

Sri Lanka



KEY FACTS

Joined Commonwealth:	1948
Population:	20,238,000 (2009)
GDP p.c. growth:	4.0% p.a. 1990–2009
UN HDI 2010:	world ranking 91
Official languages:	Sinhala, Tamil
Time:	GMT plus 5:30hr
Currency:	Sri Lanka rupee (SLRs)

Geography

Area:	65,610 sq km
Coastline:	1,340km
Capital:	Colombo

The Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon) is an island in the Indian Ocean, separated from south-east India (Tamil Nadu state) by the Palk Strait. It is almost linked to the Indian mainland by Adam's Bridge, an atoll barrier, mostly submerged, lying between the offshore island of Mannar and India itself. The country comprises nine provinces (from south to north): Southern, Sabaragamuwa, Western, Uva, Eastern, Central, North-Western, North-Central and Northern.

Main towns: Colombo (commercial capital, pop. 682,000 in 2009), Dehiwala–Mount Lavinia (greater Colombo, 232,200), Moratuwa (greater Colombo, 202,000), Negombo (142,500), Trincomalee (132,000), Sri Jayewardenepura–Kotte (administrative capital; greater Colombo, 125,900), Kandy (119,200), Kalmunai (103,900), Vavuniya (101,100), Jaffna (98,200), Galle (97,200), Batticaloa (95,500), Katunayaka (90,200), Battaramulla (greater Colombo, 84,200), Dambulla (75,300), Daluguma (74,100), Maharagama (greater Colombo, 74,100), Chavakachcheri (70,300), Anuradhapura (67,000), Point Pedro (51,100), Ratnapura (50,800) and Valvettithurai (44,400).

Topography: Beyond the coastal plains, Sri Lanka's topography is dominated by an outstandingly beautiful central mountain massif of gneiss rock, with the highest point at Pidurutalagala (2,524m). The holy Adam's Peak (2,243m) is so called from a mark at the top in the likeness of a human footprint, variously attributed as the print of the Buddha, Vishnu or Adam, and is a place of pilgrimage. The coastal plains are broader in the north, tapering off in the long low-lying Jaffna peninsula. Several fast-flowing non-navigable rivers arise in the mountains. The Mahaweli Ganga, from which hydroelectric power is obtained, is the longest at 322km.

did you know?

Sri Lanka was the first Commonwealth state to have a female prime minister. Sirimavo Bandaranaike served for three periods of office: 1960–65, 1970–77 and 1994–2000.

Scholarships and fellowships are awarded by Sri Lanka to citizens of other Commonwealth countries under the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan.

Sanath Jayasuriya was Wisden Leading Cricketer in the World in 1996, and Muttiah Muralitharan in 2000 and 2006.

One of the most violent earthquakes ever recorded occurred on 26 December 2004 in the Indian Ocean west of Sumatra generating a tsunami that swamped the east and south coasts of Sri Lanka causing approximately 31,000 deaths and devastation of the coastal area.

Climate: Tropical. The lowlands are always hot, particularly from March to May. The highlands are cooler. During December and January there is occasional frost on very high ground – for example, at Nuwara Eliya. The dry season is March to mid-May. The south-west monsoon season lasts from mid-May to September; the north-east monsoon season lasts from November to March.

Environment: The most significant environmental issues are: deforestation; soil erosion; coastal degradation as a result of mining activities and increased pollution; pollution of freshwater resources by industrial wastes and sewage; air pollution in Colombo; and the threat to wildlife populations of poaching and urbanisation.

Vegetation: Forest covers 29% of the land area, having declined at 1.5% p.a. 2000–07. Vegetation is rich and luxuriant, with a great variety of flowers, trees, creepers and flowering shrubs. The flora of Sri Lanka were described by Linnaeus in 1747 from specimens collected by a fellow botanist. Among the many species of trees are the rubber tree, palm, acacia, margosa, satinwood, Ceylon oak, tamarind, ebony, coral tree and banyan. Flowers and shrubs include the orchid and rhododendron. There are about 3,300 species of plants, of which some 280 are threatened with extinction. Arable land and permanent cropland each comprise 15% of the total land area.

