

ORAL HISTORY

Sri Lanka: Negotiating an Honourable 'De-induction'

Lakhan Lal Mehrotra, was the Indian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka during 1989-90, a critical phase of Indo-Sri Lankan relationship. He narrates the events leading up to the 'de-induction' of the Indian Peace Keeping Force.

Indian Foreign Affairs Journal (IFAJ): Thank you for agreeing to speak –to the *Journal* on an important event in contemporary Indian diplomatic history. India sent the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) to Sri Lanka at their invitation but the arrangement subsequently ran into serious difficulties. You were heading the Indian Mission in Sri Lanka when the de-induction process – indeed a difficult task – was initiated. On 28 July 1989, under your signature, the Joint Communiqué between India and Sri Lanka initiated the process. To set the scene, what was the condition in Sri Lanka in April 1989 when you arrived there?

Lakhan Lal Mehrotra (LLM): Thank you for considering me for the Oral History project. My Sri Lanka diplomatic stint was remarkable in many ways.

When I arrived there, the situation was full of sparks; it was in fact waiting to turn into a conflagration. To my great shock, I realized immediately that the 1987 Peace Agreement between two countries that was supposed to deliver peace and security to Sri Lanka unfortunately had been misconstrued by every section of the Sri Lankan society. And it had become “the main subject” in the debate during the national elections at the end of 1988 – which brought Ranasinghe Premadasa to power as President. The 1987 agreement was very deftly crafted and had included the deliberations of the best of minds – political and otherwise, both in Sri Lanka and India – to put things on an even keel. It had everything that Sri Lankans, both Tamil and Sinhala, wanted and it had provisions that guaranteed an environment of confidence and security between India and Sri Lanka – which had been coming under severe stress.

The 1987 Agreement was a sequel to the very radical course of policy that President Jayewardene had followed ever since he became what later came to be called as a “Bonapartist President”. He concentrated all power in his hands through the instrumentality of a new constitution and became Sri Lanka’s first Executive President under it. He saw that the conflict among the Sinhala and Tamils was taking Sri Lanka away from both peace and

development and he wanted to reverse that process at any cost. However the policies that he devised in the process ran completely antagonistic to Indian interests. They rested on the pillars of moving his country away from India; compromising its political, military, economic and social links with India; and moving it instead towards the West. It was quite unprecedented for him to grant military concessions to USA and UK both on the eastern and western coasts of the island, in Trincomalee and in the vicinity of Colombo proper – the two important bastions of Sri Lankan security. He also granted broadcasting rights to the Voice of America in locales away from Colombo with a view to maintain surveillance over India. Those facilities were endowed with intelligence and military capabilities.

What had greatly complicated matters for the Tamil Community in Sri Lanka, its second largest, and for India, was the Sinhala Only Act of 1956 under S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, which became operative in 1960. It transgressed the rights of the Tamils as equal citizens of the state by making Sinhala the only official language of the country. The Sri Lankan Tamils felt that they had become second-class citizens of the state ever since. More importantly, it was an assault on their very identity, cultural and linguistic, which they were keen to preserve, and on their legitimate objective to govern themselves autonomously within the parameters of the Sri Lankan state. On the other hand, President Jayewardene embarked upon a policy which set at naught any Tamil demand for political or constitutional reform or for a federal setup. Protests from the Tamils resulted in anti-Tamil riots on an unprecedented scale. They took a heavy toll of Tamils across the land and of their cultural centres such as the Jaffna library which was burnt. Repression led to the rise of militancy amongst the Tamil youth and several militant organizations sprang up amongst them in the Northern and Eastern provinces in the 1970s. To flush out the Tamil militancy, the Government in Colombo at one stage went to the length of stopping essential supplies to the Tamil areas such as medicines, food, petrol, etc. At that stage, viewing their starvation at hand, India just could not stand aloof.

The Indian humanitarian intervention that followed only included airdropping of those essential supplies. It sent a strong message to the Sri Lankan Government that strong-arm tactics would not help in dealing with its internal problem. President Jayewardene branded India's action as outright aggression. However, as the heat of the moment subsided, the realization dawned at him that the need of the hour was a sympathetic attitude towards the Tamil aspirations and an inclusive solution to Sri Lanka's ethnic problem; also that India had to be a part of the solution due to the massive concern of

its own Tamil community about the welfare of their kins in Sri Lanka. From then on his policies took a different turn.

