

Chronology of Armed Conflict in Sri Lanka (p. 16-17)

Following is a chronology of key incidents in Sri Lanka's civil war, which has killed around 70,000 people since it erupted in 1983.

1948 - Island of Ceylon gains independence from Britain and the country is later renamed Sri Lanka (in 1972).

1956 - Government makes majority Sinhala language the state language. Minority Tamils say they feel marginalised.

1976 - Some Tamils take up armed weapons against the state. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE or Tamil Tigers) is formed.

1983 - Tamil Tiger attack in the north kills several soldiers, triggering anti-Tamil riots in the capital, Colombo. Hundreds die, thousands flee.

1987 - Having earlier armed Tamil Tigers, India sends troops to enforce a truce. Tamil Tigers renege on pact, refuse to disarm and begin three years of fighting that kills 1,000 Indian soldiers. India withdraws, leaving Tigers in control of northern city of Jaffna.

1990 - Talks fail and Tamil Tigers over-run police stations in the east.

1991 - Suspected Tamil Tiger suicide bomber kills former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in south India. The next year, Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa is killed in a suicide blast.

1995 - President Chandrika Kumaratunga agrees on a truce with Tamil Tigers. Later, the Tigers sink a naval ship and lose Jaffna to government forces. As a result, an estimated 700,000 people are displaced from their homes.

1995-2001 - Fighting rages across north and east. Suicide attack on Central Bank in Colombo kills around 100 people. President Kumaratunga is wounded in another attack as bombings become frequent. Human rights violations increase.

2001 - Tigers attack main international airport and destroy half of Sri Lankan Airlines fleet. Tigers gain strategic ground and economic growth ceases.

2002 - Norway negotiates a peace agreement and the two sides sign a ceasefire.

2004 - Eastern Tiger commander Karuna Amman breaks with Tamil Tigers. Tiger offensive regains control of east. Tigers say Karuna is operating with the support of the government. Tsunami slams into north and east coast.

2005 - Courts block post-tsunami aid-sharing deal with Tigers. Suspected Tiger assassin kills Foreign Minister. Attacks on military rise, raising fears of a return to fighting.

2006 - After a string of attacks in January, two sides meet in February and renew their commitment to the 2002 peace agreement. However, by April, naval battles, air strikes and bomb blasts become more common.

By late July, heavy ground fighting starts after dispute over rebel-held water supply in the east spills over into northern Jaffna peninsula. In August, the government blocks food to the north-east. Both sides meet again in October but talks fail. Artillery battles follow in Jaffna.

2007 - In a major military offensive, government troops capture the key Tiger eastern stronghold of Vakarai, the rebels' last remaining stretch of coast in the east and a vital supply route. Tens of thousands of civilians are displaced by weeks of fighting and flee rebel-held territory to refugee camps.

In March, the Tigers launch their first confirmed air raid on a military base next to the island's only international airport, north of Colombo. Three airmen are killed and 16 wounded. The rebels warn more such attacks will follow.