

India to withdraw two battalions of troops from Sri Lanka. (1989, January 2). The Ottawa Citizen.

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The New York Times

NEW DELHI, India — India announced Sunday that it would withdraw about 2,000 troops from Sri Lanka in the next few days, and officials said further troop reductions would follow.

The announcement followed talks on Saturday in Islamabad between Sri Lanka's departing president, J.R. Jayewardene, and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi of India.

They were attending a meeting of regional heads of government at which Gandhi tried to allay his smaller neighbors' fears of India's size and military might.

The reduction in India's military presence in Sri Lanka comes at a critical time abroad and at home for Gandhi's government.

Sri Lanka's president-elect, Ranasinghe Premadasa, who will take office Monday, bitterly opposed the introduction of Indian forces in 1987, when he was the prime minister.

There are 45,000 to 50,000 Indian troops in Sri Lanka, according to Indian officials.

They are battling the last of the ethnic guerrilla armies still in the field, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. More than 600 Indi-



—Reuter photo

Gandhi and Bhutto share lighter moment in Islamabad

ans have been killed.

In a meeting with India's high commissioner after the Sri Lankan election on Dec. 19, Premadasa asked that India consider reducing its military force, the High Commissioner, J.N. Dixit, said Sunday in Colombo.

The Indian statement today said the decision to start reducing the

peacekeeping force was made because Sri Lanka had carried out its part of the agreement on the suppression of the insurgency among the ethnic Tamil minority.

It cited elections in the newly unified and recently pacified north and east, where Tamils form a majority or a substantial percentage of most areas.

The Indian announcement pre-empted any unilateral moves from Premadasa, who faces a violent backlash among the Sinhalese majority, fueled by opposition to the Indian military presence.

Premadasa would like to bring the Sinhalese militants, who tried to stop the presidential election by violence, back into the political process before parliamentary elections on Feb. 15. He must offer them something.

Gandhi is also facing an election. On Jan. 21, Tamil Nadu State, where the Sri Lankan Tamils once drew considerable support, will choose a state assembly.

Gandhi's Congress Party would like to win the state as a prelude to national parliamentary elections due before the end of 1989.

India also entered an agreement with Pakistan not to attack each other's nuclear facilities, a move hailed by their prime ministers as the first step toward easing their countries' often hostile relations.

"I think that in both our countries there is a groundswell for peace," Pakistan's Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto said. "An extremely important step has been taken toward improving relations between India and Pakistan."