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A Complete Look at Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is an island country located just southeast of the coast of India. Many average Americans who look at the map would mistake the same island state to be a part of the country, India, but that is just not the case. Sri Lanka is its own entity, separate from India, with its own climate, ethnic groups, culture, infrastructure, economy, and history. Although small, there is a rich history behind the country. Many events have shaped and formed the country into what it today. Before this can be looked into, however, one must understand Where the country is located and how this affects the country's weather and climate.

Sri Lanka is located just above the equatorial line on the Earth, causing most of the nation to receive tropical-like weather with a primarily rainy and humid climate. The southwestern portion of the nation can be classified as a tropical rainforest climate. This portion of the island receives a great amount of rain per year compared to the other sub-climate zones in the region. The northern portion of the country is considered to have a tropical savanna climate. This climate is still considerably wet, but not as wet as the previously mentioned tropical rainforest climate. The average mean surface temperature of the country over the last century has been around 26.5 Celsius (79.7 Fahrenheit). The average mean temperature of the country has risen to approximately 27 Celsius or 81 Fahrenheit in 2022 ("World Bank Climate Change Knowledge Portal"). The average rainfall in the region as of 2022 was around 2663.38mm (about 8.74 ft), an off-year, just below the median average for rainfall in a country.

There is a deep and rich history surrounding the ethnic groups that are in Sri Lanka. Understanding who these groups are and what they believe is very important when understanding the country as a whole. In total, there are 4 main ethnic groups located within the country. There are the Sinhalese people, who make up 74.9% of the population; the Sri Lankan Tamil people, who make up 11.2% of the population; the Moors, who make up 9.2% of the population; and the Indian Tamil people, who make up 4.2% of the population. The remaining 0.5% of the population does not have a specific ethnic group ("Pritzker Legal Research Center: Sri Lanka"). The main religions practiced by the country's population include Buddhism, practiced by 70.1% of the religious population; Hinduism, practiced by 12.6% of the religious population; Islam, practiced by 9.7% of the religious population; Roman Catholic, practiced by 6.2% of the religious population, and the remaining 1.4% are of other denominations ("Sri Lanka - World Directory of Minorities & Indigenous Peoples."). Ethnic groups and religious standings line up in a quite linear fashion. Most Sinhalese people practice Buddhism, most Tamil people practice Roman Catholicism and Hinduism, and most Moors practice Islam. The two national languages of the country are Sinhala and Tamil, but "English is also spoken by 23.8% of the population." ("Pritzker Legal Research Center: Sri Lanka").

To further understand the country, it is vital to understand the agriculture and economy of Sri Lanka, how each is important, and how each can affect one another. Sri Lanka has a decent-sized agriculture sector at 7% of the nation's GDP. Sri Lanka's agriculture GDP is just a little higher than that of the U.S., with the U.S. having around a 5% GDP in the agricultural sector. This is significant enough to have "over 30 percent of Sri Lankans [that] are employed in the agricultural sector." ("Sri Lanka - Agricultural Sector"). The primary crop that is grown in Sri Lanka is rice, which is accompanied by various other agricultural products that are very

significant to the country's agricultural GDP. Lentils, Animal feed, dairy products, meat, and various fabrics are considered to be the top agricultural products in the nation. Dairy and cotton are the most profitable for the country, as "the country imported $139 million USD of milk and milk products in 202." and "imported approximately $250 million USD of cotton (raw cotton, yarn, and fabric) in 2021 ("Sri Lanka - Agricultural Sector"). These numbers are not as big as they used to be in the past, and according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations that, "crop production in 2023 forecast[s] below [the] five-year average" ("GIEWS - Global Information and Early Warning System."). Agricultural decline is not the only thing that is affecting the nation's economy; it is just a small sliver of the real issues that are occurring in Sri Lanka's economic sector. Sri Lanka's GDP and economy have been on the decline for about a decade and a half. One major factor that began the decline of the Sri Lankan economy was the end of the three-decade-long civil war that was waged in the country from 1983 to 2009. After the war, the nation switched gears by funneling a great deal of effort into domestic products. This attempt at self-reliance backfired, as stress on local production caused an increased reliance on foreign goods. The problem was only extrapolated when, in 2019, the country inexplicably cut income cash, which caused the already struggling national economy to struggle an even greater deal. In 2020, the Sri Lankan economy was once again in jeopardy, as the outbreak of COVID-19 severely affected the country's economy, as well as many other countries around the world. Tourism has a sizable contribution to the nation's economy as "in 2018, tourism contributed nearly 5% of the country's GDP and generated over 388,000 jobs. In 2020, tourism's share of GDP had dropped to 0.8%, with over 40,000 jobs lost to that point" (Koop 1). Even more economic crisis occurred when Sri Lanka banned foreign fertilizers in hopes of giving the foreign currency reserves a break. This also backfired, as there was not enough domestic