When India declared that Indian intervention was not intended to undermine the Sri Lankan territorial integrity or sovereignty and was ready to sit with Sri Lanka to help it find a viable solution of its ethnic troubles, Jayewardene decided to engage India in talks. The upshot was the India-Sri Lanka Agreement, which unfortunately did not pass muster with the most militant Tamil organizations, in particular the LTTE, which first agreed but later refused to abide by its terms. The induction of the IPKF to enforce the 1987 Agreement created a totally unintended situation, which neither India nor Sri Lanka had anticipated.

Let me bring out some of the highlights of the 1987 India-Sri Lanka agreement. The Agreement guaranteed Sri Lankan territorial integrity and unity. At the same time the north and east of Sri Lanka were accepted as “historical habitation” of the Tamil-speaking population of Sri Lanka. The word “homeland” was not used, for it had a different political connotation. The north and the east were also merged together to constitute a single province. A constitutional instrument guaranteed autonomy to the province with a Governor and a separate duly elected Chief Minister presiding over a provincial council of elected members. Also, under the Thirteenth Amendment they were to have their own Police Commissioner and finances guaranteed by the Centre for running the province and for its development. The Agreement also guaranteed the surrender of all Tamil militant groups in the north and the east.

President Jayewardene invited the Indian Peace Keeping Force to obtain the surrender of arms by Tamil militants using the provisions for it in the July 1987 Agreement. However, while most of the militant groups agreed to surrender their arms, the LTTE refused and instead of surrendering arms to the IPKF, it elected to fight it.

Meanwhile, after the 1988 elections in Sri Lanka, the Presidency had changed hands from J.R. Jayewardene to Ranatunga Premadasa. In his election campaign, Premadasa had committed himself to the withdrawal of IPKF, considering its presence to be a slur on Sri Lanka’s sovereignty and breach of its territorial integrity. In saying so, he represented the voice at the time of the majority of the Sinhalese as also that of the LTTE which claimed to be the sole representative of its Tamil community. Soon after the election the new President joined the national clamour for IPKF’s immediate departure from Sri Lanka.

Sri Lankan political climate had thus turned very hostile to India. Everybody was talking about IPKF’s violation of human rights; the LTTE

shouting from rooftops that the IPKF had killed over 5000 people, etc. However, the number of Sinhala and Tamils killed by the LTTE was not mentioned either by the Sinhala press at that point of time or by the Government. That was the situation when I was asked to go to Sri Lanka. I was Ambassador in Belgrade when my orders came. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had visited Belgrade on a state visit when I was there and I had come in contact with him. One day, Mr S.K. Singh, the then Foreign Secretary, rang me up to say that I was next going to Sri Lanka and I had to fly there in a week's time. Thus I landed in Colombo in the last week of April 1989 and that was the scenario when I arrived in Sri Lanka. The President told me at my credentials ceremony that he had invited the LTTE for talks but was good enough to say that he would take me into confidence at every step. He wanted the IPKF to go and peace talks with the LTTE were to be convened towards that end. All that was meant to put maximum pressure on the Government of India to call the IPKF back before completing its mission. The Government of India did not object his holding talks with LTTE for that was his prerogative and India was interested in a peaceful solution but they did not want those talks to be used for a propaganda barrage against India.

IFAJ: Let us go back to the time when you were in India preparing to take over the new post. The time between leaving Belgrade and joining at Colombo was short. What was your basic brief from New Delhi?

