



Sri Lanka



KEY FACTS

Joined Commonwealth: 1948

Population: 21,273,000 (2013)

GDP p.c. growth: 4.6% p.a. 1990–2013

UN HDI 2014: World ranking 73

Official languages: Sinhala, Tamil

Time: GMT plus 5.5 hrs

Currency: Sri Lanka rupee (SLRs)

Geography

Area: 65,610 sq km

Coastline: 1,340 km

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 (provincial capital Galle), Sabaragamuwa (Ratnapura), Western (Colombo), Uva (Badulla), Eastern (Trincomalee), Central (Kandy), North-Western (Kurunegala), North-Central (Anuradhapura) and Northern (Jaffna).

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 (2,524 metres). The holy Adam's Peak (2,243 metres) 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 322 km.

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 March–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–mid-May. The south-west monsoon season lasts from mid-May–September, the north-east monsoon season November–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 per cent of the land area, having declined at 1.2 per cent p.a. 1990–2010. 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 288 are threatened with extinction. Arable land comprises 20 per cent and permanent cropland 16 per cent of the total land area.

Wildlife: Nature reserves now cover ten per cent 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. Some 30 mammal species and 14 bird species are thought to be endangered (2014).

Main towns: Colombo (commercial capital; Western Province; pop. 561,314 in 2012), Sri Jayewardenepura–Kotte (administrative capital; greater Colombo, 107,925), Maharagama (greater Colombo, 196,423), Dehiwala–Mount Lavinia (greater Colombo, 184,468), Moratuwa (greater Colombo, 168,280), Negombo (142,499), Kalmunai (99,893), Kandy (Central, 98,828), Galle (Southern, 86,333), Batticaloa (86,227), Jaffna (Northern, 80,829), Daluguma (74,400), Katunayaka (61,228), Anuradhapura (North-Central, 50,595), Trincomalee (Eastern, 48,351), Ratnapura (Sabaragamuwa, 47,105), Badulla (Uva, 42,237), Vavuniya (34,816), Kurunegala (North-Western, 24,833), Dambulla (23,814), Chavakachcheri (16,129), Point Pedro (13,300) and Valvettithurai (7,300).

Transport: There are 114,090 km of roads (80 per cent paved) and about 1,460 km 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. Bandaranaika international airport is 32 km from Colombo.

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

Society

KEY FACTS 2013

Population per sq km: 324

Life expectancy: 74 years

Net primary enrolment: 94%

Population: 21,273,000 (2013); 18 per cent of people live in urban areas; growth 0.9 per cent p.a. 1990–2013; 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 per cent of the population), followed by Sri Lankan Tamils (12 per cent), Muslims (seven per cent), Indian Tamils (five per cent), 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. Historians now believe that Dravidian and Indo-Aryan cultures, which form the roots of the modern-day Sri Lankan Tamils and Sinhalese, most likely arrived in Sri Lanka late in the first millennium BCE, having filtered down from India.

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 70 per cent, Hindus 13 per cent, Muslims ten per cent and Christians six per cent (2012).

Health: Public spending on health was one per cent of GDP in 2012. 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. Some 94 per cent of the population uses an improved drinking water source and 92 per cent have access to adequate sanitation facilities (2012). Infant mortality was eight per 1,000 live births in 2013 (83 in 1960). Over 90 per cent of children are born in hospital. Family planning is common, with about 68 per cent of married women practising contraception. Polio has been eradicated, but malaria remains a problem.

Education: Public spending on education was 1.7 per cent of GDP in 2012. There are nine years of compulsory education starting at the age of five. Primary school comprises five years and secondary eight, with two cycles of four years. Some 97 per cent of pupils complete primary school (2010). The school year starts in January.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) recognises 15 public universities and 17 higher education institutes, and there are four other public universities that come under other departments of government (2013). Leading universities include the University of Colombo, which was established – as

University of Ceylon – in 1942 when the Ceylon Medical College (founded 1870) and Ceylon University College (1921) were merged; University of Kelaniya; University of Peradeniya; and Open University of Sri Lanka, which provides courses through distance learning. Technical colleges offer courses up to diploma level in engineering and business. The female–male ratio for gross enrolment in tertiary education is 1.80:1 (2011). Literacy among people aged 15–24 is 98 per cent (2010).

