

COUNTRY FACT SHEET

SRI LANKA

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Research Directorate
Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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1. GENERAL INFORMATION

Official name

Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

Geography

Sri Lanka is located in Southern Asia. It is an island in the Indian Ocean, south of India. The total area is 65,610 km² (land: 64,740 km², water: 870 km²). Its climate is characterized by the tropical monsoon with the northeast monsoon from December to March and the southwest monsoon from June to October.

Population and density

Population:

19,253,000 (Official Estimate - mid-2003)

16,864,544 (Total Enumerated Population - Census 2001)^A

Density:

298.3 persons per km² (mid-2003)

Principal cities and populations (Census 2001 unless otherwise indicated)

Colombo (commercial capital) 642,020; Dehiwala-Mount Lavinia 209,787; Moratuwa 177,190; Jaffna 145,600 (mid-1997 estimate); Negombo 121,933; Sri Jayawardenepura (administrative capital) 115,826; Kandy 110,049; Kalmunai 94,457; Galle 90,934

Languages

Sinhala (74%) and Tamil (18%) are the official languages named in article 18 of the Constitution. English is also recognized as a link language. Other languages: Sri Lankan Creole Malay, Indo-Portuguese and Veddah.

Other countries where Tamil is spoken: 58,596,000 in India; 90,000 in Singapore; 250,000 in South Africa; 274,218 in Malaysia; 22,000 in Mauritius; 62,000,000 or more in all countries.

Religions

2001 Census (refers to 18 out of 25 districts)^B: Buddhist 76.7%, Muslim 8.5%, Hindu 7.9%, Roman Catholic 6.1% and other Christian 0.8%.

Ethnic groups

2001 Census (refers to 18 out of 25 districts): Sinhalese 81.9%, Sri Lankan Tamil 4.4%, Indian Tamil 5.1%, Sri Lankan Moors 8.0% and others 0.7%.

^A This figure reflects the enumeration of 18 out of 25 districts. Full enumeration could not be completed due to instability in Mannar, Vavuniya, Batticaloa and Trincomalee districts. No enumeration occurred in Jaffna, Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi, also due to instability.

^B The remaining seven districts were located in Tamil-dominated regions that were inaccessible due to regional instability.

Demographics (2006 estimate unless otherwise indicated)

Population growth rate: 0.78%

Infant mortality rate: 13.97 deaths/1,000 live births

Life expectancy at birth: 73.41 years

Fertility rate: 1.84 children born/woman

Literacy: 92.3% of people aged 15 and older can read and write (2003 estimate)

Currency

Sri Lankan rupee (LKR)

LKR 91.83 = CAD 1.00¹

National holidays

2006: 11 January (Id al-Adha, Hadji Festival Day), 15 January (Tamil Thai Pongal Day), 4 February (Independence Commemoration Day), 26 February (Maha Shivaratri), 11 April (Milad un-Nabi, Birth of the Prophet), 13 April (Sinhala and Tamil New Year's Eve), 14 April (Good Friday and Sinhala and Tamil New Year's Day), 1 May (May Day), 21 October (Diwali - Festival of Lights), 24 October (Id al-Fitr, Ramadan Festival Day), 25 December (Christmas Day), 31 December (Id al-Adha, Hadji Festival Day).

2007: 14 January (Tamil Thai Pongal Day), 4 February (Independence Commemoration Day), 16 February (Maha Shivaratri), 31 March (Milad un-Nabi, Birth of the Prophet), 6 April (Good Friday), 13 April (Sinhala and Tamil New Year's Eve), 14 April (Sinhala and Tamil New Year's Day), 1 May (May Day), 13 October (Id al-Fitr, Ramadan Festival Day), 9 November (Diwali - Festival of Lights), 20 December (Id al-Adha, Hadji Festival Day), 25 December (Christmas Day).