LLM: I met the Foreign Secretary and my colleagues in MEA dealing with Sri Lanka, our External Affairs Minister, the Prime Minister, the Defence Minister, our experts on Sri Lankan affairs in the Ministry of Defence, the Cabinet Secretary in the Cabinet Secretariat and others in his outfit that were dealing with Sri Lanka. They were all clear on one count – India was totally committed to the territorial unity and integrity of Sri Lanka but they were in no position to ignore the historic links that the Tamil community of Sri Lanka had with the Tamil community of India. That was a fact of life and we had to reckon with it. We were quite happy with the Agreement that we had signed. The IPKF was invited by the President of Sri Lanka to assist Sri Lanka; it was not there as an intervening or expeditionary force. It was doing its assigned job at a great cost to itself. We were underwriting it because India was a party to the Agreement. The fact was underlined that as far as the de-induction of IPKF was concerned, it would be withdrawn as soon as conditions improved. Its phase-by-phase de-induction plan was shown to me. As the peace and security was restored in the north-east and as the Government of Sri Lanka moved ahead with the implementation of the devolution package enumerated in the 1987 Agreement, withdrawal of IPKF would commence. We were

totally with the Government of Sri Lanka in facilitating both. That was the brief I received in Delhi.

IFAJ: When you arrived, the Indo-Sri Lankan Agreement was in tatters. 29 July 1989 had been fixed by the Sri Lankan President as the cut-off date by which the IPKF should go. What was the sanctity of the date?

LLM: The IPKF would have completed two years on that date. The Agreement was in tatters because the Tamil militant groups that had agreed to surrender arms did not do so, particularly the LTTE. The war had not ended. The casualties had continued to mount on both sides. IPKF was being blamed, quite wrongly though, for having achieved nothing on the ground – in the sense of either establishing peace or ensuring security.

The Sri Lankan Parliament was crying itself hoarse; both the President and the opposition were demanding that the IPKF packed its bags and left their country. Coincidentally, the President chose a public forum – a temple ceremony on 1 June 1989 – in Bataramulla, to announce his decision to ask, “in a day or two”, the Prime Minister of India to make sure that the last of the IPKF be withdrawn by the end of July. Then, two days later, he wrote a letter to the Prime Minister in which he “improved” upon his statement further, by saying that the date being suggested was not end July but 29 July. It was his unilateral decision. He made that decision and announced it publicly. Next day, he sent a Special Envoy to Delhi to deliver that letter to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. How can a force, which had taken eight months to be inducted, be withdrawn within eight weeks – especially when the LTTE were ready to attack it from the rear? It was impossible. Such things cannot be done by fixing arbitrary dates. The Prime Minister very graciously received the envoy, but on the question of de-induction of the IPKF by a particular date set by the Sri Lankan President he said it was the President’s own decision and he could not just agree to it without further study.

IFAJ: You mentioned about the longer time normally needed for de-induction process.

LLM: Yes, normally the de-induction process takes longer, especially when the belligerent is still very active. In fact, the day I landed at Colombo, I remember, the IPKF had lost a large number of soldiers in the north. I asked our Foreign Secretary S.K. Singh why we were paying such a heavy cost. He said, “You should draw your own conclusion as you see things on the ground.”

IFAJ: What was India’s immediate reaction to the date fixed by the Sri Lankan President?

LLM: The immediate reaction of our Prime Minister was “I have nothing to say. I was not a party to that decision” He did not reply to the President’s letter for quite some time, which perturbed the latter. Ranjan Wijeratne, the Foreign Minister, called me for a meeting and said that it was getting highly embarrassing for the Sri Lankan Government and especially for President Premadasa.

Foreign Minister Ranjan added, “My President should receive a formal reply to his letter; Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi may agree or disagree with the date proposed or he may like to say whatever he likes to say. Not sending a reply means that the President of Sri Lanka has no power over the issue. But that issue had become a matter of life and death for him, as he had to make a public announcement on that.” The instruction to me from Delhi in response was to tell the President personally that we wanted to settle the issue through discussions and debate to the satisfaction of both sides, but public diplomacy to solve it would not help. I conveyed that to the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister.

IFAJ: During those fast moving eight weeks to the deadline, it seemed that India did finally act upon the timeline set by the Sri Lankan President.

LLM: We acted, but not on the basis of that deadline. A series of considered steps taken by both sides were taken which ultimately amounted to preparing for the contingency of war breaking out between the two sides. But I was dead set on finding a peaceful solution. Ultimately those efforts led to a date for the IPKF to be fully de-inducted, not very far from the one being suggested and yet not quite near.

It should be appreciated that a solution to a bilateral problem between India and Sri Lanka worked out without the cooperation of both parties was unthinkable. Hence, I sent a message through a very personal line of communication to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi explaining what the Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka had told me. I personally urged him to send a reply to the communication from President Premadasa stressing that it would take much of the heat out of the moment. The Prime Minister very graciously responded positively to that suggestion.