In 1980 Sri Lanka hosted the Eighth Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers in Colombo. Commonwealth Education Ministers meet every three years to discuss issues of mutual concern and interest.

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 several private TV channels; public and private channels are also in Sinhala, Tamil and English.

Some 76 per cent of households have TV sets (2007). There are 38 personal computers per 1,000 people (2005).

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.

For every 1,000 people there are 127 landlines, 955 mobile phone subscriptions and 219 internet users (2013).

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 2013

GNI: US\$65.4bn

GNI p.c.: US\$3,170

GDP growth: 6.7% p.a. 2009–13

Inflation: 6.2% p.a. 2009–13

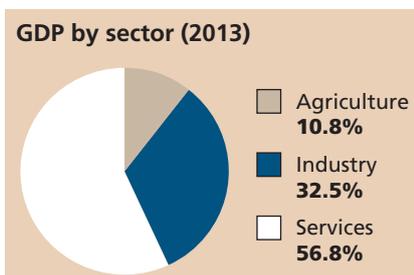
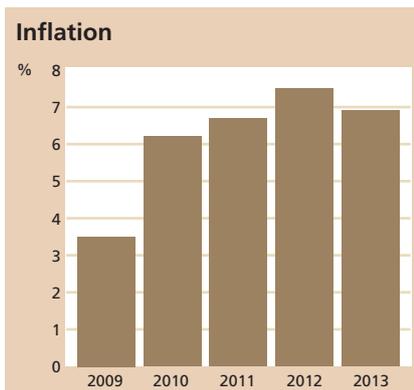
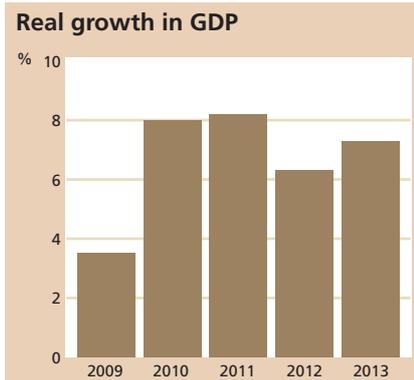
While agriculture is central to Sri Lanka's economy – and tea, rubber and coconut continue to be important exports – manufacturing and services (including banking and financial services) are of increasing importance, especially textiles and clothing which are major exports. Since 1989 the former policies of nationalisation have been superseded by extensive liberalisation, which has led to extensive privatisation of the formerly largely centralised economy, including 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 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 were maintained and manufacturing output grew by 6.3 per cent p.a. 1980–90, 8.1 per cent p.a. 1990–2000, 4.5 per cent p.a. 2000–10 and 6.8 per cent p.a. 2010–12.

Thus, despite the disruption caused by the hostilities and relatively high spending on defence, the economy grew well throughout the 1990s, but plunged into recession in 2001 when it shrank by 1.5 per cent, as export markets for clothing weakened sharply, recovering in 2002.

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 per cent p.a. during 2004–08.

Then the economy slowed in 2008–09 as the world economic downturn depressed demand for Sri Lanka's exports, causing GDP growth to moderate to 3.5 per cent in 2009, but in that year there was a compensatory surge of economic activity following the



cessation of civil strife in May 2009, yielding strong growth of at least six to eight per cent p.a. in 2010–15.

History

Modern humans arrived in South Asia from Africa in around 60,000 BCE, with the earliest definitive evidence of settlement in Sri Lanka dating to about 28,000 BCE. Early humans had also been to the island much earlier, leaving stone-age tools that can be dated to around 125,000 BCE. A land bridge connected India and Sri Lanka until around 5000 BCE, allowing different groups to come and go.

The exact origin of these early settlers has been much debated, particularly in the light of modern ethnic tensions. What is certain is that the inhabitants of 30,000 years ago were related to populations of India, South-East Asia and Australia. They have become known as Veddoid, after the modern-day Vāddā tribal group, of whom they may be the ancestors. Dravidian and Indo-Aryan

languages filtered down to Sri Lanka, from the south and north of India respectively, with modern-day Tamils and Sinhalese each often claiming their forefathers arrived first. However, many historians now think that Dravidian and Indo-Aryan cultures most likely did not arrive in Sri Lanka until late in the first millennium BCE.