Wildlife: Nature reserves now cover 10% of the island. Wilpattu National Park in the north-west (813 sq km) is best known for leopards; Yala National Park in the south-east (112 sq km) is home to large elephant populations. However, reduction of the natural tropical hardwood forest is endangering several animal species.

Transport: There are 97,290km of roads (81% paved) and 1,463km of railway. Rail links exist between the major towns. The lines run from Colombo north along the coast to Puttalam, north via Kurunegala and Anuradhapura to Mannar and to Jaffna; north-east to Trincomalee and Batticaloa; east to Kandy via Gampaha; and south along the coast to Galle and Matara.

The international ports are at Colombo, Galle, Talaimannar and Trincomalee. Bandaranaike international airport is 32km from Colombo.

The larger domestic airports are at Ratmalana (Colombo) in the south and Jaffna in the north.

Society

KEY FACTS 2009

Population per sq km: 308
Life expectancy: 74 years
Net primary enrolment: 99%

Population: 20,238,000 (2009); 14% lives in urban areas; growth 0.9% p.a. 1990–2009; birth rate 18 per 1,000 people (31 in 1970); life expectancy 74 years (43 in 1946 and 64 in 1970).

The largest ethnic group is Sinhalese (estimated at 74% of the population), followed by Sri Lankan Tamils (12%), Muslims (7%),

Indian Tamils (5%), and small communities of Malays and Burghers (persons of Dutch or partly Dutch descent) and a small number of Veddhas, descended from the earliest inhabitants. Sinhalese settlers arrived in the 5th and 6th centuries BC.

Sri Lankan Tamils settled mainly from the 10th century onwards. Indian Tamils arrived later, brought in by the British in the 19th century as labour for the plantations. Some Indian Tamils were repatriated from 1964, and since 1988 all remaining Indian Tamils have attained Sri Lankan citizenship. The Muslims are mostly descendants of Arab traders, and the Burghers descendants of European settlers of the 17th century onwards.

Language: The official languages are Sinhala and Tamil. English is used in commerce and government and very widely understood.

Religion: Buddhists 69%, Muslims 8%, Hindus 7% and Christians 6% (2001 partial census; did not cover the predominantly Tamil north and north-east).

Media: There are several daily newspapers in Sinhala, Tamil, and English including the state-owned *Daily News*, and the independent *Daily Mirror* and *The Island*, plus several weeklies including the state-owned *Sunday Observer* and independent *The Sunday Times*.

The public radio network of the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation and many private stations broadcast in Sinhala, Tamil and English. The Independent Television Network and Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation both provide public TV services, and there are many private TV channels; public and private channels are also in Sinhala, Tamil and English.

Some 32% of households have TV sets (2006). There are 38 personal computers (2005) and 88 internet users (2009) per 1,000 people.

Education: There are eleven years of compulsory education starting at age five. Some 98% of pupils complete primary school (2007). The school year starts in January.

Higher education is provided for by the country's many universities and technical colleges. The most prominent universities include University of Colombo, University of Kelaniya, University of Peradeniya and Open University of Sri Lanka, which provides courses through distance learning. There are various technical colleges offering courses up to diploma level in the areas of engineering, business and commerce. Literacy among people aged 15–24 is 98% (2008).

The tsunami of December 2004 and its aftermath affected over 350,000 children and around 650 schools, and rehabilitation and modernisation programmes ensued. The Sri Lankan government, donor organisations and the international community have worked together to restore education facilities and to address the enduring psychological effects of the disaster.

Health: Both Western and Ayurvedic (traditional) medicine are practised, though most doctors practise Western medicine. A free health service is available, with hospitals and clinics countrywide, supplemented by several private hospitals and clinics in Colombo. 90% of the population uses an improved drinking water source and 91% of people have access to adequate sanitation facilities (2009). Infant mortality was 13 per 1,000 live births in 2009 (83 in

1960). Over 90% of children are born in hospital. Family planning is common, with about 68% of married women practising contraception. Polio has been eradicated, but malaria remains a problem.

