



**Australian Government**  
**Refugee Review Tribunal**

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# Country Advice

## Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka – LKA40169 – Matara –  
Parliamentary Elections 2004 –  
Presidential Elections 2005 – United  
National Party – UNP  
12 April 2012

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**1. Deleted.**

**2. Please give dates of the national elections in 2004-2005 and approximate timing of relevant campaign cycles.**

Parliamentary elections were held on 2 April 2004, and a presidential election on 17 November 2005.<sup>1</sup>

### Parliamentary Elections

According to the *Political Handbook of the World*, parliament was dissolved on 7 February 2004, after an alliance between the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the JVP finished, and an election was called for 2 April of the same year.<sup>2</sup>

Nominations for the parliamentary elections reportedly closed on 24 February, 2004. According to Qatar news source *The Peninsula*, a total of 6,024 candidates – from 24 recognised political parties and 192 independent groups – nominated to compete for 225 parliamentary seats.<sup>3</sup> Forty political activists were reportedly injured in 27 incidents in southern and north-central regions the day after nominations closed.<sup>4</sup>

According to an article on the TamilNet website, the UNP was to launch its 2004 election campaign on Thursday, 26 February, with rallies in Anuradhapura and Kandy.<sup>5</sup> The UNP won 85 seats in the parliamentary elections.<sup>6</sup>

### Presidential Election

In 2005, incumbent president Chandrika Kumaratunga apparently argued that, under the constitution, she was entitled to twelve years in office from her first appointment in 1994, and

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<sup>1</sup> „Sri Lanka’ 2011, *Political Handbook of the World Online Edition*, CQ Press Electronic Library

<sup>2</sup> „Sri Lanka’ 2011, *Political Handbook of the World Online Edition*, CQ Press Electronic Library

<sup>3</sup> „Over 6 000 candidates file nominations for Lanka Elections’ 2004, *The Peninsula*, 25 February, para.1 <<http://archive.thepeninsulaqatar.com/component/content/article/38671.html>> Accessed 5 April 2012

<sup>4</sup> „Tigers warn against hindering Tamil voters’ 2004, *The Peninsula*, 26 February <<http://archive.thepeninsulaqatar.com/component/content/article/38713.html>> Accessed 5 April 2012

<sup>5</sup> TamilNet 2004, *UPFA, UNP to launch election campaign Thursday*, 25 February, <<http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=11313>> Accessed 5 April 2012

<sup>6</sup> „Sri Lanka’ 2011, *Political Handbook of the World Online Edition*, CQ Press Electronic Library

that therefore an election was not due until 2006. The UNP argued that because Kumaratunga called an early election in 1999, her second term expired six years later – in 2005. The UNP leadership reportedly put together a petition urging the authorities to order an election.<sup>7</sup> On 26 August 2005, the Supreme Court ruled that incumbent President Kumaratunga's second term would expire in December 2005, and not one year later.<sup>8</sup>

The 2005 UNP presidential candidate was Ranil Wickremesinghe. According to the *Asian Tribune*, Wickremesinghe pre-emptively launched his presidential election campaign in early May 2005. The campaign launch slogan was "We are moving forward – Victory is Ours". The *Asian Tribune* gave a critical review of Wickremesinghe's launch:

The irony is that even he is not sure whether another presidential election will be held and if so when... The launch itself was a disaster. It did not go the way it was planned. His minders had told him to do the launch the American way and when he made stepped into the midst of his party loyalists the confetti did not come the way he expected. It came down in big lumps and as these lumps hit him he had to duck.<sup>9</sup>

Mahinda Rajapakse of the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) was elected president on 17 November 2005, and re-elected for a second term in 2010.<sup>10</sup>

The next presidential election in Sri Lanka is due to be held by November 2015.<sup>11 12</sup>

**3. Are there any credible reports that UNP members are of interest to the government or have been targeted/harmed by state or non-state actors in the Matara area, from 2005 to now? Please also include information as to whether the UNP draws a support base from the Sinhala majority.**

The UNP has been described as one of Sri Lanka's main Sinhala political parties.<sup>13 14 15</sup>

Reports were located of people being targeted in Matara on the basis of their affiliation with the UNP:

