

MISSIVES

'We Had an Agreement'

Last week special envoy B.G. Deyshukh, carried a letter from Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa. Made public in New Delhi, the letter is one indicator of the current frosty state of relations between India and Sri Lanka following Premadasa's June 1 call for the withdrawal, by July 29, of the Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPKF). Key excerpts from Gandhi's missive:

"I have your letters of June 30 and July 5. I do not wish to enter into a debate on various interpretations of mutual obligations assumed by our two sovereign nations. These are quite clear...

"There is an agreement between our two countries. This agreement is meant to preserve the unity and integrity of Sri Lanka and to ensure the safety, security and legitimate interests of the Tamils. Nearly a thousand Indian soldiers have made the supreme sacrifice in fulfilment of India's obligations as a guarantor of this agreement.

"Since the signing of this agreement, not only have the provincial council elections been held but also the parliamentary and presidential elections. The situation in the Northeastern Province is far more settled and peaceful

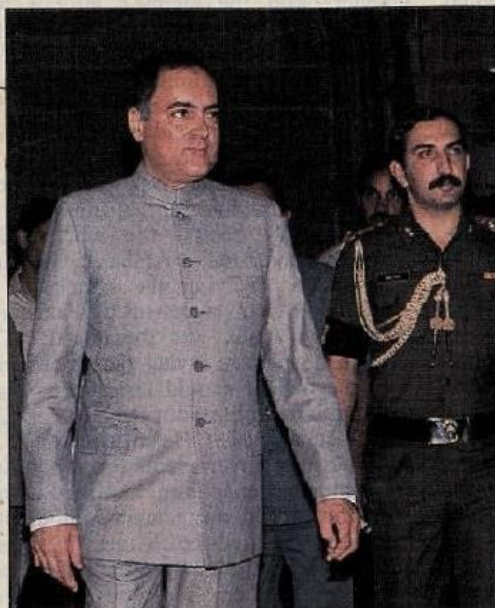
than elsewhere in Sri Lanka. Despite all this, the devolution package promised to the Tamils has not been implemented. These are incontrovertible facts.

"Both of us agree that the IPKF should be withdrawn. Both of us agree that we had commenced the withdrawal even before you asked for it. A broad time-frame for the IPKF's withdrawal had in fact been discussed. Discussions on finalising the details were proposed by your foreign minister only a few days prior to your unilateral announcement on June 1.

"I have repeatedly said that the IPKF's withdrawal schedule should be worked out through joint consultations along with a simultaneous schedule for the implementation of the Indo-Sri Lanka agreement. We are willing to resume discussions on this subject at any time and place of your convenience. Your colleague, the honourable Mr. Thondaman,* who met me here, would have conveyed to you our desire for friendly relations and our willingness to resolve any misunderstanding through mutual consultations. If, however, discussions for this purpose are not acceptable to you, we will have to decide the details of the IPKF's withdrawal unilaterally, consistent with our responsibilities and obligations under the Indo-Sri Lanka agreement.

"While I reiterate the government of India's willingness to cooperate with your government to resolve pending issues, I must emphasise to Your Excellency that India has traditionally been mindful of the sanctity of the agreements it signs with other countries and commitments solemnly undertaken under such agreements. India will under no circumstances deviate from this policy.

"It has been our practice to maintain the confidentiality of official correspondence, particularly between heads of state or government, unless otherwise agreed upon. However, the gist of your messages to me was more often than not made available to the media before they reached me. Now I find that all our recent correspondence has been officially made public by the Sri Lanka government. I may thus be constrained to depart from tradition by authorising this communication to be made public, after you receive it."



Diego Taro

Gandhi: Indicator of the frosty relations

*Sri Lanka's Rural Industries Minister S. Thondaman, who visited New Delhi recently.