Communications: Country code 94; internet domain '.lk'. Mobile phone coverage is good in urban areas and the number of subscribers has grown rapidly. Internet cafes can be found in the main towns. Postal services are good.

There are 170 main telephone lines and 696 mobile phone subscriptions per 1,000 people (2009).

Public holidays: Independence Day (4 February), Sinhala and Tamil New Year (mid-April, two days), Labour Day (1 May) and Christmas Day.

Religious and other festivals whose dates vary from year to year include Tamil Thai Pongal Day (mid-January), Prophet's Birthday, Good Friday, Vesak Poya Days (two days generally in May) and Deepavali (Diwali, October/November). There is a Buddhist Poya holiday each month on the day of the full moon. With the exception of the Vesak Poya Days, when Poya Days fall at the weekend they are nonetheless observed on the full moon day. Eid al-Fitr (End of Ramadan) and Eid al-Adha (Feast of the Sacrifice) are observed only by Muslims, and Mahasivarathri only by Hindus.

Economy

KEY FACTS 2009

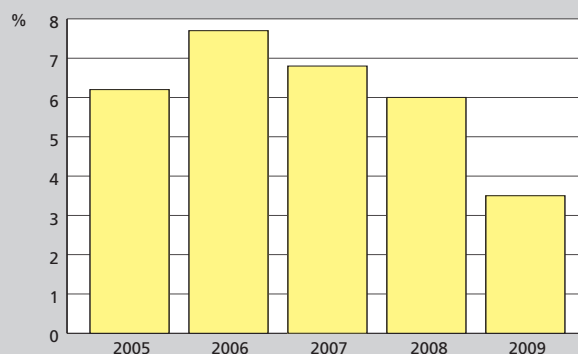
GNI:	US\$40.4bn
GNI p.c.:	US\$1,990
GDP growth:	6.0% p.a. 2005–09
Inflation:	11.5% p.a. 2005–09

Overview: While agriculture is central to Sri Lanka's economy (accounting for nearly one-fifth of GDP), manufacturing and services (including banking and financial services) are of increasing importance, with exports of textiles and clothing now well ahead of the traditional agricultural exports as foreign exchange earners. Since 1989 the former policies of nationalisation have been superseded by extensive liberalisation, which has led to extensive privatisation of the formerly largely centralised economy. Privatisation is under way in agricultural enterprises, banking, transport services and utilities.

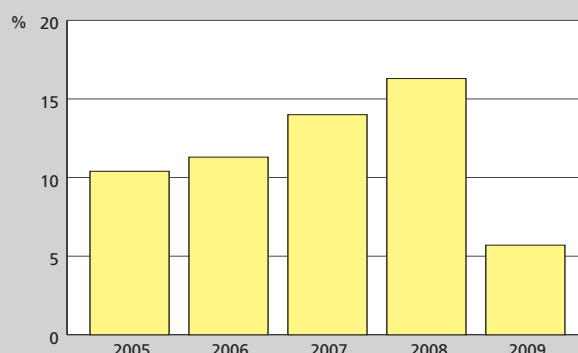
Sri Lanka had been aiming at achieving newly industrialised country status by the year 2000, but ethnic conflict has adversely affected the economy, notably in the spheres of foreign investment and tourism, and particularly in the north and east of the country. Despite the conflict, tourism earnings generally held up in the 1990s and into the 2000s, though attacks on tourist areas such as the international airport in 2001 caused sharp falls. Foreign investment in manufacturing and infrastructure also generally rose in the 1990s, and manufacturing output grew by 6.3% p.a. 1980–90 and 6.6% p.a. 1990–2004.

Thus, despite the disruption caused by the hostilities and relatively high spending on defence, the economy grew well throughout the 1990s, continuing with 6% growth in 2000, but plunged into recession in 2001 when it shrank by 1.5%, as export markets for clothing weakened sharply, recovering to grow by 4% in 2002.

