

J.R. JAYEWARDENE

“IPKF must return”

HE is the co-architect of the Indo-Sri Lanka accord, but is now backing Premadasa's case against India. Senior Correspondent CHIDANAND RAJGHATTA spoke to J.R. Jayewardene in Colombo last fortnight. Excerpts:

■ On the Indo-Sri Lanka treaty

The Indo-Sri Lanka treaty of 1987 was the best thing that could happen under the circumstances. The Indian Government put pressure on us in 1987 to ease the campaign against the Tamil militants in the north. When we were undertaking the Vadamarachchi campaign Mani Dixit told Lalith Athulath-

mudali that India won't allow us to take Jaffna. We were also having difficulty sustaining the campaign and keeping up supplies to our soldiers in the north.

So, when the idea of an accord came I gladly accepted it. It was the right thing then. If the accord had not happened, the Government would have lost, it would have collapsed. Moreover, India promised to bring peace, make the militants lay down arms. They went back on their word.

By signing the treaty India was undertaking responsibility to help solve the problem they themselves had created. I see nothing wrong in it.



■ On withdrawal of the IPKF

The IPKF must return if Premadasa says so. The accord is clear on that. The withdrawal is not linked to the devolution. The IPKF has done a great job and we are indebted to it. But if the Sri Lankan Government feels it is time for them to go, and that it can tackle the problem on its own, India should oblige.

■ On the ethnic conflict

It is very difficult to trace the origins of the ethnic problem. It has gone on for a long time but I still have hope. Yes, so many principal characters in the drama have died—Mrs. Indira Gandhi, A. Amirthalingam, Uma Maheswaran and now V. Pirabhakaran—but the problem remains. It was aggravated by encouragement provided to the militants by the Tamil Nadu Government. The Government of India turned a blind eye to this for a long time.