



Immigration and
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Sri Lanka: Prevalence of fraudulent National Identity Cards (NICs) (2004 - 2006)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

According to 19 December 2006 correspondence sent to the Research Directorate by an official at the Canadian High Commission in Colombo, Sri Lanka, the Sri Lankan authorities do not systematically keep statistics on the prevalence of forged National Identity Cards (NICs). The Official indicated, however, that there have been "high profile cases" of NIC fraud in the media including "[Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)] members, suicide bombers, government ministers and officials and businessmen seeking to have multiple identities" (Canada 19 Dec. 2006). The Official further noted that the Sri Lankan authorities do not systematically keep statistics on the prevalence of genuine NICs obtained by fraudulent means; however, "foreign immigration authorities dealing with Sri Lankan clientele are uncovering significant amounts of [NIC] fraud where persons assume multiple aliases" (ibid.).

News sources from 2004 to 2006 report on the production and/or use of fraudulent NICs (*Daily News* 13 Dec. 2006; AP 19 July 2006; LankaNewspapers.com 13 Apr. 2005; *Daily News* 20 July 2004). In July 2004, the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the Sri Lankan police investigated the alleged involvement of employees of the government's Registration of Persons Department in a "massive NIC racket" (ibid. 17 July 2004; ibid. 20 July 2004). Several employees of the Registration of Persons Department were thought to have been involved in the issuance of fraudulent NICs at "exorbitant" prices (ibid. 20 July 2004; ibid. 17 July 2004). Four of the Department's employees allegedly issued a fraudulent NIC to a female suicide bomber of the LTTE, which reportedly allowed the woman to "gain access to many places" (ibid.; see also *Daily News* 20 July 2004). Further information on the outcome of the CID investigations could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

According to an article on LankaNewspapers.com, a Sri Lankan online news service, in April 2005, the Special Task Force (STF) of the Sri Lankan police uncovered an LTTE NIC racket (13 Apr. 2005). The racket reportedly involved using the cards of LTTE members who died in the December 2004 tsunami and replacing the Tamil names of the deceased with Sinhalese names in order to create new NICs (Lankanewspapers.com 13 Apr. 2005). According to the LankaNewspapers.com article, an LTTE member caught by the STF with a fraudulent card revealed that it was easier for LTTE members to travel to the south of the country and to Colombo using Sinhalese aliases (ibid.). A 19 July 2006 Associated Press (AP) article reports that the Sri Lankan police arrested a "would-be" female LTTE suicide bomber who was in possession of two fraudulent NICs.

A 13 December 2006 article in the Colombo-based *Daily News* indicates that the CID launched an investigation into the issuance of an NIC to an LTTE suicide bomber by the Registration of Persons Department. According to the article, the investigation found that the individual had submitted fraudulent documents in order to obtain the

NIC (*Daily News* 13 Dec. 2006). The Registration of Persons Department reportedly issued the individual an NIC with a Muslim name (*The Sunday Times Online* 10 Dec. 2006). The police arrested the former NIC Commissioner for his alleged involvement in issuing the fraudulent card (*ibid.*; see also *Daily News* 13 Dec. 2006). According to the CID, cited in the *Daily News* article, in other cases, LTTE suicide bombers had been issued NICs by claiming to have lost their original cards; however, in at least one case involving a suicide bomber, the Registration of Persons Department did not have the documentation required to obtain the replacement NICs [e.g., police report, birth certificate (Sri Lanka 7 Feb. 2006; *Daily News* 13 Dec. 2006)] in its possession (*ibid.*).

In 19 December 2006 correspondence, the Official at the Canadian High Commission in Colombo indicated that security features of the NIC have changed over time. The Official identified several security features of the current NIC, including a "green optical strip," certain "features" that are visible under ultra-violet light, and the personal number of the cardholder which is composed of an algorithm (Canada 19 Dec. 2006). The details of the security features are not publicly known (*ibid.*). According to the Official, the authenticity of a NIC can be verified by contacting the Commissioner of the Sri Lankan Registration of Persons Department (*ibid.*). The Official noted that

[the Canadian High Commission] in Colombo has undertaken such verifications on behalf of CBSA [Canada Border Services Agency], CIC [Citizenship and Immigration Canada], IRB [Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada] and visa offices. Verification is done manually at the ... offices [of the Registration of Persons Department] and may take several months in order to allow for retrieval of the original file. (*ibid.*)

The Official stated that some ways to recognize a forged NIC

may include tampering with the laminate in order to substitute the photograph of the genuine holder. Other alterations may include changing the residential address or the actual personal number. Other forgeries may be completely counterfeit documents trying to resemble NICs. (Canada 19 Dec. 2006)

News sources from 2006 indicate that the Sri Lankan government plans to introduce a new NIC (*Daily Mirror* 7 Dec. 2006; *Daily News* 24 June 2006). The new identity card is expected to include more information about the cardholder in order to "avoid impersonation and abuse" (*ibid.*; see also *Daily Mirror* 7 Dec. 2006). According to the Secretary of the Internal Affairs Administration Ministry, cited in an article in the online Sri Lankan newspaper *Daily Mirror*, the new cards will have the "latest security techniques," including a thumbprint of the holder, security codes and "secret numbers," thereby making duplication difficult (*ibid.*). The Secretary further noted that the new NIC system would allow applicants to apply for NICs at the district level; currently, applicants must apply for NICs at the Colombo head office (*ibid.*). The Secretary also indicated that, while the current NICs are issued to persons above 16 years of age, the new cards will be issued to persons above 15 years of age (*ibid.*). All current NIC cardholders will reportedly have their cards replaced by the new one (*ibid.*). The Sri Lankan government plans to issue the new identity cards by the end of 2007 (*ibid.*).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

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The Sunday Times Online [Colombo]. 10 December 2006. "Gotabhaya Probe: Ex-NIC Commissioner Arrested." <<http://www.sundaytimes.lk/061210/News/n104.html>> [Accessed 14 Dec. 2006]

Additional Sources Consulted

Internet sites, including: Amnesty International (AI), British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), European Country of Origin Information Network (ecoi.net), Factiva, Human Rights Watch (HRW), United Kingdom Home Office, United States Department of State.

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