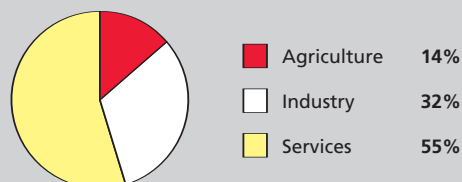
Real Growth in GDP



Inflation



GDP by Sector (2009)



The massive tsunami of December 2004 that swamped the east and south coasts of Sri Lanka, causing approximately 31,000 deaths and devastation of the coastal area, displaced more than 400,000 people and destroyed property valued at an estimated US\$1.5 billion. Despite this devastation of the economic infrastructure of the coastal areas in the south and east of the country, economic growth continued steadily, partly spurred by reconstruction, averaging 6.4% p.a. during 2004–08, while inflation averaged about 10% over the same period.

Then the economy slowed in 2008–09 as the world economic downturn depressed demand for Sri Lanka's exports, causing GDP growth to fall to 3.5% in 2009, but in that year there was a compensatory surge of economic activity following the cessation of civil strife in May 2009, yielding growth of over 7% in 2010.

Trade: Exports of goods and services account for 25% of GDP (2008). Sri Lanka's main exports are textiles, clothing, tea (world's number two exporter), machinery and equipment, cut diamonds, jewellery, rubber and rubber products, coconut products, gemstones, and leather and footwear.

Constitution

Status:	Republic with executive president
Legislature:	Parliament
Independence:	4 February 1948

Sri Lanka is a democratic republic with an executive presidency based on the French model. Under the 1978 constitution, the head of state and government is the president. There is universal adult suffrage with proportional representation; parliamentary and presidential elections are held every six years. Parliament has a single chamber with 225 members. Members are directly elected, but vacant seats occurring during the life of a parliament go to nominees of the party holding the seat.

Ministers are appointed by the president, who chairs the cabinet and appoints the independent judiciary. Amendments may be made to the constitution, subject to a two-thirds majority in parliament; however, to amend certain entrenched articles of the constitution approval in a national referendum is also required. The constitution provides for provincial councils.

The Eighteenth Amendment – enacted in September 2010 – removed the limit on the number of terms a president may serve, previously set at two.

Politics

Last elections:	January 2010 (presidential), April 2010 (parliamentary)
Next elections:	2016 (presidential and parliamentary)
Head of state:	President Mahinda Rajapaksa
Head of government:	the president
Ruling party:	United People's Freedom Alliance

The People's Alliance coalition, led by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, and consisting of seven mostly left-of-centre parties, came to power in the August 1994 general election. The leader of this coalition, Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, became the prime minister, but relinquished her position to stand in the presidential election in November 1994, which she won. Her mother, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, became prime minister, her third term over a span of four decades.

In July 1999, the moderate Tamil politician Neelam Tiruchelvam, the architect of the government's devolution plans, was killed by a suicide bomber in Colombo. In an early presidential election of December 1999, having narrowly escaped assassination, Kumaratunga won her second term with 51% of the votes while her main rival, United National Party (UNP) leader Ranil Wickremasinghe, received nearly 43%. The winning margin was less than in 1994.

In August 2000, the government failed to gain the two-thirds majority of parliament for its constitutional reform, designed to end the 17-year civil war (see 'Communal conflict' under the 'History' section earlier). This entailed the devolution of substantial powers on elected councils in seven provinces and an interim appointed council in the two provinces (Northern and North-Eastern) with majority Tamil populations.

After a violent campaign in which at least 70 people died, in the parliamentary elections of October 2000, the ruling People's

Alliance (PA) won 107 of the 225 parliamentary seats, the UNP 89 and the Marxist Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (JVP) ten. Short of a working majority, the new government was dependent on the support of the smaller parties, and this diverted its attention from new peace initiatives and its economic reform programme.