Secondly, I met the leader of Opposition, Madame Sirimavo Bandaranaike to pick up her brains for a solution to the mounting crisis. She told me that President Jayewardene was personally responsible for the Indian intervention and she could not blame India for it, though she would have wished that it had not taken place. The people of Sri Lanka also could not reconcile themselves to that intervention. President Jayewardene had no business to bring in a foreign force to settle an internal dispute. She would herself want the IPKF to

go but said, “Premadasa has created a situation in which no solution is possible”. He had precipitated a confused situation and had totally vitiated and destroyed the relationship with India, she added.

I then met former President Jayewardene. He said that the Sri Lankan Government had invited the IPKF to strengthen Sri Lanka’s security and sovereignty and not to breach its sovereignty. He further said that the Agreement of 1987 was approved by the Cabinet and was accepted by all the militant groups, including the LTTE, before it became operational. The LTTE had now gone back on its commitments. That was neither his fault nor that of the Government of India. Rather, he said, the Government of India had kept its commitment to send a force to obtain the surrender of the militants. Therefore, neither India nor Sri Lanka could be faulted. But, he said, Premadasa had his own way of thinking. He wanted talks with the LTTE and they could be only on the premise that the IPKF was withdrawn. The JVP (Janatha Vimukthi *Peramuna*) was also demanding that the IPKF was withdrawn. He finally told me that it was better to leave the issue in the hands of Premadasa. “I don’t trust the LTTE but the President will learn his own lessons”, he said.

IFAJ: On 28 July, leading up to the communiqué, what were the atmospherics?

LLM: The atmosphere was highly charged. However, quite like me, Foreign Minister Ranjan Wijeratne, and Bernard Tilakaratna, the Foreign Secretary, were committed to find a solution. Ranjan called me to his Defence Coordination room one day where no one else was present. In confidence he said, “High Commissioner, we know what has happened and we are not happy about it.” He could not speak against his President openly but he asked me to find a way out and soon. So I said, “Look, Ranjan, our Foreign Minister, Mr Narasimha Rao, has already invited you, the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, for talks and nothing more needed to be done. You just have to go for the talks and discuss the issues; a solution would emerge.” I said, the atmosphere was highly charged. Here is an example. Shortly before I met Ranjan, the Prime Minister had deputed Mr B.G. Deshmukh, his Principal Secretary, to Colombo for talks at the request of the Government of Sri Lanka but see what happened.

The Sri Lankan President told Deshmukh that IPKF should withdraw at once; otherwise the 1987 Agreement would be declared as null and void. He did not care if there was a rupture in diplomatic relations and he would go to any length and any cost to send the IPKF back and that he would not budge an inch from that position. Mr Deshmukh then said, “Mr. President, while we want to cooperate and negotiate a solution to the problem, if that is how you want it to be, then it will be so.” To the comment by the President that he

would declare the IPKF as an occupation force and it would hurt India's reputation, Deshmukh responded, "We will take care of our reputation." The President angrily retorted, "It will cost my political future and your next visit will be for my funeral." These were the exact words he used.

Before Deshmukh left for New Delhi, the Legal Advisor of the President saw me and left word that the President should not be misunderstood since he wanted an amicable solution. Noticing the new mood of President Premadasa who was known for his mercurial temperament, I sat down after his emissary left and drafted a three-point formula almost instinctively by way of a solution to the logjam in which we were.

IFAJ: What was the formula exactly?

LLM: It involved a statement on the part of the Sri Lankan President to the effect, first, that the President of Sri Lanka was desirous that the de-induction of IPKF should re-commence. (The process had got frozen after his ultimatum. I did not use the word "withdraw", but "re-commencement of de-induction" that had been stalled. No date for final withdrawal was mentioned). Second, the Foreign Minister of India had invited the Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka to visit New Delhi for discussion on the re-commencement of the de-induction process and the implementation of the 1987 Agreement. Third, the President of Sri Lanka had agreed to the proposal. The formula was as simple as that.

