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

In January 2011 correspondence with the Research Directorate, an official from the High Commission of Canada in Colombo noted that

[t]here remains concern that the front end issuance process for Sri Lankan documents is open to abuse. Low civil servant salaries and decentralized procedures for the issuance of feeder documents are two key areas that can be exploited by persons seeking to improperly obtain documents. (Canada 18 Jan. 2011)

A representative of the Canada Border Services Agency's (CBSA) Document Integrity Unit also noted in correspondence with the Research Directorate that when it comes to Sri Lanka's National Identity Card (NIC), the practice of "improperly" issuing a genuine card to a non-Sri Lankan is the "most common type of fraud" exercised (Canada 12 July 2011). According to the CBSA representative, "[o]ften someone who is non-Sri Lankan is issued a NIC because they have submitted false supporting documentation that purports them to be Sri Lankan" (ibid. 15 July 2011). The United Kingdom's country report on Sri Lanka includes an excerpt from a letter sent by the British High Commission (BHC) in Colombo to the UK Border Agency, which notes that "genuine documents are so easy to obtain fraudulently, there is no need to forge them" (UK 4 July 2011, para. 27.02). The BHC goes on to say that

[t]he high level of corruption in Sri Lanka and the unscrupulous actions of government officials at all levels, somewhat undermines the issuing process for many official documents. It is common knowledge that persons can obtain an ID card or passport in any identity they want with the right contacts. (ibid.)

The BHC also noted that the Sri Lankan birth certificate is the "base document for many services in Sri Lanka," such as applications for NICs (UK 4 July 2011, para. 27.01). According to the BHC, "forged birth certificates are readily available through agents, at a reported cost of around 2,500 LKA rupees [\$21.99 CAD (XE.com 12 July 2011)]" and "often pass the scrutiny of the relevant authorities and successfully support the fraudulent issue of ID cards" (UK 4 July 2011, para. 27.01). The BHC also noted that in Sri Lanka "[t]here are numerous agents throughout the country who advertise employment or studies

abroad, and will provide an entire package of forged documents to support applications for passports and/or visas" (ibid.). These documents can include NICs (UK 4 July 2011).

According to the BHC, "[i]t is suspected that there are many more ID cards in circulation than the actual total population of Sri Lanka" (ibid.). However, the Canadian High Commission official noted that, as with other governments, "it is not possible to determine the percentage of improperly issued or forged documents that may be in existence" (Canada 18 Jan. 2011).

The official further added that "the main challenge in the verification of documents is that most records are not available electronically"; an NIC "can be checked quickly if a copy of an original document can be provided to the issuing authority for reference/comparison" (ibid.). The CBSA representative noted that CBSA is able to verify "the substrate of the document" (Canada 12 July 2011), which is "the base product of which a document is made," such as paper or plastic (ibid. 15 July 2011). However, the representative noted that it "is difficult if not impossible" to verify the "authenticity" of a NIC issuance (ibid. 12 July 2011) because it is hard "to determine if the documents are legitimately issued or issued by a competent authority in an incorrect manner, such as corrupt officials selling documents" (ibid. 15 July 2011). The CBSA representative also added that the NIC's "lack of security features makes determining a forgery very difficult," and that the security features have not changed for "many years" (ibid.).

In April 2010, *Lanka Truth*, a Colombo-based news source, reported that the Department of Registration of Persons moved to the control of the Ministry of Defence "in order to prevent irregularities that are being committed using fake identity cards" (8 Apr. 2010). Police information obtained during investigations of terrorist activities indicated that fake identity cards had been "used for various nefarious activities" (*Lanka Truth* 8 Apr. 2010). The Ministry of Defence cited "national security" and the "mysterious dealings of a former official of the Department" as reasons for its takeover (ibid.).

Reports of fake NIC use

The *Daily Mirror*, a Colombo-based national newspaper, reported, on 1 April 2010, the arrest of a "con artist" who had used different identity cards to open fake bank accounts. The same news source also writes of the arrest of three suspects in Kandy who made illegal NICs in 15 minutes for people applying to join government institutions such as the military and the Presidential Security Division (*Daily Mirror* 9 Jan. 2011). In another article, the *Daily Mirror* reported that Sri Lankan customs officers seized a container full of contraband cigarettes; however, no suspects were arrested because the people importing the cigarettes had used forged identity cards (1 Feb. 2011). A different report by the same source made note of the arrest of a man with three identity cards near a polling centre in Trincomalee (*Daily Mirror* 17 Mar. 2011).

The *Sunday Times*, another Colombo-based newspaper, reported on the arrest of a Vavuniyan businessman who had 35 forged NICs (30 Apr. 2011). The businessman was using the forged NICs to sell Subscriber Identity Module (SIM) cards to criminals (*Sunday Times* 30 Apr. 2011). In a different article, the same news source reports of the arrest of a married couple running an employment scam, and the recovery of many NICs and travel documents from the suspects (ibid. 29 June 2011). The *Sunday Times* also reported the arrests of four people

from a fake bullion factory, where they had been making gold jewellery and later pawning the items while occasionally using fake NICs (1 July 2011).

New NICs

In an October 2009 article, *Lanka Truth* reported that a project to create new electronic NICs, which began in 2006, was "abandoned" because of the "inability of authorities" to choose the company that would lead the project (16 Oct. 2010).

In a 6 January 2010 article, the *Daily News* reports the Secretary of Defence as saying that the

present national identity card system is outdated, and does not create interconnectivity and has many security issues. Therefore, the Government is planning to introduce an electronic smart card system to replace it from this year.

He also informed the audience at a Microsoft Tech Colloquium on 4 January 2010 that the NIC "is very simple and easy to forge" (Sri Lanka 30 Dec. 2010).

The Ministry of Defence announced on 22 January 2011 that the Department of Registration of Persons "has taken steps to issue new digitalized National Identity Cards for Sri Lankan citizens" (Sri Lanka 24 Jan. 2011). *ColomboPage*, a Sri Lanka Internet newspaper based in the United States, reported that in early 2011, the Defence Ministry had announced "plans to issue new digitalized NICs which cannot be changed or altered" (4 Apr. 2011). Reports of new NICs being issued could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

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 sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Attempts to contact Transparency International Sri Lanka and the Sri Lanka Police were unsuccessful.

Internet sites, including: Asian Development Bank, Australia - Refugee Review Tribunal, British Broadcasting Corporation, Centre for Information and Research on Organised Crime, Denmark - Danish Immigration Service, European Country of Origin Information Network, Factiva, *Forced Migration Review*, Global Integrity, GlobalSecurity.org, INTERPOL, *Jane's Intelligence Review*, LankaNewspapers.com, Onlanka, Sri Lanka Police, Sri Lanka - Registration of Persons Department, Transparency International, United Nations Refworld, United States Department of State.

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