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30 August 2004

### LKA42859.E

Sri Lanka: Update to LKA42248.E of 16 December 2003 on current political situation and any reports of violence between United National Front (UNF) and People's Alliance (PA) political parties (December 2003-August 2004)  
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

Various articles and reports highlight the results of the 2 April 2004 general elections (UK 2004, Sec. 2.17, 2.8; Reuters 5 Apr. 2004; AFP 5 Apr. 2004) and a violent rift within the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) leadership (AI 26 July 2004; HRW 28 July 2004; ICG 1 Apr. 2004; AP 5 Apr. 2004) as major factors driving the current political situation in Sri Lanka.

According to bulletins compiled by the International Crisis Group (ICG), an ongoing dispute between President Chandrika Kumaratunga and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe (related to events outlined in LKA42248.E of 16 December 2003) was brought to a close when Kumaratunga called snap general elections for 2 April 2004, nearly four years earlier than planned (1 Feb. 2004; ICG 1 Mar. 2004). In the build-up to the elections, Amnesty International urged all political parties and the LTTE to refrain from violence and abide by human rights protocols (AI 27 Feb. 2004).

While the European Union's Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) stated that some "250 complaints of intimidation or ballot stuffing" were reported, "[g]enerally speaking, election laws were very well enforced" and according to the election monitors the polls were on the whole "free and fair" with incidents of "vote-rigging" and intimidation occurring mainly in the North and East of the country (UK 2004). Sri Lanka's Elections Commissioner Dayananda Dissanayake also stated that the elections were close to being "100 per cent" free and fair (Reuters 5 Apr. 2004).

Nevertheless, the BBC mentioned that six weeks before the elections, on the closing day for nominations, 27 incidents of politically motivated violence had left 40 party activists injured in southern and north-central areas of the country (25 Feb. 2004). The *Daily News* of Colombo also reported that there were 29 incidents of pre-election violence, noting that a clash between supporters of the United National Front (UNF) and the newly formed United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) in the Galle district resulted in the hospitalization of nine people (27 Feb. 2004). According to the Colombo-based independent organization Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMCV), all of the pre-election violence involved members of the two major political parties—the People's Alliance (PA) or UPFA and the United National Party (UNP) or UNF (*Daily News* 27 Feb. 2004; BBC 25 Feb. 2004).

Election results reported that the UPFA, an alliance of President Kumaratunga's Sri Lanka Freedom Party and the Marxist People's Liberation Front (JVP), won 105 seats, eight less than what was needed for a majority government (AFP 5 Apr. 2004; Reuters 5 Apr. 2004). Prime Minister Wickremasinghe's United National Party (UNP) ended up with 82 seats, a loss of 27 seats from the previous election, while the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) won 22 seats (ibid.; UK 2004). Subsequent internal elections to determine the speaker for the new parliament saw the main opposition party win the ballot by one vote (ICG 1 May 2004; BBC 22 Apr. 2004). According to the BBC, this situation was a setback for Kumaratunga's minority government, as the opposition party would control the parliamentary agenda and have "the power to delay government business" (22 Apr. 2003).

With regard to LTTE-related violence, in July 2004, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch expressed concern over ongoing violence between a breakaway eastern-based LTTE faction, led by Colonel Karuna and elements of the core group (AI 26 July 2004; HRW 28 Jul. 2004). Karuna and the 6,000 combatants under his control, reportedly accusing LTTE leaders of discriminating against eastern-based Tamils, apparently defected from the main LTTE group in March 2004 (ICG 1 Apr. 2004; ICG 1 May 2004; AP 5 Apr. 2004). In April 2004, the core LTTE faction, declaring it would quell Karuna's group, began a violent offensive that claimed the lives of at least nine (ICG 1 May 2004) or ten persons (Reuters 11 Apr. 2004). The BBC subsequently reported on 13 April that the core LTTE group recaptured the eastern region formerly controlled by Karuna, who apparently fled the area (13 Apr. 2004). Although ICG reports have mentioned that Karuna's whereabouts have been unknown since April 2004 (1 May 2004; ICG 1 June 2004), the ICG's August bulletin noted that Karuna was reportedly in contact with Hindu Minister Douglas Devananda (1 Aug. 2004).

However, as mentioned earlier, more violence between LTTE factions broke out in the month of July 2004, reportedly leaving more than a dozen people dead (HRW 28 July 2004). Many of the victims were believed to be Karuna's top supporters (HRW 28 July 2004; ICG 1 Aug. 2004). In addition, reports noted that an 8 July suicide bomb attack in Colombo that killed four police officers, and a grenade attack against "a Tamil political party's office in the eastern town of Valachchenai" that injured five persons could threaten to destabilize the country's ceasefire which came into effect in February 2002 (ibid.; AP 3 Aug. 2004).

For more information about the political situation in Sri Lanka covering 2 April to 25 June 2004, please consult the United Kingdom's Immigration and Nationality Directorate country information bulletin at:  
<[http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/ind/en/home/0/country\\_information/bulletins/sri\\_lanka\\_1\\_2004.html?>](http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/ind/en/home/0/country_information/bulletins/sri_lanka_1_2004.html?>).

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.

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