

## **Sri Lanka**

Sri Lanka is an island country relative in size to West Virginia that is located south of India in the Indian Ocean. The country's 1,340 kilometers of coastline and predominantly low altitude rolling plains provide plenty of area to endure the effects of a tsunami. Nearly 20 million Sri Lankans call the 64,740 square kilometer island home. Seventy-four percent of the people in Sri Lanka identify with the Sinhalese ethnic group, while eighteen percent call themselves Tamils and seven percent Moors. Seventy percent of Sri Lankans are Buddhist, fifteen percent Hindu, eight percent Christian, and seven percent Muslim.

The Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka has a presidential-parliamentary hybrid form of government with a unicameral legislature. Their parliament consists of 225 members elected for six-year terms. The current chief of state is President Chandrika Kumaratunga. He has held this position for twelve years since November 1994. Their current constitution was adopted on August 16, 1978. The key political pressure groups and leaders are the Buddhist clergy, labor unions, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, Radical Chauvinist Sinhalese groups, and Sinhalese Buddhist lay groups. The 1980's brought an outbreak of hostility between the government and a violent Tamil separatist group. This ethnic struggle between the Sinhalese majority and Tamil separatists cost tens of thousands of lives and festered until recently in February 2002 when a cease-fire was reached. The Tamil Tigers are considered a terrorist organization by the United States. However, there is still much hostility between the groups that unfortunately has been spurred somewhat via the disaster and the distribution of aid.

Nearly three-quarters of Sri Lanka's coastline was affected by the December 26<sup>th</sup> tsunami that caused the displacement of 800,000 and the deaths of nearly 38,000 people on the island. This number of casualties ranks second among nations affected by the tsunami. An estimated 221,100 casualties in the south Asian area are the result of this disaster, including approximately 166,320 in Indonesia, the country closest to the epicenter of the earthquake. Indonesia is a republic with a Presidential System. Their legislature has 550 members elected for a five-year term. So far, 10,744 lives in India and 5,322 lives in Thailand have also been lost from the tsunami. India and Thailand both have a parliamentary system with a bicameral legislature consisting of an upper house and a lower house. Relatively minimal casualties were also suffered in Somalia, Burma, Maldives, Malaysia, Tanzania, Bangladesh, and Kenya.

Reconstruction will total at about 3.2 billion US dollars. A little over half of a 1.8 billion dollar reconstruction plan will concentrate on rebuilding fisheries and revitalizing small businesses in the Tamil Tiger controlled areas in the north and east parts of the island which were most affected. Approximately 90,000 houses were also destroyed in the chaos. Another 1.4 billion dollar plan will focus on infrastructure needs over the next decade resulting from the disaster. About ninety percent of the reconstruction will be executed by donors and the government will play the role of facilitator. The Central Bank of Sri Lanka altered its projections of 2005 economic growth from 5.5% to 5%. This is not that great of decrease considering the damage inflicted upon the fishing and tourism industries in the country. The country has recently reached the secondary rebuilding effort and hence may not require U.S. military presence anymore. Currently, there are 700 Marines serving in the non-Tamil south and west parts of the country to

help primarily with cargo transport as the United States is one of few relief providers with access to cargo helicopters operating from sea-based ships. In regard to the relief effort for all affected areas, the U.S. has flown over 1,500 missions and delivered over 3 million pounds of relief supplies. India's relief efforts that it has extended beyond its own borders display their emergence as a regional diplomatic and economic power. Additional American troops in Sri Lanka will not be needed because of Indian efforts. These forces are serving in the guerrilla controlled north and east parts of the island. Aside from India's military efforts, they have also pledged \$23 million to Sri Lanka.

Although the level of aid has been very high in Sri Lanka, the act of distributing the aid has posed an ongoing struggle for the Sri Lankan government. Recently, the bureaucracy admitted the relief operation had been unsuccessful even after one month of the tsunami. The Commissioner General of Essential Services told reporters that as little as thirty percent of victims have received relief supplies. He blamed grassroots unprofessionalism in the bureaucracy as the cause of the delay. This caused President Kumaratunga to issue an order that at least seventy percent of the victims have received relief supplies by February 7.

The need for assistance in Sri Lanka has essentially risen due to the country's lack of economic and humanitarian power. The country is greatly in debt and the G7 has promised to help reduce it in an effort to rebuild the country and ensure its survival in the future. The government has initiated some relief efforts itself too, however. It is to grant each house destroyed by the tsunami 250,000 Rs. The Finance Ministry is to ensure that the two state banks stay open on Saturday and Sunday to process applications and distribute the grants. Several new branches of the banks will be open in the areas most in

need of their services. Owners of houses partially or completely destroyed by the tidal wave are eligible to apply for the grant and bank officers will be available to meet and discuss the needs of families. Another program has been started to speed up the process of building business back up. The government will issue loans for restarting business ventures. \$50 million US has been set aside for this program. Entrepreneurs can apply for loans for Rs. 5 million at just six percent interest.

In the wake of this horrible disaster, one of the most interesting aspects concerning Sri Lanka will be the way that the government and the Tamils work with each other for the reconstruction and progress of everything and everyone on the island they both share.