That was my proposal and I showed it to Mr Deshmukh just before he boarded the flight for Delhi. He asked me to go ahead and wished me luck. He also asked me to visit New Delhi with Sri Lanka's response.

I sent my draft proposal to the Legal Advisor of the President and subsequently it reached the President. The President said that there should be two more points to the High Commissioner's proposals. First, de-induction would recommence on 29 July; second, that he (the President of Sri Lanka) had asked for the same as the Commander-in-Chief of all the forces on Sri Lankan territory, meaning thereby that it included the IPKF though he did not say that openly.

I then flew to Delhi with my draft with the two points added by the President. Mr Deshmukh told me that the President's first point could be conceded that is that the IPKF withdrawals would recommence on the 29th of July but the second point was controversial because the President of India is the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of India and no one else could substitute the President of India on that score. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was very kind in discussing this issue at length at an exclusive session with

me at his residence where I showed him the draft proposal. He expressed agreement to my three points and the first point of the Sri Lankan President. But he said he could not agree to anyone except the President of India being the Commander-in-Chief of any Indian military contingent anywhere in the world, including the IPKF since that was constitutionally untenable. When I asked whether I could proceed with negotiating the document with the Sri Lankan President's first point included, he agreed but cautioned me saying, "When you go back watch the situation and see how it unfolds", his concern being whether the President Premadasa would change his posture again.

When I returned to Colombo, I found the whole country in revolt – "Our President has asked the IPKF to go but they are not going!" Both the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE were asking that the IPKF should leave! It was at that point that Ranjan called me and said something had to be done urgently. I wrote a counter draft to the earlier Sri Lankan one, carefully omitting the last point inserted by the Sri Lankan side about the Sri Lankan President being the Supreme Commander but retaining the rest – and gave it to him informally. Ranjan met the President and to my pleasant surprise the latter informed me that he would meet me the next day – 28 July 1989 – as he wanted to negotiate 'my' proposal with me 'personally'. The meeting was fixed for 11.30 a.m.

However, as I was leaving my house at 11 o'clock to meet President Premadasa, I got a message that the President could not receive me at 11.30, but that Ranjan and the Deputy Minister of Defence would receive me first a little past 12 O'clock noon. Exactly at 12 noon, I walked into Ranjan's chamber. He came in a few seconds later. He told me he could not enter the place where I was sitting a second before 12 noon because "*Rahu*" was in operation. That was also the reason why the President could not meet me in the morning. Then I told Ranjan jokingly, "*Rahu* is gone but Lakhan is by your side now". He smiled and then said the President would meet me at 12.30 at "Sucharita", his residence. Before I took his leave, Ranjan asked me what exactly I was carrying to the President for discussion. I said that I had got a document duly approved by the Foreign Secretary and the Foreign Minister and they had authorized me to go ahead with a couple of changes the Prime Minister had suggested in my draft. I gave a copy of the final version, which was now in the form of a joint communique, to Foreign Minister Ranjan.

I then drove to Sucharita. Mr Bradman Weerakoon, the President's Principal Secretary and personal advisor on foreign affairs received me and ushered me in. The President said, "Mr High Commissioner, I have seen your draft." Ranjan seemed to have forwarded the draft given to him earlier. In reply I pointed out that it had come to me from the Prime Minister. The

President then suggested that we went through it verbatim.

The President started by saying that the time had come for us to reach an agreement. Otherwise he would need to go on *Rupvahini*, the official television channel, to announce that the Sri Lankan armed forces had taken over charge, both in the north and the east from the IPKF and then if the IPKF resented, there would be hostility and war. I said, "Excellency, I have come here to discuss peace with you but if you want war you will have it." These words, delivered in a very serious manner, brought him down. I was observing him keenly; he was not expecting that kind of reply. He was virtually shaking and could not speak for a minute or two. I wanted to give him breathing space and told Ranjan that we would retire for some time and return later when called. The President retired to a side room. Ranjan and Tilak and I discussed the development. They suggested that I calm down.