Head of state and government

President Mahinda Rajapakse (since 19 November 2005)

Form of government

Sri Lanka has employed a presidential-parliamentary system of government since 1978. The president is the head of state, the head of the executive, the head of the government, and the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The parliament is Sri Lanka's legislative branch of government. The prime minister is appointed by the president.

Legislative structure

The parliament is unicameral and contains 225 seats. A modified system of proportional representation is used to elect members to 6-year terms.

Administrative divisions

Sri Lanka has 9 provinces and 25 districts.

Provinces: Central, Eastern, North, North Central, North Western, Sabaragamuwa, Southern, Uva and Western.^C

Districts: Colombo, Gampaha, Kalutara, Kandy, Matale, Nuwara Eliya, Galle, Matara, Hambantota, Jaffna, Mannar, Vavuniya, Mullaitivu, Kilinochchi, Batticaloa, Ampara, Trincomalee, Kurunegala, Puttalam, Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Badulla, Moneragala, Ratnapura and Kegalle.

Judicial system

The judiciary comprises the Supreme Court, the Court of Appeal, the High Court, district courts, magistrates' courts and primary courts. The president appoints judges to the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal.

Elections

Sri Lanka has universal suffrage for citizens 18 years and older. The president is elected for a 6-year term and is eligible for re-election to a second term only. The legislature also operates on a 6-year term but may be dissolved at the president's discretion.

The last presidential election was 17 November 2005. Mahinda Rajapakse, representing the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA), won the presidency with 50.29 % of the vote. Ranil Wickremasinghe of the United National Party (UNP) garnered 48.43 % of the vote.^D

The last parliamentary election was 2 April 2004. Out of 225 seats, the UPFA won 105 seats, the UNP 82 seats, the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) 22 seats, Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) 9 seats, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) 5 seats, the Up-Country People's Front (UPF) 1 seat and the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) 1 seat.^E

Defence

Military service is voluntary. The age of eligibility is 18. In August 2005, the Sri Lankan armed forces numbered 151,000 personnel:

Army:	118,000
Navy:	15,000
Air Force:	18,000

^C In 1998, the government of Sri Lanka attempted to officially merge the North and Eastern provinces. Although the amalgamation was not successful, the government regards the North Eastern province as one administrative entity.

^D According to the Commonwealth Secretariat, voter turnout was strong except in the northern district of Jaffna and peace and calm prevailed during the casting of ballots (16 Dec. 2005, 28, 30).

^E According to the Commonwealth Secretariat, the April 2004 election reflected the free will of voters with the exception of those in the North and the East (7 April 2004). The Commonwealth Secretariat also expressed concern regarding the use of violence and intimidation before the election and the conduct of state media (7 April 2004).

Paramilitary forces numbered 88,600 including:

Home Guard:	13,000
National Guard	15,000 (estimate)
Anti-guerrilla unit	3,000

The 2006 defence budget is LKR 56.2 billion (CAD 612,018,000).²

Media

Article 14(1)(a) of the 1978 constitution entitles citizens to freedom of speech and publication. However, these rights may be restricted under specific circumstances, for example, to maintain racial and religious harmony, or national security and public order.

Sri Lanka's primary publishing groups are the Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd. (government-owned), Upali Newspapers Ltd. and Wijeya Newspapers Ltd. The National News Agency of Sri Lanka (Lankapuvath) and the Press Trust of Ceylon are the chief national news agencies, and the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (government-run) manages national and commercial radio service. As of 2003, there were an estimated 2.4 million television receivers, 325,000 personal computers and 250,000 Internet users in Sri Lanka. Newspapers with wide circulation are: *Silumina*, *Divaina*, *Dinamina* and *Janasathiya* (in Sinhala); *Lankadeepa* and *The Sunday Times* (in Sinhala and English); *Daily News*, *The Island* and *The Sunday Observer* (in English); and *Virakesari*, *Mithran Varamvalar* and *Thinakaren* (in Tamil).