By June 2001 the PA lost its majority in parliament following defections; the UNP tabled a motion for a no-confidence vote and in October early parliamentary elections were called for December 2001. These gave the UNP 109 seats, the president's PA 77, JVP 16, Tamil National Alliance (TNA) 15 and Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) five. With the support of the TNA and SLMC, the UNP commanded a majority in the National Assembly, and the president was obliged to appoint UNP leader Ranil Wickremasinghe prime minister and invite him to form a government.

Thus, in due course, the president found herself chairing a cabinet composed entirely of political opponents. The new government was nevertheless determined to pursue the peace process. But as the end of the government's first year in office approached (when the president had the power to dissolve parliament and call fresh elections), relations between the president and government became increasingly strained. However, both the president and prime minister remained committed to the peace process, though there were ongoing differences over what the government's position should be.

In 2002, with the influence of the prime minister, the government signed a ceasefire agreement with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and invited Scandinavian countries, led by Norway, to monitor the truce.

In November 2003, the week before the seventh round of peace talks was due to take place, the president sacked three ministers, suspended parliament and first declared then lifted a state of emergency, calling for a government of national reconciliation, and plunging the country into political crisis. This endured until April 2004 when in a snap election the president's United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) – a new alliance with the JVP – took 105 seats and 46% of the votes, while the UNP won 82 seats and the Tamil National Alliance 22. President Kumaratunga formed a government and UPFA's Mahinda Rajapaksa was sworn in as prime minister but, without an overall majority, they would be depending on the support of members of minority parties and any opposition members who crossed the floor.

After the election, there were efforts to get the stalled peace process under way again. The new government invited the Norwegian mediators to return to the country to arrange peace talks between LTTE and the government, but governing alliance partner JVP remained staunchly opposed to any solution that involved power-sharing.

In the presidential election in November 2005, Rajapaksa, with just over 50% of the votes, defeated UNP leader Wickremasinghe. The overall turnout was 74%, even though many Tamils boycotted the election in the LTTE-controlled areas in the north and east of the country. President Rajapaksa's appointment strengthened the power of the UPFA-led government.

In late 2006 there were two major set-backs to the peace process: in October peace talks with the Norwegian mediators in Geneva

broke down without agreement; and in December, with hostilities already intensifying, the LTTE's senior negotiator, Anton Balasingham, died. For most of 2007 it was apparent that the ceasefire agreement signed in 2002 was no longer respected by the parties; the government officially withdrew from the agreement in January 2008.

By January 2009, after very intense fighting in the north-east of the country, government forces were reported to be in control of most

of the country including the LTTE strongholds of the Jaffna Peninsula, Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu, and claimed they were very close to defeating the LTTE. There were mounting concerns in the international community about the security of an estimated 250,000 civilians trapped in the conflict zone. In May 2009 LTTE leader and founder Velupillai Prabhakaran died in combat. The government proclaimed victory and the war that began in 1983 was declared over. At the conclusion of hostilities almost 300,000 displaced persons who had fled the conflict were housed in camps



History

Sri Lanka appears to have been inhabited from as early as 125,000 BC. Balangoda Man was the ancestor of the present-day Veddhas, a racial minority now inhabiting remote forests. The Great Dynasty (Mahavamsa) of the Sinhalese was established in 543 BC by King Vijaya, who came with his followers (the *Sinhala*, or 'Lion Race') from Bengal and settled in the north. Traces of the vast irrigation system they established still exist. About 300 years later, a royal prince from India named Mahinda, son of Asoka, introduced Buddhism. Tamil settlements began in the 10th century AD, and gave rise to a Tamil kingdom in Jaffna. There was a long struggle between Sinhalese and Tamil kings for the control of the north of the island.

By the end of the 13th century, the Sinhalese were forced to migrate to the south. Malaria set in when the irrigation and drainage systems were destroyed by continuing warfare. The Sinhalese population split into two separate kingdoms at the end of the 15th century, the up-country kingdom of Kandy and the low-country kingdom of Kotte.