An impressive irrigation system had been developed by 100 CE, which became the most elaborate in South Asia. By the time of Alexander the Great's arrival in the region in around 327 BCE, a trading centre had been established at Māntai (modern-day Tirukketisvaram).

Buddhist scholars in around the fourth and fifth centuries CE wrote the chronicles *Dīpavamsa* and *Mahāvamsa*, recording some of the early history of Sri Lanka, focusing in particular on the establishment of Buddhism and the political fortunes of different dynasties. The *Mahāvamsa* tells of the arrival of a prince from India named Vijaya, and the Sinhalese have often seen him as the founder of Sinhala civilisation in the island.

By the third century BCE Anurādhapura had grown into one of the largest cities in South Asia and Buddhism was adopted by the city's rulers, after the Indian emperor Ashoka sent a missionary to Anurādhapura in 250 BCE. The city-state extended its control over more of the island and struggles ensued over the next two centuries as power passed back and forth between successors of the Buddhist *Devānampiyatissa* and rulers identified as 'Damila' in the *Mahāvamsa*, who mainly came from the south of India.

By 500 CE several million people lived in the northern Dry Zone centred around Anurādhapura – the vast majority of the island's population.

In around 1000 CE, the Hindu Colas, from South India, had gained control of Anurādhapura and moved the capital south by 100 km to Polonnaruwa, before the Sinhalese regained the crown. By the 13th century, malaria had spread through the Dry Zone, making the area virtually uninhabitable and the focus of political life drifted to the south-west.

The Portuguese arrived in Sri Lanka in 1505 and soon began to influence the internal affairs of the island. By the end of the 16th century, the Portuguese had gained control over the Kotte and Jaffna kingdoms, the former initially a Sinhalese settlement and the latter originally Tamil. The Dutch arrived in Asia soon after and Portugal began to pull out of its South Asian strongholds to defend territories elsewhere.

From the mid-1630s, the King of Kandy helped the Dutch to dispossess the Portuguese; by 1656 the island had become a Dutch possession except for Kandy. Later the Dutch also seized Kandy's coastal areas. British interests developed in the late 18th century when its 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 abolished, with the whole island coming 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 switched to tea, with the country soon becoming the second largest producer of black tea after India. During this period, Indian Tamils were brought in 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 opening up of the colonial civil service to Ceylonese. 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 nationalist SLFP won the elections, but in September 1959 Bandaranaike was assassinated. After elections the following year, his widow, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, led the SLFP to victory and became the first female 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 – whereby Sri Lanka became a republic. The country's name was also changed from Ceylon to Sri Lanka – 'Lanka' being an ancient name for the island and 'Sri' meaning 'resplendent' or 'venerable'. In 1978, a further constitution under the government of J. R. Jayewardene, introduced the executive presidency. Throughout this period, Ceylon's

government developed programmes of welfare and nationalisation, leading to improvements in health and literacy, but the economy began to decline. In 1971 there was a serious internal crisis with an armed revolt by a communist youth organisation.

Civil war

After independence, the Sinhalese became the dominant social and political force and the Tamils felt 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 and, when this was refused, an independent homeland. Anti-Tamil riots led to the death and displacement of hundreds of Tamils.

At the general election in 1977, the UNP under J. R. Jayewardene won a sweeping victory.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was formed in 1976 in response to growing tensions between Tamil and Sinhalese communities. It undertook violent attacks against politicians, the police and the army in the north. The group's name was chosen because the 'tiger' was thought to be a worthy opponent to the Sinhala (meaning 'lion race') and Eelam was the name of an aspirational separate Tamil state.

The civil war began in July 1983, after the death of 11 soldiers in an attack by the LTTE sparked mass anti-Tamil riots in Colombo and the south-west of the country, which left hundreds dead. Tactics on both sides were brutal. The LTTE escalated its terrorist attacks to include civilians, while many Tamils detained by the police and army 'disappeared'.

The first 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.

The Indian government attempted to mediate in the hostilities 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 LTTE refused to co-operate and in 1988 Jayewardene asked the Indian government to withdraw its troops. The LTTE took control of the vacated areas and fighting continued.

Suicide bombings of high-profile politicians by the Tamil Tigers in the 1990s wrought havoc with Sri Lankan politics. In 1988 UNP's Ranasinghe Premadasa was elected to Sri Lanka's presidency, but he was assassinated in 1993. In 1994 UNP presidential candidate Gamini Dissanayake was also killed in a similar attack. In July 1999, the moderate Tamil politician Neelan Tiruchelvam – architect of the government's devolution plans – was the next victim when he was murdered in Colombo. The 1991 assassination of Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was also attributed to the Tigers.