I told Ranjan that I had always stood for peace but the President seemed to think in terms of war. In that case we should part company and face the consequences. Thereupon Ranjan assured me that he was certain that the President eventually would discuss the entire draft with me and we would reach agreement. Ranjan then went to see his President and returned after ten minutes or so, asking us all to join the President in the side room. The President, obviously looking composed by then started reading the draft sentence by sentence, asking for clarifications. He saw our acceptance of the date proposed by him – 29 July, for recommence of IPKF's de-induction. That pleased him even though it did not mean IPKF's final withdrawal by that date which he had demanded. On the Indian invitation to the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister to visit India "to finalize the process of de-induction and implementation of the 1987 Agreement", he said those two issues were not linked. "The implementation aspect is my internal affair and you need to de-link them", he said. I said I will remove the word "and" joining the two points and put them in separate sentences. But he insisted that they should be in separate paragraphs altogether. Foreign Secretary Tilakratna also suggested some minor changes which I carried out. Things were now almost ready for signatures. But I informed the President that since this was our Prime Minister's draft and he had had a say in finalizing it, I should forward it to him the changes suggested by him (the President) for his (Prime Minister's) approval. He said that he understood that and asked me to go to the next room to ring up our Prime Minister to get his approval. He said he would wait for me to return. I said, such consultations by me could not take place from the office or residence of the President of a foreign country. I added that I would go back to the High Commission and would be back as

soon as possible. He warned me that the TV announcement was slated for 5 p.m. and it was already 3.15.

I rang up Delhi from our High Commission asking for the Prime Minister on the hot line. Ronen Sen, who was then Joint Secretary in the PMO, took the line but the Prime Minister was not there. Ronen took down the negotiated version of the communiqué word for word. After some time, the Prime Minister himself rang me up and said to me to go ahead with the draft.

What I had done was: without creating a second paragraph I ended the sentence relating to finalizing the plan for IPK's de-induction at the end of one line and started a new sentence at the beginning of the next line that related to the implementation of the 1987 Agreement. It looked like a new paragraph, without really being so in a fashion that it satisfied the viewpoint of both the President of Sri Lanka and the Prime Minister of India. Actually, our Prime Minister was very keen to draw a link between these two aspects – there should be no de-induction unless the devolution plan was implemented while the Sri Lankan President wanted them delinked. I went with the draft and told the President that our Prime Minister had accepted every bit of the draft as revised by him and proposed no further change which indeed was the case. I distributed six copies of it to the six people present there and they all said to their President that there was no change to what they had drafted. The President then looked at it himself closely and overwhelmed by joy exclaimed, "Oh, no change, no change!" He then walked over to me, hugged me hard and said to Ranjan 'I would like every Sri Lankan Foreign Service officer to be like Lakhan Mehrotra.' He then left for Rupvahini to announce the agreement just reached and that changed the climate around very significantly. The joint communiqué effectively silenced the war drums.

IFAJ: Subsequently, there was a proposal to sign a treaty of peace and friendship which could not be concluded. What was the hitch?

LLM: President Premadasa realized that the Indo-Sri Lankan Peace Accord of 1987 did not serve the purposes for which it was signed. While India was still committed to that Agreement, Premadasa wanted to attract India with an alternative proposal. He said, "I am a friend of India. Any notion that I don't stand for a very close relation between India and Sri Lanka hurts me. As a Buddhist I feel deeply beholden to the country which gave birth to Lord Buddha and from where he travelled to Sri Lanka." In fact, Premadasa invited me to visit the island, which as Mahavamsa tells, Gautama the Buddha had visited himself in Sri Lanka to resolve an ethnic conflict. President Premadasa

said he wanted to emulate the Buddha in bringing ethnic peace to his island nation.

He wanted an agreement for permanent peace and cooperation with India so that nobody would have any doubt that Sri Lanka was not cooperating with India. That was the intention behind the proposal for a peace treaty. However, the prime motive behind it was to provide India a substitute to the 1987 Agreement which in his view would put the "relationship on a more permanent footing". In Premadasa's opinion, the 1987 Agreement lacked permanence as it was meant to take care of a particular situation. He was not opposed to that Agreement in its totality but opposed its military provisions. However, for that, he said, Sri Lanka itself was responsible. He wanted the new treaty, the Treaty of Permanent Peace and Friendship with Sri Lanka, to be drafted jointly by India and Sri Lanka, thus indirectly suggesting that the 1987 Agreement was a one-way affair, weighted entirely in India's favour. India never accepted that insinuation.

