

**SULTAN'S ANGER OVER SECRET LOVE**  
UPROAR IN MALAYSIA

# ASIAWEEK

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## INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

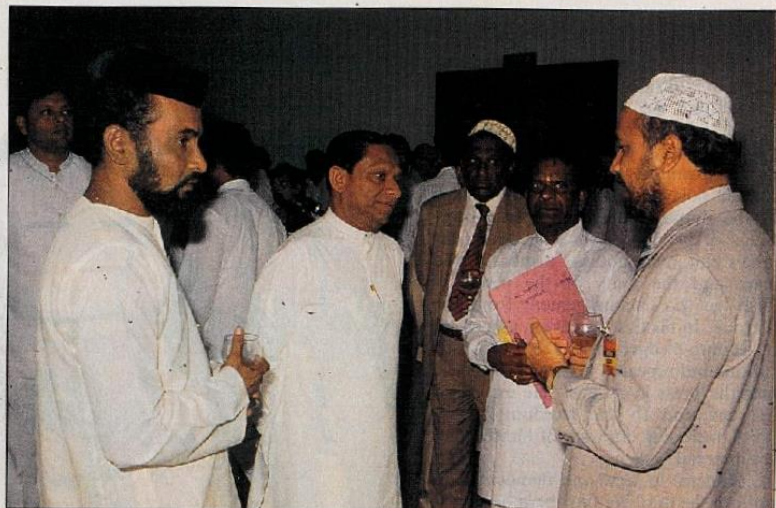
SRI LANKA

### Time to Go Home

After months of bitter wrangling, the diplomatic deadlock was finally broken. On Sept. 18 in Colombo, the Sri Lankan and Indian governments signed an agreement to complete the withdrawal of the 43,000-strong Indian Peacekeeping Force from the island by the end of the year. The accord also stipulated that Indian troops would observe a ceasefire with Tamil rebels beginning Sept. 20. For beleaguered Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa, the settlement comes as a welcome boost.

India sent in the IPKF a little over two years ago at the invitation of then-president Junius Jayewardene. The move was aimed at enforcing a limited autonomy deal that Colombo had struck with the country's Tamil minority to end the separatist insurrection by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. But the presence of the soldiers became an embarrassment for Premadasa, who won the presidency last year on a promise to get rid of the troops. India's reluctance to pull out soured relations between the two countries.

Despite the deal, Premadasa's troubles are hardly over. India's withdrawal puts a question mark on the future stability of the government of the Tamil-dominated northeast sector, which is administered by the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front. The EPRLF has consistently been against an Indian pull-out, fearing it would unleash the Tigers' wrath on their cadres. A EPRLF spokesman recently told Asiaweek that they "laid



Premadasa (centre) at the all-party conference: The Indians agree to Dec. 31

down their arms because of the guarantee of peace in the north and east given by India." But he warned that "if India were to leave and peace not return to the Tamil homelands, we will be compelled to take up arms again."

The Tigers had earlier agreed to a ceasefire with Colombo, promising to "enter the democratic mainstream and cease violence against all other Tamil groups." In this regard, the insurgent group is participating in the recently convened all-party conference intended to hammer out a solution to the conflict in Sri Lanka. But many Sri Lankans feel that the EPRLF would be savaged as soon as the responsibility for the security of the north-

east is transferred to local authorities. Only a day before the two adversaries met at the all-party gathering, the Tigers called on the EPRLF government to resign or face death.

But the Indian withdrawal may help Premadasa bring Sinhalese militants to the negotiating table. The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (People's Liberation Front), which is vehemently opposed to the Indian presence, has consistently refused to talk with Colombo. Premadasa has repeatedly called on the JVP to agree to a ceasefire — to no avail. By winning a deal with New Delhi, the president has bought some time. But in Sri Lanka, the continuing cycle of violence still clouds the prospects for peace. ■