

No exit in sight: difference with India on IPKF pull-out as killing continue . (1989, Oct 15). India Today.

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SRI LANKA

No Exit in Sight

Differences with India on IPKF pull-out as killings continue



ANOTHER conciliatory chapter was added to Sri Lanka's continuing saga of political turmoil and instability last fortnight as Indian High Commissioner Lakhan

Lal Mehrotra and Sri Lankan Foreign Secretary Bernard Tilakratne signed yet another accord. This time it was to lay down the framework for the withdrawal of the IPKF from the north-east.

To this chapter was added one more—the Premadasa Government's offer of a three-day truce to the radical JVP which has held the Sinhala mainland to ransom. But as Sri Lanka's wont, discord followed quickly. Differences arose with India on the IPKF withdrawal and despite the olive branch to the Sinhala subversives, killings continued.

Just as the Government was trying to use the accord to take the wind out of the sails of the JVP, which thrives on anti-Indian Sinhala chauvinism, problems arose on the in-

terpretation of key clauses of the accord. Indian spokesmen, including Minister of State for External Affairs Natwar Singh, said the withdrawal was linked to devolution of power to the provisional government in the north-east.

Foreign Minister Ranjan Wijeratne questioned this interpretation. As fresh discussions started it became clear that India was keeping its options open. It had no intention of retreating without achieving the gains it had expected to make: bringing the LTTE into the democratic mainstream, securing a north-east linkage and devolution of powers to

an autonomous Tamil government.

No withdrawals had begun till a week after the accord was signed and South Block sources indicated the withdrawal was not going to be front-loaded, but rear-end-loaded leaving India the option to change its mind till the very end. Sources say the mutual, unwritten understanding is that elements of the IPKF could linger till March '90.

Despite the differences, Premadasa supporters called the accord a feather in his tattered presidential cap and persuaded him to "exploit the positive mood" by offering a three-day truce to the JVP. Significantly, the truce offer was sponsored by the all-party conference convened by Premadasa to end the blood-letting. So, last fortnight two cease-fires came into effect in the island.

But Sri Lanka's headlong rush to self-destruction continues, with killings providing a macabre background score to conciliatory moves. The latest incident of tit for tat violence came from Kandy district, where nearly 150

LTTE militants; (top) IPKF in Jaffna

Photographs by SHYAM TEKWANI