fertilizer to support the nation's crops, causing many to die or not grow at all. This forced Sri Lanka to purchase even more imports for fertilizer, decreasing the foreign reserves even further. As the country stands right now, its foreign currency reserves are down 99% as of 2019, with only $50 million USD in those said reserves. As of 2022, Sri Lanka is $51 billion USD in debt to other nations. “the economy contracted by 7.8 percent in 2022 and 7.9 percent in the first half of 2023” (Kaluthotage), which is just another statistic that shows the country's current economic struggles. Even “Amid the crisis, half a million jobs were lost, food insecurity and malnutrition increased, poverty doubled, and inequality widened” (Kaluthotage). All these factors are making it hard for the average Sri Lankan citizen to live a normal life that is debt-free. The massive inflation that is occurring is causing many citizens to become unable to purchase everyday goods for themselves and their families. The recent resignation of President Rajapaksa and new government reforms seem to have the country on the right path to recovery, although this is yet to be seen in the struggling nation.

When understanding Sri Lanka as a whole, it is also important to delve into its infrastructure, as well as any industrialization that has taken place within the country. Sri Lanka is a smaller nation, roughly the size of West Virginia and Virginia combined, so there are few international airports in the country. There are only 5 international airports in the country, with the biggest being Colombo International Airport, located in Colombo, Sri Lanka. This is a minuscule number compared to the U.S., which has around 150 International airports. One important thing to note about Sri Lanka’s infrastructure is that the nation has the largest road density out of the many countries located in the South Asia region “with some 173.9 km of roads per 100 square kilometers of land as of 2016” (“Sri Lanka - Infrastructure.” 1). A vast majority of those roads are class A roads, about 12,220 kilometers, with only 170 kilometers considered to

be class B roads. Another important fact about Sri Lanka's roads is that every road in the country is a single laned road with no divider. Sri Lanka is also one of the least urban countries in the world, ranking in the bottom 20 in urbanization globally by country. The urban population was "19.2% of total population (2023)," and the country's rate of urbanization is "1.22% annual rate of change (2020-25 est.)" ("Explore All Countries - Sri Lanka"). Overall, Sri Lanka has quite poor infrastructure due to low funding for housing and projects due to the country's poor economy. This also affects industrialization, as many factors are unable to operate, making the country much more dependent on other means to provide money for the country.

Finally, one of, if not, the most important parts of understanding a country as a whole is understanding the history of the country. "The first Sinhalese arrived in Sri Lanka late in the 6th century B.C., probably from northern India." ("Explore All Countries - Sri Lanka"). The first kingdoms of the country were developed in Anuradhapura, from around 200 B.C. to 1000 A.D., and in Polonnaruwa from around 1070 to 1200. One of the Kingdoms in this area was known as the "Tamil Kingdom," which is the main reason that the 2 main ethnic groups of Sinhalese and Tamils were formed. The Island was ceded by Britain in 1796, and its name was known as "Ceylon" during its British occupation. The country finally gained independence in 1948 and officially changed its name to Sri Lanka in 1972. In 1983, tensions between the Tamil minority and the Sinhalese government majority eventually erupted into a civil war between the defecting Tigers of Tamil and the Sri Lankan government. This bloody war that killed around 80,000 Sri Lankans in its totality lasted 3 decades and finally ended in May of 2009, with the government of Sri Lanka defeating the Tigers of Tamil. So far, the post-conflict era in this nation's history has not gone too well, with a high economic decline and a decline in the standard of living. Overall, Sri Lanka can be characterized as a struggling nation that seems to always be on the brink of

breaking out of its social and economic woes but just cannot seem to break that barrier. Today, there is some hope that the country can turn itself around. However, there is still a lot of work that needs to be done before the country can ever reach that point.

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