

India announces plans for pullout from Sri Lanka. (1989, January 2). The globe and nail.

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India will start pulling its peace-keeping troops out of Sri Lanka this week at the request of Sri Lankan President-elect Ranasinghe Premadasa, the Indian government announced yesterday.

Mr. Premadasa, who takes office today, promised during the election campaign to send the Indian soldiers home.

India sent an estimated 50,000 soldiers to the Indian Ocean island in July, 1987, hours after an accord was signed with the aim of ending an insurgency by Tamil rebels demanding a separate homeland.

India will withdraw two battalions in the next few days, the Indian High Commission in Colombo announced at a news conference.

"I cannot give you the mathematics of how many troops will be involved but from what I know, from 2,000 to 3,000 troops, making up two brigades, will be withdrawn," High Commissioner H. M. Dixit said.

Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Sri Lanka's outgoing president, Junius Jayewardene, discussed the withdrawal on Saturday during a summit of seven South Asian countries in Pakistan, Mr. Dixit said.

Opponents of the peace accord had feared that Indian troops sent to the island to disarm the Tamil rebels and enforce a ceasefire might remain indefinitely.

India became involved in the conflict because 60 million Tamils living in southern India are sympathetic to the rebels' cause. More than 625 Indian soldiers have died trying to enforce the agreement.

Militant Tamils have been demanding an independent nation in the northern and eastern prov-

inces. They have rejected the Colombo government's offer of limited autonomy if they surrender their weapons and end the five-year guerrilla war that has left more than 8,500 people dead.

The accord also enraged Sinhalese radicals, who contend that it granted too many concessions to the Tamils and brought Indian troops to Sri Lankan soil. These militants have been blamed for the deaths of more than 900 people, most supporters of the agreement.