United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) and Country Rank^F

Value: 0.751/1 (2003)

Rank: 93 out of 177 countries (2003)

Gender-related Development Index (GDI) and Country Rank^G

Value: 0.747/1 (2003)

Rank: 66 out of 140 countries (2003)

Population below the national poverty line

25% (1990-2002 estimate)

^F The HDI is a composite measurement of human development in a country, based on life expectancy, levels of literacy and education, and standard of living. Values are: 0.800 and higher (high human development), 0.500-0.799 (medium human development) and 0.500 and under (low development index). Countries are ranked in descending order by their HDI value.

^G The GDI adjusts the rating of the HDI to reflect inequalities between men and women.

Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)^H

Score: 3.2/10 (2005)

Rank: 78 out of 159 countries surveyed (2005)

[Information compiled from: Commonwealth Secretariat 16 Dec. 2005; Commonwealth Secretariat 7 Apr. 2004; *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* 2005; *The Europa World Year Book* 2006 2006; *Political Handbook of the World: 2005-2006* 2006; *Political Parties of the World* 2005; Sri Lanka 2006; Sri Lanka 1978; Transparency International 2005; UN 2005; US 22 Aug. 2006]

2. POLITICAL BACKGROUND

Presidential election

Sri Lanka's recent political history was marked by a change in its presidency. On 17 November 2005, Mahinda Rajapakse of the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) was elected president of Sri Lanka with 50.29 percent of the vote.³ His opponent, Ranil Wickremasinghe of the United National Party (UNP), won 48.43 percent of the vote. Voter turnout was minimal in northern and eastern regions of the country.⁴ Following the election, President Rajapakse stated his intention to reach a peace settlement with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and resolve questions of post-tsunami aid distribution.⁵ Committed to preserving a unitary state⁶, President Rajapakse does not support "autonomy for Tamils in the north and the east".⁷

Civil war

The current parties to the Sri Lankan conflict are government security forces and rebels. The rebels consist of the LTTE and other Tamil separatist groups.⁸ The LTTE seeks an autonomous Tamil state in the northern and eastern regions of Sri Lanka.⁹ Since the start of the conflict in 1983, over 65,000 people have died.¹⁰ A cease-fire was reached on 22 February 2002.¹¹ At the time of publication of this *Country Fact Sheet*, the cease-fire is still in effect despite worsening violence (see "Events in 2006").

Events in 2006

Following increased violence in late 2005 and early 2006, the government and the LTTE met in February in Geneva and jointly proclaimed their intention to mitigate the Sri Lankan conflict.¹² The two parties agreed to further negotiations in April sponsored by Norway: however, the LTTE suspended the April talks, using attacks against Tamil civilians as justification.¹³ The situation in Sri Lanka continued to destabilize with violent exchanges between the government and the LTTE and assaults against humanitarian personnel in April and May.¹⁴ A September 2006 report from the International Crisis Group (ICG) points to "full-scale military clashes in eastern and northern regions," hundreds of deaths and 200,000 displaced persons.¹⁵

^H The Transparency International CPI is based on composite survey data from 16 polls and 10 independent institutions. The data reflects the perceptions of resident and non-resident business people and country analysts. Scores range from 0 (highly corrupt) to 10 (highly clean). According to their score, countries are ranked in order from least corrupt (1) to most corrupt (159).

Tsunami

On 26 December 2004, Sri Lanka was hit by a tsunami originating from an earthquake in the Indian Ocean.¹⁶ More than 31,000 people died and thousands were left homeless and without employment.¹⁷ The economic impact on Sri Lanka's tourism industry was severe.¹⁸ Early on, there was optimism that the devastation caused by the tsunami would serve to unite Sri Lankans and assuage internal conflict: however, the government and the LTTE soon began to fight over the flow of resources to affected areas.¹⁹ The Post-Tsunami Operational Management Structure (P-TOMS) was established in June 2005 in order to include the LTTE in the aid distribution process: however, it was suspended when the Supreme Court ruled certain clauses illegal.²⁰

3. POLITICAL PARTIES

United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA)

