

December 2, 1963
**Telegram from Ambassador J.N. Khosla, 'President
Kennedy's Assassination'**

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Summary:

Reaction to President Kennedy's assassination in Belgrade.

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DATE: December 2, 1963

FROM: J.N Khosla, Ambassador

TO Foreign Secretary, MEA

President Kennedy's Assassination

President Kennedy's assassination has created a deep sense of shock and horror here. Even though the news arrived late in the evening (8:30 pm) on the 22nd November, anxious crowds began to assemble silently outside newspaper offices to find out more details. Expressions of sorrow were spontaneous and immediate. President Tito personally rang up the United States charge d'affaires. Next afternoon, he, accompanied by his Foreign Secretary Mr. Koca Popovic, called at the American Embassy and signed the condolence book. Elsewhere in the republics, wherever the United States consulates exist, the Presidents of the National Assemblies paid similar homage. The public felt numbed. The 24th of November was declared a day of mourning in Yugoslavia and flags flew at half-mast at all public buildings. Public shows were cancelled. Official functions fixed for Gheorghiu-Dej, the Rumanian President, who had arrived in Belgrade for a State visit a few hours before Kennedy's death, were put off.

In his condolence message to Lyndon Johnson, Tito expressed his conviction that Kennedy's "devotion to the cause of international understanding and peace will be of lasting benefit to mankind." To Mrs. Kennedy he wrote: "We have been deeply shocked by the news of the tragic death of your husband, whose life and work were so necessary, not only for the American people, but also for the international community."

Yugoslavia was represented by Mr. Petar Stambolic, President of the Federal Executive Council and Koca Popovic. Editorials in the newspapers were warm and naturally made frequent reference to Tito's recent meeting with Kennedy.

The reasons for this genuine, but unprecedented, grief in a communist country, on the assassination of a Western statesman were two-fold. The tragedy was not only human and personal, but had also vast international dimensions. The Yugoslavs felt unhappy for Mrs. Kennedy, but more than that they were sorry that the world was deprived at this important stage of East-West negotiations, of the services of sincere worker for peace. Kennedy, they believe, had brought about a remarkable change in the U.S. attitudes and had thus contributed significantly to bringing about a thaw in the cold war. His speech delivered at the Washington University (AMERICAN?) and the one he was to deliver, but could not, at Dallas, have been read and reread here with real admiration. His death is mourned for his achievements as well as for the achievements that were expected to follow in the future, had he lived to lead his nation. This universal expression of sorrow would probably serve to strengthen those in the US whose task it would be to carry on the great work left incomplete through Kennedy's premature and untimely death.