

The starkest illustration of the failure of the policy initiated by Rajiv Gandhi and Junius Jayawardene comes from the fact that today the LTTE and the JVP are celebrating victory . (1989, July 31). India Today.



JVP chief Rohana Wijeweera at a rally: psychological warfare

diktat which is what Premadasa wants to do." MEA officials indicated that the Government would be happiest with a withdrawal schedule that extended well beyond the next elections. But considering Premadasa's belligerent mood, that may be hoping for too much.

Meanwhile, as Indian policy-makers went about doing whatever damage control was possible at this stage, the Sri Lanka problem was finally beginning to become an issue in national politics. The Opposition came out firmly in support of the withdrawal of the IPKF last fortnight. There were even allegations that the Indian Government had kept the nation in the dark about its Sri Lankan policy and had refused to accept constructive help from opposition stalwarts including the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi.

Key opposition leaders pointed out that it was India which had spurned the LTTE offer for a negotiated settlement in December last year. LTTE ideologue Anton Balasingham had then tried to establish contact with India to persuade it not to concede to Premadasa's demand for withdrawal of the IPKF. When he failed to get any response, Balasingham got in touch with Janata Dal leader George Fernandes, with whom he had a secret meeting in Tamil Nadu. He requested Fernandes to mediate between the LTTE and the Indian Government, pleading that the Tigers were in-

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the prime minister. But he did promise to involve the President who happened to be a Tamil. So he sent a confidential letter to President R. Venkataraman. Says Fernandes now: "The President got back and asked for further details. He assured me that he would pass this on to the prime minister." A few days later, however, Fernandes was asked by the Government not to interfere in the matter.

The Government's wariness is understandable as it would not like an opposition leader to discover the extent of its embarrassment in Sri Lanka. Unfortunately, so stark is the failure of India's Sri Lanka policy that even a staunch ally like the Soviet Union finds it hard to defend it. Last fortnight, Indian policy-makers were rudely surprised by a commentary in the official Soviet newspaper *Izvestia* which said the row over the IPKF shows India in a bad light, as a "big power trying to impose its will on a small state". "The issue has gone beyond the bilateral level," the newspaper stated.

With world opinion fast turning against its Sri Lankan policy, India actually has no choice but to get out of there as fast. The fact that the LTTE is talking to Premadasa—the man they had dismissed as a "Sinhala chauvinist"—and that Balasingham has actually praised him for his generosity, signifies the helplessness of Indian diplomacy.

On the second anniversary of the Indo-Sri Lanka accord almost all the objectives India had set out to achieve remain painfully unfulfilled. The island's Tamils are no more secure than they were in July 1987, the LTTE

is far from being finished as a fighting force, and far from becoming a stabler, friendlier and even grateful neighbour, Sri Lanka is a strife-torn, sullen and bitter liability. Worst of all, for India and its army, there can be no totally honourable escape from the mess it has got itself into. To that extent the Sri Lanka policy has been the Rajiv Gandhi Government's greatest political defeat. No degree of valour on the military battleground or skills in diplomatic letter-writing can brush that bitter reality aside.



LTTE supremo Velupillai Pirabhakaran at target practice: dramatic turnaround

capable of fighting either the IPKF or the Sri Lankan Army as their cadres were in disarray and efforts to smuggle in arms had been foiled by the Indian Navy. Balasingham feared that if the IPKF withdrew under such circumstances, the LTTE would become a sitting target for the Sinhalese-dominated Sri Lankan Army.

Fernandes made it clear that he was not in a position to take up the issue with