The UPFA is the current governing alliance.²¹ Formed to contest the April 2004 parliamentary elections, the UPFA grew out of the former People's Alliance (PA).²² Ratnasiri Wickremanayake, Sri Lanka's current prime minister is the president of the UPFA.²³ The UPFA won 105 out of 225 seats in the April 2004 parliamentary election.²⁴ ¹ UPFA members are:

Communist Party of Sri Lanka (CPSL): The CPSL was established in 1943.²⁵ It advocates a socialist society, democratic practices, social equality and a unified Sri Lanka.²⁶ The CPSL also supports negotiation and the decentralization of powers to help resolve the Tamil conflict.²⁷ D.E.W. Gunasekara is the leader of the CPSL.²⁸

Democratic United National Front (DUNF): The DUNF was founded in 1991 by breakaway members from the United National Party (UNP).²⁹ Historically, the DUNF was a part of the PA, joining in 1994 and backing the PA coalition in the 2000 and December 2001 elections.³⁰ Ariyawans Dissanayake is the leader of the DUNF. The party has 500,000 members.³¹

Lanka Equal Society Party (Lanka Sama Samaja Pakshaya, LSSP): The LSSP is a Trotskyist party founded in 1935.³² Historically, it has supported SLFP-dominated alliances, and in 1964, the party united with the SLFP to form a coalition government.³³ In the April 2004 election, the LSSP backed the UPFA but secured no seats in Parliament.³⁴ Wimalasiri De Mel is the leader of the LSSP.³⁵

Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP): The democratic socialist SLFP, founded in 1951 by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, has figured prominently in Sri Lankan politics.³⁶ Historically, the SLFP has supported public and private sector

¹ At the time of the April 2004 election, the People's Liberation Front (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, JVP) was part of the UPFA (see "Other parliamentary parties" below).

development, non-alignment in international affairs and protection for minorities.³⁷ In the April 2004 parliamentary election, the SLFP secured approximately 60 out of the 105 seats won by the UPFA.³⁸ Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga is the leader of the SLFP.³⁹

Sri Lanka People's Party (Sri Lanka Mahajana Pakshaya, SLMP): The SLMP was founded in 1984 by Chandrika Kumaratunga (before she became leader of the SLFP) and her husband Vijaya.⁴⁰ Vijaya Kumaratunga was assassinated on 16 February 1988, allegedly by the People's Liberation Front (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, JVP).⁴¹ The party espouses social democratic principles and is currently led by Sarath Kongahage.⁴²

United National Front (UNF)

The UNF alliance secured 82 seats in the April 2004 parliamentary election.⁴³ UNF members are:

United National Party (UNP): The UNP is a democratic socialist party established in 1946.⁴⁴ The party endorses a moderate stance,⁴⁵ non-alignment in international affairs, official language status for Sinhala and Tamil, and government support for religious schooling.⁴⁶ In the December 2001 election, the UNP obtained 109 seats (the most of any party) and formed the United National Front (UNF) led by Ranil Wickremasinghe, the subsequent prime minister.⁴⁷ In the April 2004 parliamentary election, the UNP won 74 seats finishing second to the UPFA.⁴⁸ Wickremasinghe currently leads the UNP's 1.4 million members.⁴⁹

Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC): The CWC was founded in 1939 primarily as a trade union representing the interests of Indian Tamil tea plantation workers.⁵⁰ In the April 2004 parliamentary election, the CWC obtained eight seats as a part of the UNF.⁵¹ S.R. Arumugam Thondman is the current leader of the party's 300,000 members.⁵²

Tamil National Alliance (TNA)

The TNA secured 22 seats in the April 2004 parliamentary election.⁵³ TNA members are:

All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC): The ACTC was established in 1944 and is considered the first Tamil separatist organization.⁵⁴ The ACTC ran in the December 2001 and April 2004 election under the banner of the TNA.⁵⁵ Nalliah Kumuraguruparam is the party's leader.⁵⁶

Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF): Engaged in guerrilla fighting in the early 1980s, the EPRLF was all but destroyed by the LTTE in 1986.⁵⁷ In the late 1980s the EPRLF reconstituted itself as a political party.⁵⁸ The party is split into two factions led by Suresh K. Premachandran and Annamalai Varatharajah Perumal.⁵⁹ The EPRLF ran as a part of the TNA in the December 2001 and April 2004 elections.⁶⁰

Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO): In 1984, three militant Tamil separatist organizations amalgamated to form the TELO.⁶¹ Like the EPRLF, they were almost decimated by the LTTE in 1986 but regrouped to contest future elections.⁶² TELO has been a national political party since 1988⁶³ and ran in the December 2001 and April 2004 elections as part of the TNA.⁶⁴ TELO is currently led by Selvam Adaikalanathan.⁶⁵

Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF): In 1976, various Tamil groups joined to form the TULF, which advocates a Tamil homeland and self-determination.⁶⁶ Historically, the LTTE has targeted the TULF, killing a number of members holding important posts.⁶⁷ TULF ran in the December 2001 and April 2004 elections as part of the TNA.⁶⁸ The leader of the party is Veerasingham Anadasangaree.⁶⁹

Other parliamentary parties

Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP):

Previously the Eelavar Democratic Front (EDF, 1988-1994), the Tamil EPDP was founded in 1995.⁷⁰ Refusing to heed the LTTE's call to boycott elections in 1998, the EPDP has faced continual threats and attacks from the LTTE.⁷¹ The EPDP won one seat in the April 2004 parliamentary election, and subsequently pledged its support for the governing UPFA, which appointed EPDP leader Douglas Devananda to cabinet.⁷²

People's Liberation Front (Janatha Vimukthi Perumuna, JVP):

The JVP was established in 1965 as a Sinhalese Marxist party with a pro-Chinese stance.⁷³ In 1971, the JVP tried to overthrow the government and lost its legal status until 1977.⁷⁴ The party was outlawed again from 1983 to 1994.⁷⁵ A founding member of the UPFA,⁷⁶ the JVP won 39 of the UPFA's seats in the April 2004 parliamentary election.⁷⁷ However, the JVP later withdrew from the governing alliance because it opposed the government's decision to deal with the LTTE under the Post-Tsunami Operational Management Structure (P-TOMS).⁷⁸ The leader of the JVP is Somawansa Amarasinghe.⁷⁹

National Heritage Party (Jathika Hela Urumaya, JHU):

The Sinhalese nationalist JHU was founded in 2004 out of the former Sihala Urumaya (SU).⁸⁰ The JHU is a pro-Buddhist organization that strongly opposes compromise with Tamil separatist groups.⁸¹ In the April 2004 parliamentary election, the JHU won 9 seats.⁸² Tilak Karunaratne is the leader of the JHU.⁸³

Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC):

The SLMC was formally established as a political party in 1986 but has membership dating back to 1980.⁸⁴ The SLMC advocates for Muslims and supports a political resolution of the conflict with Tamil separatists.⁸⁵ The SLMC won 5 seats in the April 2004 parliamentary election and is led by Rauff Hakeem.⁸⁶

Up-Country People's Front (UPF):

The UPF was founded by breakaway members of the CWC and advocates in the interests of Indian Tamil tea plantation workers.⁸⁷ The UPF secured one seat in the Parliament in April 2004.⁸⁸ The leader of the UPF is P. Chandrasekaran.⁸⁹