When Shri V.P. Singh became Prime Minister towards the end of 1989, a Sri Lankan delegation was the first to visit Delhi to greet him. They were told that we were ready for such a treaty and that we would send our draft in a week's time. Our then Foreign Minister, Shri I.K. Gujral, sent our draft of the proposed Treaty to Colombo within the stipulated time. Our draft was in reply to the Sri Lankan draft sent to New Delhi in Shri Rajiv Gandhi's time. Foreign Secretary Muchkund Dubey was deputed by the government to deliver our draft and to say that we would be ready to sign the Treaty of Permanent Peace and Friendship with Sri Lanka as and when the Sri Lankan side were ready. However, between the 28 July communiqué and the time our draft (of the new treaty) was ready around the end of 1989, the Sri Lankan government's priorities had changed. They started concentrating more on the actual withdrawal of the IPKF. Probably, it was at the back of their mind that with the final withdrawal of the IPKF, they might not need the new treaty at all and that they could live with the situation as it was with the 1987 Agreement intact. While we were ready for the peace and friendship treaty to be signed in early 1990, they seemed to have developed cold feet.

IFAJ: How different were the two drafts?

LLM: They were quite close to each other and as a matter of fact when Mr Dubey came, the Sri Lankan government said that we could soon start negotiations on the draft.

But those were diversionary tactics. As I said earlier, their priority had changed by then. Diplomatically, they might not have seen any great advantage

in pursuing the matter further. Their Foreign Office remained completely silent about it but my own understanding from some other contacts in Sri Lanka was that they developed cold feet because they felt the proposed treaty would translate into their being a permanent satellite of India! To them it meant something like the relationship between the East European countries and the Soviet Union. That was the talk in some elite circles on the subject, but that kind of thing was never said or explained to me by any authorized representative of Sri Lanka.

IFAJ: Can you tell us something about the attitude and views of the Tamil political circles in India on the induction of the IPKF and thereafter, the de-induction?

LLM: Before the 1987 Agreement, the voice of Tamil Nadu was very strong in favour of India standing up for the rights of Tamils in Sri Lanka and that had, to a large extent, influenced the drafting of the 1987 Agreement. Subsequently, there was a big gulf between what was intended and what was achieved on the ground. If the LTTE militants had surrendered, as envisaged, the agreement would have functioned very smoothly.

I have reproduced a document in my book, *My Days in Sri Lanka*, in which Prabhakaran had confirmed to the Prime Minister of India that he would go to Jaffna by 1st August 1987 and personally supervise the surrender of arms by the LTTE that was supposed to commence from 4th August. But when the LTTE went back on its undertaking and in fact challenged the IPKF militarily, the IPKF had to resort to force and the whole picture changed. When some of the LTTE cadres were killed as a result, there was a severe reaction in Tamil Nadu about what the IPKF was doing. That sentiment continued to prevail until the de-induction of the IPKF. A person like Mr. Karunanidhi, who had negotiated hard to bring the militants together into a peace accord when he was Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu in my time in Sri Lanka, went to the extent of disallowing the returning IPKF units to land at any of his ports.

IFAJ: It was almost within five weeks of the arrival of the IPKF that the situation took an ugly turn....

LLM: The IPKF had no choice. The LTTE left no choice for the IPKF and India was determined to carry out its commitment under the Agreement.

IFAJ: What is your opinion on the LTTE leadership prior to the July 1989 Accord and thereafter?

LLM: When the talks were going on between the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE, starting from end April 1989, Ranjan once went to Velvettiturai

in the North to meet Prabhakaran. Prabhakaran had agreed to the meeting. Ranjan invited me to come along with him and we flew in a helicopter to that village. But not only was Prabhakaran not there but the whole village had been evacuated, not a soul was in sight! There were only two dogs on the street. When Ranjan expressed his outrage, I told Ranjan, "We have repeatedly told you what LTTE is all about but you didn't trust us. They have betrayed our Prime Minister and they will betray you."