In the 16th century the Kotte Kingdom sought protection from new arrivals, the Portuguese; and in 1597 Dharmapala, last of the Kotte kings, bequeathed his throne to the King of Portugal. The Portuguese soon subdued the north and so acquired most of the coastal belt of the country, leaving the central region to the Kingdom of Kandy.

From the mid-1630s, the King of Kandy helped the Dutch to dispossess the Portuguese; by 1656 the whole island had become a Dutch possession except for the Kingdom of Kandy. Later the Dutch also seized Kandy's coastal areas, cutting the Kandyans off from the outside world. British interests developed in the late 18th century when a British army invaded and forced the Dutch to accept its protection. In 1802 the Dutch colony became a British possession. The Kingdom of Kandy was invaded in 1815 and its monarchy was abolished. Thus the whole island came under British rule.

Plantations growing rubber, coconut and coffee were established in the 19th century. After the coffee plantations were destroyed by a fungus in the 1870s, planters successfully switched to tea. The country soon became the second largest producer (after India) of black tea. During this period, Indian Tamils were brought into the country as indentured labour for the tea estates.

Constitutional development of Ceylon (as the country was then called) began relatively early, with executive and legislative councils set up in 1833, and the first opening up of the colonial civil service to Ceylonese. Full self-government was achieved in

1946, under a new constitution, with a bicameral legislature (which became a single chamber in 1972), and Ceylon became fully independent and joined the Commonwealth in 1948.

The first prime minister of independent Ceylon was one of the leaders of the independence movement, D S Senanayake. He was the head of the United National Party (UNP, the former Ceylon National Congress supported by the Tamil Congress). After a split in the UNP in 1951, S W R D Bandaranaike formed the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP).

In 1956 the SLFP won a decisive electoral victory. The new government, nationalist and non-aligned, immediately began talks with the UK which ended in the return to Ceylon of the Katunayake airfield and the Trincomalee naval base.

In September 1959, Bandaranaike was assassinated. After elections the following year, his widow, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, led the SLFP to victory and became the first woman prime minister in the world. In March 1965, the UNP was voted back to power with Dudley Senanayake (son of Sri Lanka's first prime minister) as prime minister until 1970, when the elections returned the SLFP.

Sirimavo Bandaranaike's new government introduced a new constitution in 1972. Following the lead of India, Ceylon became a republic while remaining within the Commonwealth. Under the new constitution, the republic had a unicameral parliament, the National State Assembly, and a non-executive president. The first president was William Gopallawa, formerly governor-general, and Mrs Bandaranaike remained prime minister.

Throughout this period, Ceylon's government developed programmes of welfare and nationalisation. These led to marked improvements in health and literacy, but the economy began to decline. In 1971, there was a serious internal crisis with an uprising of Sinhalese youth, led by the Marxist Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (JVP), in protest about widespread unemployment. In 1972 the country's name was changed to Sri Lanka. In 1977 the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE or Tamil Tigers) was formed as the Sinhalese and Tamil communities polarised, and the civil war had begun by the early 1980s (see the text under 'Communal conflict').

The government lost popularity and, at the general election in 1977, the UNP under J R Jayewardene won a sweeping victory. The UNP government encouraged the private sector, and (under a new constitution in 1978) opted for a presidential form of government with proportional representation and renamed the country the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka. The first

established by the government. At the beginning of 2010, the majority of internally displaced persons had been permitted to leave the camps.

Almost two years before the expiry of his term of office, Rajapaksa called a presidential election in January 2010, when he faced a challenge from former head of the army General (Rtd) Sarath Fonseka, who had overseen the military victory against the LTTE. In a poll with a 75% voter turnout, Rajapaksa was returned to office

with 57.9% of the vote; Fonseka received 40.2% of the vote, but contested the election result in the courts. A Commonwealth expert team was present during the election period. At the release of the team's report, Commonwealth Secretary-General Kamallesh Sharma said that 'on the day of the election voters were free to express their will', but shortcomings primarily in the pre-election period meant that overall the election 'did not fully meet key benchmarks for democratic elections'.