- In 2010, *The Island* reported that two UNP Matara District candidates were attacked and admitted to hospital.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> „Sri Lanka opposition campaign to force presidential election' 2005, *People's Daily Online*, source: *Xinhua* <[http://english.people.com.cn/200508/08/eng20050808\\_200979.html](http://english.people.com.cn/200508/08/eng20050808_200979.html)> Accessed 5 April 2012

<sup>8</sup> „Sri Lanka' 2011, *Political Handbook of the World Online Edition*, CQ Press Electronic Library

<sup>9</sup> „Ranil hit by lumps of confetti as he launches his presidential campaign' 2005, *Asian Tribune*, 16 May <<http://www.asiantribune.com/news/2005/05/16/ranil-hit-lumps-confetti-he-launches-his-presidential-campaign>> Accessed 5 April 2012

<sup>10</sup> „Sri Lanka' 2011, *Political Handbook of the World Online Edition*, CQ Press Electronic Library

<sup>11</sup> „Sri Lanka: Political structure' 2010, *Economist Intelligence Unit – ViewsWire*, 7 December, FACTIVEA

<sup>12</sup> Sri Lanka Department of Elections, Past Elections, n.d., <<http://www.slelections.gov.lk/pastElection.html>> Accessed 6 January 2011

<sup>13</sup> Sathananthan, S. n.d., *Conflict Resolution in Sri Lanka Problems and Prospects*, South Asia Terrorism Portal <<http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/publication/faultlines/volume5/fault5-3ssanthan.htm>> Accessed 12 April 2012

<sup>14</sup> Encyclopedia of the Nations n.d., *Sri Lanka – Political parties* <<http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/Asia-and-Oceania/Sri-Lanka-POLITICAL-PARTIES.html>> Accessed 12 April 2012

<sup>15</sup> TamilNet 2004, *UPFA, UNP to launch election campaign Thursday*, 25 February, <<http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=11313>> Accessed 5 April 2012

<sup>16</sup> Ranaweera, D D 2009, „UNP candidate attacked by thugs', *The Island*, 7 October <<http://www.island.lk/2009/10/07/news20.html>> Accessed 12 April 2012

- In January 2010, the General Secretary of the UNP alleged that President Rajapaksa had “unleashed his goon squads to attack a Cinema Hall in Matara, which was showing the film ‘Sudu Hansi’ (White Swan)”.<sup>17</sup> The article does not explicitly state why this film may have attracted government attention, or whether the audience comprised UNP supporters.
- In December 2009, the JVP reportedly accused the government of “thuggery and intimidation to demoralise Opposition candidates in some areas including Colombo, Anuradhapura, Matara and Welimada”. According to the report, the brother of a Matara UNP figure was abducted and assaulted by thugs aligned to the government.<sup>18</sup>
- In October 2009, the UNP General Secretary alleged that UPFA supporters had attacked a UNP convoy of 20 vehicles in Matara.<sup>19</sup>

On 8 April 2010, *The Daily Mirror* reported on incidents of election-related violence. The report states that “polling agents from the UNP had been chased away from the booths at the Anamaduwa Walapanawa Vidyalaya and Madawakkulama booth in Galle”. Galle is located in Southern Province, approximately 40km west of Matara.<sup>20</sup>

More broadly, there are several reports of conflict between UNP supporters or members, and supporters or allies of the United People’s Freedom Alliance (UPFA). For example:

- A November 2011 report by the *Associated Press* states that members of the UNP were physically attacked in parliament by members of the UPFA for trying to: “hold up placards protesting the proposed budget”. The report used the word ‘brawl’.<sup>21</sup>
- A September 2011 report by *Lanka e-News*, an anti-government news website, quotes A. J. M. Muzammil, the UNP Mayor of Colombo Municipal Council, who claims that UPFA supporters physically attacked UNP supporters during local elections in September. Muzammil claims that UPFA supporters also destroyed the home of a UNP supporter, and destroyed UNP vehicles at the candidate’s electoral office.<sup>22</sup>
- Members/supporters of the UNP were targeted in the context of council elections in March/April 2011. The Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV) reports that, during the elections, the UPFA was responsible for 16 major incidents of violence,

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<sup>17</sup> „With defeat staring in its face, the government has stepped up its campaign of...’ 2010, *Plus News Pakistan*, 14 January, FACTIVA

<sup>18</sup> Campaign for Free and Fair Elections 2009, *Govt intimidates opponents: JVP*, 2 December, para.6

