

# The World

## Military Moves

# India Is All Over, and South Asia Resents It

By BARBARA CROSSETTE

IN December, when Pakistan plays host to a summit meeting of South Asian nations, the leaders will discuss a longstanding concern: India's expanding military presence, most recently exercised in the role of a regional policeman.

Earlier this month, India sent troops to put down a coup attempt by mercenaries in the small Indian Ocean nation of the Maldives. New Delhi portrayed its intervention as a swift action to help a neighbor in distress. But elsewhere it was perceived as yet another assertion of Indian military might in a weaker neighbor's affairs.

In Sri Lanka, India's entanglement continued. There, more than 500 Indian soldiers have been killed, many blown up by land mines and gunned down by terrorists as they patrolled streets in the island's north and east, where they have been trying to put down a rebellion by ethnic Tamils. On Nov. 19, the Indian troops helped police regional elections in the Tamil areas under threats from the most violent rebel group.

The Maldives and Sri Lankan interventions have become the focus for debate within India itself. And messages of support and congratulations for New Delhi from the United States and Britain about the Maldives have only added to a growing perception in the region that the West has joined the Soviet Union in turning the entire Indian Ocean region over to India.

Pakistan's most influential newspaper, the Muslim, which has often taken a sympathetic view of India, said in an editorial after the Maldives intervention: "Does this mean that from now on India will be given a free hand to intervene in any South Asian country on the pretext that it is foiling threats to the government of that country?" It asked whether the big powers saw the region as "India's backyard, where it can do what it wills, just like the U.S. considers Central America to be its own backyard?"

## A History of Concern

Last week, in an interview, the newspaper's editor, Malecha Lodhi, commented: "In an almost insidious manner, the Indians have effectively got Western acceptance for their role as a regional policeman. We don't like it because it has all sorts of ramifications and implications for us." Referring to the Sind province of Pakistan, she expressed a growing concern: "The precedent that has been set for this is Sri Lanka,



Indian soldiers displaying weapons they had taken from mercenaries who tried to stage a coup in the Indian Ocean nation of the Maldives this month.

which means that tomorrow they could walk into Sind on the pretext that the Hindus of Sind have been discriminated against."

Similar remarks are being heard in India. On Nov. 4, Subramaniam Swamy of the opposition Janata Party asked rhetorically whether India had a policy of intervention in the region. "It could be called the Rajiv Doctrine, like the Monroe Doctrine," he said. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, irked by these and other comments about the Maldives action, has responded that it is "unpatriotic" to criticize the armed forces. "I do not like our armed forces to be run down in any forum," he has said.

Indeed, the military power of India, a nation of 800 million people with armed forces of 1,250,000, has been a source of concern to smaller South Asian nations since New Delhi's troops seized the Portuguese territory of Goa without warning in 1961. In 1971, Indian troops backed Bengali secessionists in what was then East Pakistan, and created Bangladesh. Four years later, the small Himalayan nation of Sikkim was unilaterally incorporated into India. A longstanding treaty with Nepal gives India responsibility for its defense and foreign affairs.

And in Sri Lanka, India first assisted ethnic Tamil guerrillas through its intelligence agencies, and then sent troops to the Tamil-dominated northern and eastern regions to monitor a peace plan worked out with the Sri Lankan Government. When the rebels kept fighting, the Indian role turned to putting down the rebellion. More than 50,000 Indian troops remain, adding to Sri Lanka's problems by giving violent nationalists from the Sinhalese majority an issue to exploit:

sovereignty. Many Sri Lankan Sinhalese who were willing to live with the presence of the Indian military under the treaty signed by President J. R. Jayewardene are nonetheless distressed by other aspects of the Indian presence. Indians in Sri Lanka or New Delhi often make announcements about the future of Sri Lanka. And the accord gives India veto power over Sri Lanka's use of its important east coast port of Trincomalee.

## A Hidden Motive?

Here in Pakistan, which has fought several wars with India since 1947, sensitivities are perhaps sharper than anywhere else in the region outside Sri Lanka. Pakistanis have been tempted to look for something more in the Maldives intervention than a quick Indian police action. Some have linked it to Indian interest in a tiny island called Gan, about 500 miles from the American base on Diego Garcia. The Maldives once leased military installations on Gan to Britain. After Britain withdrew in 1976, the Soviet Union and India were reportedly interested in using the installations. The Maldives refused to lease them.

Now Pakistanis are watching to see how long it will be before all Indian forces leave the Maldives — 500 troops have been left behind — and whether an agreement will be signed that will give India any special privileges in the islands.

For these Pakistanis, the important question today is not whether the Indian forces were acting as good Samaritans in the Maldives; it is what the Indians' future intentions are, now that they have asserted themselves with military force in the middle of the Indian Ocean.