

President's widow seen as successor. (1993, May 7). *The Ottawa citizen* .

SRI LANKA

President's widow seen as successor

By Edward A. Gargan
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COLOMBO, Sri Lanka — The body of Sri Lanka's assassinated president, Ranasinghe Premadasa, was cremated Thursday.

Only hours after the elaborate Buddhist funeral, government officials were suggesting the president's widow, Hema Premadasa, might move quickly to try to become prime minister, thereby unsettling other politicians' ambitions.

While leading a May Day political rally Saturday, Premadasa and 23 others were killed by a suicide bomber in what the police say was an attack by the separatist guerrilla organization, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

A curfew was imposed on the capital Thursday night to prevent ethnic violence. Government officials have said they feared reprisals by the majority Sinhalese against Tamils.

Over the last two days, thousands of Tamils have fled the city, fearing violence similar to the 1983 riots in which enraged Sinhalese moved through Tamil neighborhoods in Colombo, killing more than 4,000 Tamils and burning homes after Tamils killed 13 soldiers.

Premadasa's death came a week after the assassination of the country's most prominent opposition leader, Lalith Athulathmudali, who was gunned down at a political rally. Athulathmudali's funeral became violent when his supporters, believing Premadasa had ordered his killing, fought with police.

In the last two days, tens of thousands of Sri Lankans have filed past the president's coffin, with the line of mourners often stretching more than three kilometres.

The funeral began with a slow procession through the city. Thousands followed the coffin as it was driven in a gold-canopied carriage.

Premadasa's body was taken to Independence Square, where several of Sri Lanka's senior Buddhist monks chanted and paid homage.