<[http://www.caffesrilanka.org/Govt\\_intimidates\\_opponents\\_JVP\\_-5-1237.html](http://www.caffesrilanka.org/Govt_intimidates_opponents_JVP_-5-1237.html)> Accessed 12 April 2012

<sup>19</sup> „Sri Lanka – Deniyaya tense as UNP claims attack by UPFA’ 2009, Colombo Times, 4 October, FACTIVA

<sup>20</sup> „Sri Lanka polls see several incidents of violence – observers’ 2010, *BBC Monitoring Newsfile*, source: *Daily Mirror*, 8 April

<sup>21</sup> „Ruling party lawmakers attack opposition protestors inside Sri Lankan Parliament’ 2011, *The Washington Post*, source: *Associated Press*, 21 November <[http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia-pacific/ruling-party-lawmakers-attack-opposition-protesters-inside-sri-lankan-parliament/2011/11/21/gIQArqBDhN\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia-pacific/ruling-party-lawmakers-attack-opposition-protesters-inside-sri-lankan-parliament/2011/11/21/gIQArqBDhN_story.html)> Accessed 30 November 2011

<sup>22</sup> „UNP Muzammil’s Supporters brutally attacked’ 2011, *Lanka-e News*, 20 September

<<http://www.lankaenews.com/English/news.php?id=12271>> Accessed 30 November 2011

while the UNP were responsible for two such incidents.<sup>23</sup> It should be noted that the CMEV often relies on individuals to report incidents of violence during elections.<sup>24</sup>

- In September 2010, the UNP “accused the authorities of undermining democracy by intimidating parliamentarians” after Mangala Samaraweera was “unfairly questioned for hours by the police”.<sup>25</sup> Samaraweera, who is a Member of Parliament (MP) and the UNP’s media coordinator, had ordered a poster meant for public display from a printer protesting against the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment to Sri Lanka’s constitution.<sup>26</sup> The poster depicted the president as a dictator. The 18th amendment to the constitution removed a two-term limit for a sitting president. UNP deputy leader Karu Jayasuriya said “that the ‘political harassment’ of Mr Samaraweera is a serious threat to freedom of expression in Sri Lanka”.<sup>27</sup> The printer’s wife, her two brothers, the printer, and the owner and seven workers at the printing works were reportedly arrested in relation to the printing of the poster.<sup>28</sup>

Additionally, in August 2010, UNP parliamentarian Ravi Karunanayake was reportedly attacked by a group close to fellow UNP MP Sajith Premadasa, who at the time was considered to be a primary contender for the party’s leadership. The attackers were thought to be supporters of Premadasa.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Centre for Monitoring Election Violence 2011, ‘Local Authority Election 2011: Final Media Communique on Election Day’, 17 March < <http://cmev.wordpress.com/2011/03/17/local-authority-election-2011-final-media-communique-on-election-day/> > Accessed 29 November 2011

<sup>24</sup> Centre for Policy Alternatives 2011, ‘CPA Statement on Local Government Elections 23 July 2011’, 23 July < <http://us2.campaign-archive1.com/?u=746409e6de7b1c2a97474620a&id=467101a884> > Accessed 30 November 2011

<sup>25</sup> ‘Sri Lanka MP interrogated over “dictator” posters’ 2010, *BBC News*, 28 September < <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-11425865> > Accessed 30 September 2010

<sup>26</sup> Free Media Movement (FMM) 2010, *The Free Media Movement condemns the arrest of the printer, and the owner and workers at Sarala Graphics, Nugegoda*, Asian Human Rights Commission website, 10 September < <http://www.ahrchk.net/pr/mainfile.php/2010mr/779/> > Accessed 15 September 2010

<sup>27</sup> ‘Sri Lanka MP interrogated over “dictator” posters’ 2010, *BBC News*, 28 September < <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-11425865> > Accessed 30 September 2010

<sup>28</sup> Free Media Movement (FMM) 2010, *The Free Media Movement condemns the arrest of the printer, and the owner and workers at Sarala Graphics, Nugegoda*, Asian Human Rights Commission website, 10 September < <http://www.ahrchk.net/pr/mainfile.php/2010mr/779/> > Accessed 15 September 2010

<sup>29</sup> TamilNet 2010, *UNP MP attacked by Premadasa supporters, 2010*, 12 August < <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=32395> > Accessed 13 August 2010

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