVIL WAR.

THE GOVERNMENT HAS PLEDGED TO CONTINUE PEACE TALKS WITH THE LTTE TO FIND A POLITICAL SOLUTION TO END THE WAR. THE FIRST ROUND OF PEACE TALKS WAS HELD ON OCTOBER 13-14, BUT THE SECOND ROUND WAS POSTPONED INDEFINITELY FOLLOWING THE OCTOBER 24 BOMB BLAST IN COLOMBO WHICH KILLED OPPOSITION LEADER GAMINI DISSANAYAKE AND 53 OTHERS.