After Premadasa's death in 1993, D. B. Wijetunga took over as President. The People's Alliance coalition, led by the SLFP, 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 become President in November 1994. Her mother, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, became Prime Minister, her third term over a span of four decades.

The People's Alliance government engaged in peace talks with the LTTE, but the Tigers broke a ceasefire and relaunched the war. In 1995 government forces recaptured the town of Jaffna, forcing the LTTE to withdraw into the jungle, and the war continued.

From 1996 the LTTE attacked substantial civilian and economic targets, especially in Colombo. On 25 January 1998, ten days before the celebrations to mark 50 years of independence, a truck was blown up 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 an early presidential election in December 1999, Kumaratunga won her second term with 51 per cent of the votes.

In August 2000 the government failed to gain a two-thirds majority of parliament for its constitutional reform, designed to end

the 17-year civil war. This entailed the devolution of substantial powers on elected councils in seven provinces and an interim appointed council in the two provinces (Northern and Eastern) with majority Tamil populations.

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, suspending all non-essential development projects.

Despite the declaration of a unilateral ceasefire from December 2000 to April 2001 by the LTTE, and the efforts of the Norwegian envoy (see 'Peace talks', below), the Sri Lankan army declined to lay down its arms. In mid-2001 the Tigers attacked the international airport near Colombo, destroying several civilian and military aeroplanes.

Peace talks

After the failure of Indian-led negotiations and the collapse of internal peace talks, Norway stepped in in February 2000, agreeing to provide a special envoy to act as intermediary.

A ceasefire was agreed with the LTTE in February 2002 and the first round of talks was held in Thailand in September 2002, focusing on reconstruction of the areas affected by the war and the return of displaced people.

As the peace talks proceeded, the 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 the LTTE was barred from attending an international donor conference in Washington, USA, under US terrorist legislation. The Tigers then refused to attend a further donor conference in Japan.

After the election in April 2004, there were efforts to get the stalled peace process under

Sri Lanka on the international stage

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.

Shehan Karunatilaka won the Commonwealth Writers' Book Prize in 2012. Man Booker Prize winner Michael Ondaatje was born in Colombo in 1943. Having relocated to Canada, he went on to be honoured with the Sri Lanka Ratna in 2005, the highest honour that can be given to foreign nationals by the government.

Sanath Jayasuriya was Wisden Leading Cricketer in the World in 1996, Muttiah Muralitharan in 2000 and 2006, and K. C. Sangakkara in 2011 and 2014.

Rap artist Mathangi Arulpragasam, better known by her stage name MIA, spent part of her childhood in Jaffna, having been born to Sri Lankan Tamil parents in London.

way again. The new government invited the Norwegian mediators to return to the country to arrange peace talks between the LTTE and the government, but governing alliance partner JVP remained staunchly opposed to any solution that involved power sharing.

In late 2006 peace talks with the Norwegian mediators in Geneva broke down without agreement. By the following year it was apparent that the ceasefire agreement signed in 2002 was no longer being respected and the government withdrew from the agreement in January 2008.

By January 2009 government forces were reported to be in control of most of the country and in April the government rejected UN calls for a ceasefire. In May 2009 LTTE leader and founder Velupillai Prabhakaran died in combat. The government proclaimed victory and the war was declared over.

At the conclusion of hostilities, almost 300,000 displaced persons who had fled the conflict were housed in government camps and as many as 100,000 people were estimated to have been killed in the fighting.

Constitution

Status: Republic with executive President

Legislature: Parliament of Sri Lanka

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. Under the Nineteenth Amendment of April 2015, which reduced the powers of the presidency, this limit of two terms was reinstated; presidential and parliamentary terms of office were reduced from six to five years; and several independent commissions were established, including the Election Commission and Human Rights Commission.

