

Partial withdrawal of IPKF from Lanka. (1989, January 2). The Ottawa Citizen.

*Indian Govt. responds to Premadasa's request*

# Partial withdrawal of IPKF from Lanka

By Rodney Martinez

Two battalions of Indian troops will withdraw from Sri Lanka "with in next few days": it was officially announced yesterday.

Indian High Commissioner, Jyotindra Nath Dixit, told a news conference at his office that the move followed a request from President-elect, Ranasinghe Premadasa. He said further phased withdrawals would follow "depending on the ground situation".

Mr. Dixit said the President-elect made the request when he made the courtesy call on him. He had soon got in touch with his Government, Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, who was in Islamabad attending the

SAARC Summit was apprised immediately. Thereafter, Premier Gandhi had discussed the matter with outgoing President, J. R. Jayewardene during bi-lateral discussions over break fast, he said.

"The successful conduct of Provincial Council and Presidential elections, the formation of provincial governments and the beginning of genuine devolution of powers have enabled some of the troops in the North and East to withdraw", Mr. Dixit said. He, however, refused to divulge the number of troops that are being withdrawn.

It was only on Saturday the Chairman of the United National Party, Ranjan Wijeratne, announced that District Development Councils would cease to function from December 31. This leaves only the Provincial

Councils as the instrument to decentralise power from the Central Government.

"As the situation in the north-eastern province improves, as the devolution of powers becomes effective, as the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement gets progressively implemented and as the mischief-making potential of extremist elements opposed to the Agreement is reduced, the Government is hopeful of making further withdrawals in consultation with Sri Lanka Government", Mr. Dixit said.

Mr. Dixit disclosed that Mr. Premadasa has explained to him the meaningful and realistic manner in which he set out to solve the problems of the minority Tamils of Sri Lanka.

Asked about the Govern-

ment's decision to put off the referendum on the merger of the North and East, Mr. Dixit replied: "I gathered that for the sake of a legal requirement the date was put off for July 5".

An official Indian Government statement distributed at yesterday's news conference said: "The Government of India welcomes the recent steps taken by Government of Sri Lanka under the guidance of the President-elect, Mr. Ranasinghe Premadasa, to make devolution of powers to the Provincial Council governments effective. With this, the realisation of genuine provincial autonomy for the Tamil people of Sri Lanka has come a step nearer despite the efforts of extremist elements to disrupt the process".