

## EDITORIALS

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# Daunting challenges in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's new president, Ranasinghe Premadasa, has decided not to renew the 5½-year-old state of emergency that expires on Sunday. That looks like welcome evidence of good will.

Under the emergency, police or soldiers could detain people for up to 90 days without charges, dispose of bodies without inquests and raid homes without warrants. The rules made it easy for authorities to commit abuses that then fanned communal sentiment and violence.

But Mr. Premadasa will need much more than good will to heal the former island-paradise's wounds and fulfill his election promises of peace and prosperity.

Sri Lanka's July 1987 accord with India did dampen somewhat the long-running Tamil insurgency by guerrillas seeking to create a new country in northern and east-

ern Sri Lanka. The deal gave minority Tamils some autonomy, and led to the installation in Sri Lanka of 50,000 Indian troops. But the Tamil Tigers continue to fight.

A newer and perhaps more dangerous guerrilla insurgency has arisen in the south; it is being conducted by members of the Sinhalese majority. They resent concessions to the Tamils and to India in the 1987 agreement.

Mr. Premadasa, himself Sinhalese, has his work cut out for him. His pledge to discard the 1987 Indo-Lankan agreement and replace it with a friendship treaty may help defuse the Sinhalese insurgency. But he may have a tough time getting India to withdraw more than a token number of its troops. And if he pursues his promised course, he could see the modest successes

achieved for Tamils blow up in his face.

The new president also will have a hard time finding the money to fulfill his promise of an income supplement of \$100 a month to the country's poorest families.

And Mr. Premadasa also is dogged by accusations he benefited from irregularities in the Dec. 19 election. He won 50.4 per cent of the vote, narrowly avoiding a run-off. (Still, the day saw an admirable showing at the polls by voters subject to death threats from extremists intent on sabotaging the electoral process; at least 36 people were killed on election day.)

The new president's most immediate test probably will be the parliamentary elections next month. If an unfriendly parliament is elected, Mr. Premadasa will face even more challenges.