Politics

Last elections: 8 January 2015 (presidential), 17 August 2015 (parliamentary)

Next elections: 2021 (presidential), 2021 (parliamentary)

Head of state: President Maithripala Sirisena

Head of government: The President

Ruling party: United National Party

Women MPs: 5%

After a violent campaign in which at least 70 people died, in the parliamentary elections of October 2000, the ruling People's Alliance (PA), led by President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, won 107 of the 225 parliamentary seats, the United National Party (UNP) 89 and the Marxist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) ten. Sirimavo Bandaranaike was reappointed Prime Minister. However, 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.

Parliamentary elections were held in December 2001 after the PA lost its majority in Parliament. The UNP won 109 seats, the PA 77, JVP 16, Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) 15 and Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) five. With the support of the TULF and SLMC, the UNP commanded a majority in Parliament, and the President was obliged to appoint UNP leader Ranil Wickremasinghe Prime Minister and invite him to form a government.

Thus, in due course, President Kumaratunga 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, and in 2002 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 per cent of the votes, while the UNP won 82 seats and the Lanka Tamil State Party (ITAK) 22. President Kumaratunga formed a government and the 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.

Further information

Presidential Secretariat:	www.priu.gov.lk
Department of Elections:	www.slelections.gov.lk
Parliament of Sri Lanka:	www.parliament.lk
Department of Census and Statistics:	www.statistics.gov.lk
Central Bank of Sri Lanka:	www.cbsl.gov.lk
Sri Lanka Tourism:	www.srilankatourism.org
Commonwealth Secretariat:	www.thecommonwealth.org
Commonwealth of Nations:	www.commonwealthofnations.org/country/Sri_Lanka

Media

<i>Daily Mirror:</i>	www.dailymirror.lk
<i>Daily News:</i>	www.dailynews.lk
<i>The Island:</i>	www.island.lk
<i>Sunday Observer:</i>	www.sundayobserver.lk
<i>The Sunday Times:</i>	www.sundaytimes.lk
Independent Television Network:	www.itn.lk
Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation:	www.slbcl.lk
Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation:	www.rupavahini.lk
Government News Portal:	www.news.lk
Lankapuvath:	www.lankapuvath.lk

In the presidential election in November 2005, UPFA leader Mahinda Rajapaksa, with just over 50 per cent of the votes, defeated UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe. The overall turnout was 74 per cent, even though many Tamils boycotted the election in the LTTE-controlled areas in the north and east of the country.

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 that had been declared by the government in May 2009. In a poll with a 75 per cent voter turnout, Rajapaksa was returned to office with 57.9 per cent of the vote; Fonseka received 40.2 per cent 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 Kamalesh 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'.

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 per cent of votes cast; the UNP/SLMC electoral coalition took 60 seats (29.3 per cent); ITAK 14; and the Democratic National Alliance seven. Turnout was 61 per cent.

Incumbent President Rajapaksa (with 47.6 per cent of the vote) was defeated by the New Democratic Front candidate Maithripala Sirisena (51.3 per cent) in the presidential election held on 8 January 2015, in a turnout of 82 per cent. A Commonwealth observer group, led by former President of Guyana Dr Bharrat Jagdeo, concluded that the election result reflected the will of the people of Sri Lanka.

The parliamentary elections on 17 August 2015 were won by the President's UNP, with 106 seats, securing 45.7 per cent of votes cast. UPFA, led by Rajapaksa, took 95 seats (42.4 per cent); ITAK 16 (4.6 per cent); and JVP six (4.9 per cent). Turnout was 78 per cent. A Commonwealth observer group, led by former President of Malta Dr George Abela, concluded that the election was credible; that it met the key criteria for democratic elections; and that the outcome reflected the will of the people of Sri Lanka.

International relations

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

Traveller information

Immigration and customs: Passports must be valid for at least six months from the date of arrival. Visas are required by all Commonwealth nationals. Prohibited imports include some fresh food, plants and plant material, and tea.

Travel within the country: Traffic drives on the left. Visitors wishing to drive will need an international driving permit.

Trains connect Colombo to most other towns; air-conditioned carriages are available on some services and express services operate on a few lines, for example Colombo–Kandy. Taxis have yellow tops and red and white number plates. Most are metered but visitors should always agree the fare before travel. Chauffeur-driven cars are also available and motorised rickshaws are plentiful.

Travel health: Prevalent diseases where appropriate precautionary measures are recommended include dengue fever, hepatitis A, hepatitis B, Japanese encephalitis, malaria, rabies and typhoid.

There were 1,275,000 tourist arrivals in 2013.



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