Two months later, the LTTE broke the ceasefire; they killed a large number of cadres from another Tamil militant group in Trincomalee and Batticaloa. By November, they had destroyed the camps of other militant factions. The Sri Lankan President was wrong in his assessment that he could bring the LTTE to the negotiating table and push them towards peace. He had called them and also the JVP to negotiations. With both the LTTE and JVP at the negotiating table, he wanted to talk to India from a position of strength, to say that there was no rationale for the IPKF to stay on as he was now negotiating peace with both of them. That was his strategy, which did not work. Anybody who negotiated peace with LTTE was eliminated by it, be it Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, President Premadasa or foreign Minister Ranjan Wijeratne. Premadasa had many streaks of greatness in him. He belonged to the UNP, which was an elitist party to which Jayewardene, Sir John Kotelawala and many others had belonged. In contrast Premadasa was not from the upper crust; he was not a Goyigama and was not from Colombo but was a man of the masses.

Premadasa was deeply attached to the soil and was committed to maintain the sovereignty and integrity of Sri Lanka as a unitary state. From the very day the IPKF had been invited to Sri Lanka, he strongly believed that it had breached Sri Lankan sovereignty. That became the main plank of his differences with Jayewardene. That was his stand even when he was Prime Minister in the Jayewardene cabinet. He was in Japan when the 1987 Agreement was signed and when he came back he openly expressed his opposition to the Agreement. During his own election campaign he had vigorously expressed his opposition to the military aspects of the pact.

However, he was wrong on two counts. First, there was no need for him to challenge India for gaining his objectives. As a friend of Sri Lanka, India felt deeply hurt by his unilateral approach to a matter of great mutual concern. In fact, he created a situation where tensions with India became inevitable. Second, he believed that his goodwill for the Tamils would translate itself into peace negotiations with the LTTE. The LTTE came to the negotiating table

after three months of his assuming Presidency actually to gain time to re-equip because the IPKF had hit it very hard. It insisted that it could not pursue peace until the IPKF was withdrawn.

Once the IPKF left, the LTTE turned the tables on Premadasa. They killed him and his Foreign Minister, and many other leaders, both Sinhala and Tamil, including Amritalingam, the champion of constitutional reform.

IFAJ: Finally, the de-induction was completed before you left your post. Leaving aside the military aspects of the agreement, can you recall any anecdote on the de-induction process?

LLM: Yes. Immediately after Mr. V.P. Singh took over as Prime Minister, President Premadasa strongly felt that an opportunity had come his way to speed up the process of the IPKF withdrawals. He first sent a warm letter congratulating the new Prime Minister and then sent a delegation to him with a brief to persuade him to have the withdrawals completed by December 1989. India's new Prime Minister had hardly come into the Chair when the Sri Lankan President was asking him to complete the IPKF's withdrawal within a couple of weeks!

Prime Minister V.P. Singh simply said he would look into the matter but did not commit himself to a date. Thereafter, Foreign Minister Gujral informed Ranjan through me that the withdrawals would be completed by 31 March 1990 as earlier visualized. I also made an announcement as part of the traditional 26 January Republic Day Message to the people of Sri Lanka to that effect.

Sometime thereafter, I got a message through a very personal friend of Wijeratne that his portfolio as Foreign Minister was in jeopardy as he could not persuade the new government in Delhi to end the IPKF's withdrawal process earlier and that any relief on that account would be very welcome to him. Knowing him as a friend, I wanted to do something for him. I met External Affairs Minister Shri I.K. Gujral in Delhi and gave him that message. He managed to advance the date of IPKF's final de-induction by a week in consultation with the Ministry of Defence and the de-induction process was completed on the 24th of March. That made my friend Ranjan Wijeratne very happy. He personally came to Trincomali on that date to see off the IPKF. The IPKF was given "a grand farewell" with a combined salute from Sri Lanka's three military arms. Ranjan made a very positive statement when the bugle was sounded for the departure of INS Magyar carrying the IPKF's top brass and its last units. It was indeed a very honourable withdrawal.

On top of that, there was a letter from President Premadasa to Prime Minister V.P. Singh, not only thanking the Government of India for withdrawing the IPKF in time but also for the great sacrifices of the IPKF in ensuring the integrity and sovereignty of Sri Lanka.

IFAJ: Thank you very much, Sir, for sharing the insider perspective on the withdrawal of IPKF, which would be of much interest both to the academia and policymakers.

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