

OVERVIEW OF CURRENT SITUATION¹

There is universal suffrage and the right to campaign for elected office in Sri Lanka. Free and fair presidential elections were held on 7 November 2005. Mahinda Rajapakse won the election with a paper-thin margin of 50.3%. Over 9.8 million voters, or 74% of the electorate, participated. Opposition candidate Wickremasinghe, who won 48.4% of the vote, accepted the outcome. However, the ethnic polarization between the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority and the ongoing conflict between the Colombo government and the radical Tamil Tiger insurgents fighting for an independent Tamil state in the Northern parts of the country (Tamil Ealam) are constant threats to political stability, human rights and democracy. With the April 2006 resumption of major military operations between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam (LTTE), the ceasefire of 2002 has all but officially collapsed.

Although the general acceptance of the democratic system is high, politically motivated violence is frequent. Candidates of minority parties in the Tamil areas (sometimes also in the Sinhalese South) still run at considerable personal risk. Part of the press is under state control and quite often subject to censorship. Separation of powers and independence of the judiciary are weak. Respect for human rights did suffer significantly during the civil war. Since the civil war began in 1983, both the security forces and the LTTE have been responsible for countless human rights abuses. Violations of human rights that characterized the ceasefire period – politically motivated assassinations and “disappearances” – have become even more frequent since April 2006. Rising violence between Tamils, Sinhalese and Muslims has been exploited rather than dampened by the government and the LTTE. Both army and rebels have engaged in targeting civilians. Impunity for perpetrators of human rights abuses (rebels and security forces) is the rule.

RECENT TRENDS

Sinhala chauvinism and narrow ethnic nationalism in the South enforced by “democratic tyranny” of Sinhalese politicians and political parties have contributed extensively to this sad state of affairs, which arose as a consequence of decades of de jure and de facto discrimination against the minorities. The narrow victory of a Sinhalese nationalist candidate, Mahinda Rajapakse, in the presidential election of 2005 resulted in a return of Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism and a shift from the reconciliatory policy orientation of previous president Kumaratunga. Beyond doubt this has contributed to the worsening of the current situation. However, it is also important to mention that since the start of the ceasefire in 2002, the LTTE has been implicated in more than 200 targeted killings, mostly of Tamils viewed as being political opponents. Soon after signing the ceasefire agreement, the Tigers took advantage of the access it granted them to government-controlled areas and proceeded to forcibly recruit thousands of children, murder hundreds of their Tamil political rivals, intimidate the Tamil-speaking minority, and generally clamp down on all forms of independent political activity. With rampant impunity for human-rights abuses, violence continues to escalate; more than 1,000 combatants and civilians have been killed already in 2006. This places the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission,

¹ Principal author: Bertelsmann Stiftung

SRI LANKA - WATCHLIST

created as part of the Norwegian-brokered ceasefire agreement of 2002, in a difficult position. Limited in its capacity to speak out against human-rights violations for fear of disrupting the peace talks, the Mission was further weakened when, on August 1, 2006, governments of three Scandinavian countries announced their withdrawal from the mission in response to a Tamil Tiger demand. Of an initial contingent of fifty-seven monitors, only twenty international civilian monitors are left on the ground.

In October 2006, a suicide bomber attacked a military convoy, killing more than 90 sailors. Tamil Tigers attacked a naval base in Galle, a southern city frequented by tourists. Peace talks resumed in Geneva but failed over the rebels' demand that the government reopen a key highway to Tamil-dominated Jaffna peninsula that was closed owing to fighting in August. In January 2007, after weeks of heavy fighting, the military says it has captured the Tamil Tiger stronghold of Vakarai, in the east. Tens of thousands of civilians fled the area.

ASSESSMENT

Sri Lanka was a participant in Warsaw, Seoul and Santiago.

With high levels of violence, the revival of Sinhala chauvinism and a strong political polarization, democracy in Sri Lanka is seriously hampered. Both the Colombo government and the Tamil Tigers have to take the blame for the recent outburst of violence. As of January 2007, it remains to be seen how the situation will evolve further. Currently, the democratic institutions are still functioning (albeit heavily tilted towards the Sinhalese majority) and the democratic system is supported by the large (Sinhala) majority.

STATISTICS AND INDICATORS

World Bank Institute Governance Indicators 2005	Score	Key
Voice and Accountability	39.6	Range 0-100 (Lower value indicates weak voice and accountability; higher value indicates strong voice and account)
Political Stability and Absence of Violence	10.8	Range 0-100 (Lower value indicates weak political stability and high violence; higher value indicates opposite)
Government Effectiveness	40.7	Range 0-100 (Lower value indicates weak government effectiveness; higher value indicates strong govt. effectiveness)
Regulatory Quality	50.0	Range 0-100 (Lower value indicates weak regulatory quality; higher value indicates strong regulatory quality)
Rule of Law	54.1	Range 0-100 (Lower value indicates weak rule of law; higher value indicates strong rule of law)
Control of Corruption	47.3	Range 0-100 (Lower value indicates weak control of corruption; higher value indicates strong control of corruption)

SRI LANKA - WATCHLIST

Freedom House: Freedom in the World 2007	Score	Key
Political Rights	4	Range 1-7 (Lower value indicates good system of political rights; higher value indicates bad system political rights)
Civil Liberties	4	Range 1-7 (Lower value indicates good system of civil liberties; higher value indicates bad system civil liberties)
Status	PF	3 Categories: F (Free); PF (Partly Free); NF (Not Free)

Corruption Perceptions Index 2006	Score	Key
Total Score	3.1	Range 0-10 (lower value indicates high corruption; higher value indicates lower values of corruption)
Rank	84	163 countries

Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2006	Score	Key
Stateness	5.0	Range 0-10 (Lower value indicates negative democratic development; higher value indicates positive democratic development)
Political Participation	6.8	
Rule of Law	6.0	
Stability of Democratic Institutions	6.0	
Political and Social Integration	6.0	
Total Score Political Transformation	6.0	Range 0-10 (Lower value indicates negative democratic development; higher value indicates positive democratic development) / Arrow shows trend in democratic development (↑Improved; ↓Worsened)
Total Score Political Management	5.32	Range 0-10 (Lower value indicates lower quality of political management; higher value indicates higher quality of political management)