► presidential election, held in 1982, was won by Jayewardene. In December 1982, the life of the 1977 Parliament was extended, by a national referendum, for six more years.

In 1988 Ranasinghe Premadasa was elected to the presidency and in 1993 was killed by an LTTE suicide bomber. In 1994 UNP presidential candidate and opposition leader Gamini Dissanayake was killed, with more than 50 others, by a suicide bomber. After President Premadasa's assassination in 1993, D B Wijetunga took over as president and remained in office for about a year until the general election in August 1994.

Communal conflict: After independence, the Sinhalese became the dominant social and political force and the Tamils felt that they were being marginalised, especially after 1956 when Sinhala was made the official language. Several different Tamil parties formed and demanded that the Northern and Eastern provinces become part of a federal state or, when this was refused, an independent homeland.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE or Tamil Tigers) was formed in 1977 and from around 1980 began attacks on politicians, the police and the army in the north. This brought a Sinhalese backlash in the south: in July 1983 there were riots against Tamils in Colombo and the south-west of the country, and Tamils fled to the north and Tamil Nadu in India. The army deployed in the north, the conflict escalated, and the Tamil Tigers gained effective control of Jaffna and the northern peninsula.

The Indian Government attempted to mediate and, in July 1987, President J R Jayewardene and Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi arranged a ceasefire, supervised by Indian troops. Under the Indo-Lanka Accord provincial councils were introduced as a solution to the conflict. The provincial councils for the Northern and Eastern provinces were to be temporarily merged into a single council.

Some Indian-supported Tamil groups accepted the arrangement, and elections for the new council proceeded. However, the Tamil Tigers refused to co-operate, and in 1988 Jayewardene asked the Indian Government to withdraw its troops. The Tigers took control of the vacated areas and fighting continued with few breaks into the 21st century and by 2001 it was estimated that more than 60,000 people had died in the conflict.

After it came to power in the August 1994 general election, the People's Alliance government engaged in peace talks with the LTTE, but after four rounds the Tigers unilaterally abrogated the ceasefire that had been in force and relaunched the war. Their leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, appeared to remain committed to

fighting for a separate state. In 1995, government forces recaptured the town of Jaffna, forcing the LTTE to withdraw into dense jungle, and the war continued.

From 1996 LTTE attacked substantial civilian and economic targets outside the operational area, and especially in Colombo. Ten days before the celebration to mark 50 years of independence, on 25 January 1998 a truck was exploded by LTTE suicide bombers as they drove it through the gates of the country's most sacred Buddhist site, the Temple of the Tooth at Kandy, killing 16 people. In mid-2001, the Tigers attacked the international airport near Colombo, destroying several civilian and military aeroplanes.

In February 2000 Norway agreed to provide a special envoy to act as intermediary in peace talks and he held several rounds of talks.

In March 2000, the LTTE began a new offensive on the Jaffna peninsula – held by government forces since 1995 – and the government declared a state of war for the first time and suspended all non-essential development projects. In April, the LTTE captured the strategic Elephant Pass base, denying government troops the only land route into the peninsula. By May, the Tigers had driven the government forces back to the suburbs of the city of Jaffna, proving themselves as a professional fighting force, deploying sophisticated weapons including heavy artillery captured at Elephant Pass.

Despite the declaration of a unilateral ceasefire from December 2000 to April 2001 by LTTE, and the continuing efforts of the Norwegian envoy, the warring parties could not agree to meet and deadlock continued until a UNP government was elected in December 2001. A ceasefire was agreed with the LTTE in February 2002, allowing Norwegian facilitators to organise peace talks between the government and the separatists. The first round of talks was held in Thailand in September 2002, when talks focused on reconstruction of the areas affected by the war and the return of displaced people, and dates for further talks were agreed.