Other political parties

- **Akhila Illankai Tamil United Front (AITUK)**⁹⁰
- **Ceylon Democratic Unity Alliance (CDUA)**⁹¹
- **Citizen's Front (Puravesi Peramuna, PP)**⁹²
- **Democratic People's Liberation Front (DPLF)**⁹³
- **Democratic Workers Congress (DWC)**⁹⁴
- **Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front (ENDLF)**⁹⁵
- **Eelavar Democratic Front**⁹⁶
- **Eksath Lanka Podujana Pakshaya**⁹⁷
- **Jathika Sangwardhena Peramuna (JSP)**⁹⁸
- **Liberal Party**⁹⁹
- **Muslim United Liberation Front (MULF)**¹⁰⁰
- **National Liberation People's Party (also Desha Vimukthi Janatha Pakshaya)**¹⁰¹
- **National People's Party (NPP)**¹⁰²
- **National Unity Alliance (NUA)**¹⁰³
- **New Equal Society Party (Nava Sama Samaja Pakshaya, NSSP)**¹⁰⁴
- **People's United Front (Mahajana Eksath Peramuna, MEP)**¹⁰⁵
- **Ruhuna Janatha Party (RJP)**¹⁰⁶
- **Sinhalese Freedom Front (Singhalaye Nithahas Peramuna, SNP)**¹⁰⁷
- **Socialist Equality Party (SEP)**¹⁰⁸
- **Sons of the Soil Party (Sinhalaya Mahasammatha Bhoomiputra Pakshaya, SMBP)**¹⁰⁹
- **Sri Lanka Muslim Katchi (SLMK)**¹¹⁰
- **Sri Lanka National Front (SLNF)**¹¹¹
- **Sri Lanka Progressive Front (SLPF)**¹¹²
- **Swarajya (SR)**¹¹³
- **United Muslim People's Alliance (UMPA)**¹¹⁴
- **United Socialist Party (USP)**¹¹⁵

4. ARMED GROUPS AND OTHER NON-STATE ACTORS

Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE):

The LTTE was initially established in 1972 as the Tamil New Tigers and aims for the creation of a Tamil state in the northern and eastern regions of Sri Lanka.¹¹⁶ The LTTE is the strongest of Tamil separatist organizations.¹¹⁷ Velupillai Prabhakaran is the leader.¹¹⁸

People's Front of the Liberation Tigers (PFLT):

The PFLT was established in 1989 and is the political wing of the LTTE.¹¹⁹ Gopalswamy Mahendrarajah is the leader.¹²⁰

People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE):

The PLOTE is the militant wing of the DPLF (see above).¹²¹ Dharmalingam Siddharthan is the leader.¹²²

Tamil Eelam United Liberation Front (Tamilleela Iykkiya Viduthalai Munnani, TIVM):

The TIVM was established in October 2004 and unites the ENDLF with Colonel Karuna's Tamil Eelam People's Liberation Tigers (see below).¹²³

Tamil Eelam People's Liberation Tigers (Tamilleela Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal, TMVP):

The TMVP was formally established in 2004 by breakaway LTTE eastern commander, Colonel Karuna (also, Vinayagamurthi Muralitharan).¹²⁴ Karuna separated from the LTTE citing excessive control by northern leaders.¹²⁵ The LTTE prevailed when violent exchanges broke out between the two groups a few days after the April 2004 parliamentary election.¹²⁶

Other groups

- **Ellalan Force**¹²⁷
- **People's Revolutionary Action Group**¹²⁸
- **Tamil Eelam Liberation Front (TELF)**¹²⁹
- **Tamil People's Protection Party**¹³⁰

5. FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

At the time of publication of this *Country Fact Sheet*, the 2002 ceasefire remains officially in place.¹³¹ However, in an 18 September 2006 address to the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour identified the following concerns regarding Sri Lanka: escalating violence, extrajudicial and political killings, over 200,000 displaced persons and the forced recruitment of child soldiers.¹³² As well, in a 19 September 2006 report, Human Rights Watch (HRW) urged the government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE to consent to a UN human rights monitoring mission in Sri Lanka.¹³³

ENDNOTES

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- ²² *Political Handbook of the World*, p. 1101.
- ²³ *The Europa World Year Book*, p. 4075.
- ²⁴ Ibid., p. 4074.
- ²⁵ *Political Handbook of the World*, p. 1102.
- ²⁶ *The Europa World Year Book*, p. 4075.
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