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NAM-Sri Lanka (Terrorism)

BRUTE FORCE NOT THE ANSWER TO TERRORISM, SAYS SRI LANKAN PRESIDENT

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 25 (Bernama) -- The leader of a country which has seen the largest number of people killed by suicide bombers said today she is "happy" that the world's most powerful nation the United States has woken up to the scourge of terrorism.

But Sri Lanka President Chandrika Kumaratunga said combating terrorism with brute force as the U.S. was doing without looking at the root causes why terrorists became one, was not the solution to the problem.

"Terrorism is the most horrendous scourge of our generation, of the last century and the beginning of the 21st century but just using brute force is not going to resolve the problem," she told a press conference on the sidelines of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) summit here.

Kumaratunga said the U.S. had learnt in the two years since the attacks on Sept 11 what Sri Lanka had suffered for over two decades of terrorism by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) fighting for a homeland for the minority Tamil population in the country's north and east.

She agreed with Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad that the root causes of terrorism had to be addressed, saying she was not condoning acts of terror by anybody or by the most powerful or least powerful nations.

"That's what we are doing in Sri Lanka. The root causes need to be handled efficiently and quickly. Attacking terrorism with force and violence and destroying the lives of millions of innocent people for many generations to come and polluting the environment may not be the medium- or the long-term solution," she said.

The LTTE had the largest number of suicide bombers in the world and they killed the most number of people through suicide bombers, she said of the bloodshed from the conflict that left more than 60,000 dead.

But she said the ceasefire between the government and the LTTE was holding out in the last one year, the longest period such a truce had not been violated in the protracted conflict.

She said peace talks brokered by Norway aimed at ending the conflict had been taking place every month for the last eight months with the next round scheduled for next month in Tokyo.

Kumaratunga, who is a frequent critic of the government of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe over his handling of the peace process, however said she was very happy that the new government was taking the peace process forward.

According to her, the ethnic conflict was triggered by a "specific policy" against the Tamil minority in 1983 by the then government which led to an exodus of some 750,000 highly educated Tamils out of the country.

"It is these Tamils who live in the rich countries who have been funding the LTTE at the rate of US\$10 per person per month or at least US\$6 million monthly," she said when asked the source of funds for LTTE's acts of terror.

She said it was obvious that war was not the solution to the conflict in Sri Lanka as was advocated by the previous government before she came to power in 1994.

"I am very happy that we have been able to convince everybody, including my main opponents in the government who opposed me when I was trying to do the peace process the first time around. At long last they believe in peace as a solution.

"This is very positive but it's not going to be easy," said  
Kumaratunga, who herself survived an assassination attempt by the LTTE  
three years ago.

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