As the peace talks proceeded, LTTE dropped its demand for a separate Tamil state and agreed to work towards a federal system and, for the first time, the government also agreed to share power with the LTTE. After the sixth round of talks, held in Japan in March 2003, progress slowed and LTTE failed to attend the international donor conferences focusing on Sri Lanka's development priorities in Tokyo in June 2003. However, with aid donors exerting increasing pressure, a seventh round of talks was eventually scheduled for November 2003 to discuss proposals for a power-sharing administration in the north and east of the country.

Two weeks after the presidential election, Fonseka was arrested and detained by the military police. A government spokesperson alleged he had been plotting a coup. In August 2010 he was convicted by court martial of participating in political activities while on active service and stripped of his rank, medals and pension. In September the court martial convicted him of arms procurement offences and he was required to resign the parliamentary seat he won in the April 2010 election.

In the parliamentary elections of April 2010, the UPFA won 144 of 225 seats, securing 60.3% of votes cast; the UNF took 60 seats (29.3%); the Democratic National Alliance seven (5.5%); and the Tamil National Alliance 14 (2.9%).

International relations

Sri Lanka is a member of the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation, Non-Aligned Movement, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, United Nations and World Trade Organization.

Traveller information

Local laws and conventions: Visitors should not enter a Buddhist temple wearing headgear or with bare legs or shoulders; footwear must also be removed.

Alcohol cannot be sold on *Poya* holidays. Visitors can be fined if they ignore instructions not to smoke or drink in public. Penalties for all drug offences are severe.

Photography and videotaping are not permitted near military bases and government buildings, and posing for photographs in front of a statue of Buddha is prohibited.

Shaking hands is the usual form of greeting. Informal dress is acceptable, except when visiting Buddhist temples, where modest clothing should be worn. Businesswear is generally casual, though women should dress conservatively. Appointments are necessary for meetings and punctuality is important. Business cards are usually exchanged on first introduction and English is widely used. Office hours are Mon–Fri 0900–1700.

Immigration and customs: Visas are required by all visitors, and passports must be valid for at least six months beyond the intended length of stay.

It is prohibited to import weapons, ivory, antiques, statues, old books, animals or birds, reptiles, tea, rubber and dangerous drugs.

A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required by all those arriving from infected areas.

Travel within the country: Traffic drives on the left and an international driving permit is required for foreign visitors. Car hire is inexpensive and is available from international agencies. There is a 56kph speed limit in built-up areas and 75kph outside towns. If another driver flashes their headlights, they are asserting their right of way.

Trains connect Colombo to most other cities, and first-class air-conditioned carriages are available on a few services. An intercity express service operates between Colombo and Kandy.

There is an extensive bus network that operates around the country. Taxis have yellow tops and red and white number plates. Most are metered but visitors should always agree the fare before travel. Motorised rickshaws are readily available for hire and chauffeur-driven cars are also available.

Visitors should seek advice from local authorities if they wish to travel to Anuradhapura.

Travel health: Comprehensive travel insurance is recommended. Emergency medical treatment is limited outside main cities, and treatment in private hospitals can be expensive.

Mosquito-borne diseases – dengue fever, chikungunya and malaria – are present in Sri Lanka, and visitors will need to bring insect repellent and suitable clothing to protect themselves against mosquito bites.

Water should be boiled or sterilised before used for drinking, brushing teeth or making ice. Many hotels provide bottled or mineral water for guests. Unpasteurised milk should be boiled before use.

Money: There are ATMs in major cities, but some do not accept international cards. Most major banks will change US dollar travellers cheques and accept Visa and Mastercard withdrawals. To avoid additional exchange rate charges, travellers are advised to take travellers cheques in US dollars or pounds sterling. Visitors should note that foreign currency can only be changed at authorised exchanges, banks and hotels, and that these establishments must endorse such exchanges on the visitor's Exchange Control D form, which is issued on arrival and must usually be returned at the time of departure. Banking hours are Mon–Sat 0900–1300.

There were 448,000 tourist arrivals in 2009.

Further information

Government of Sri Lanka Official Web Portal: www.gov.lk

Commonwealth Secretariat: www.thecommonwealth.org

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