



Issue Papers, Extended Responses and Country Fact Sheets

[Home](#)

Issue Paper SRI LANKA ALIEN SMUGGLING May 1996

Disclaimer

This document was prepared by the Research Directorate of the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada on the basis of publicly available information, analysis and comment. All sources are cited. This document is not, and does not purport to be, either exhaustive with regard to conditions in the country surveyed or conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. For further information on current developments, please contact the Research Directorate.

Table of Contents

1. [INTRODUCTION](#)
2. [ALIEN SMUGGLING: THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT](#)
3. [SRI LANKAN ALIEN SMUGGLING](#)
 - [3.1 Introduction](#)
 - [3.2 Smuggling Networks](#)
 - [3.3 Common Routes and Practices](#)
 - [3.4 False Documents](#)
 - [3.5 LTTE Role](#)
 - [3.6 Government Role](#)
4. [NOTES ON SELECTED SOURCES](#)

[REFERENCES](#)

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper provides on publicly available information on a clandestine activity: the smuggling of Sri Lankans to Canada and other countries by human traffickers. The paper looks at the subject in the context of the burgeoning global phenomenon of alien smuggling. The paper examines aspects of the networks reportedly operating in Sri Lanka to smuggle asylum-seekers and illegal immigrants to Canada and other countries, and also discusses reports of Sri Lankan alien smuggling and forgery networks reportedly operating within Canada.

Due to the nature of the topic, detailed information was difficult to obtain for several sections. However, the paper benefits from the expertise of two main oral sources who were willing to present their information in a public forum: Corporal Fred Bowen, a senior investigator with a new section of the RCMP formed to combat alien smuggling and forgery operations in Canada, and Linga Tharmalingam, an enforcement investigation exhibit officer at the Ontario Securities Commission and long-time member of the Toronto Sri Lankan Tamil community who has conducted research into alien smuggling on behalf of a number of Tamil families and who has acted as an RCMP contact on smuggling and forgery cases.

2. ALIEN SMUGGLING: THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

Human trafficking, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), involves the illegal crossing of borders by aliens, an exchange of money, and the use of intermediaries to provide services such as travel documents, transport, safe houses and jobs (ctd. in AP 25 Oct. 1994)^[1]. *Newsday* estimates that approximately one million people are illegally smuggled from poor to wealthy countries by criminal organizations every year (*Newsday* 12 June 1994). Traffickers can range from individuals acting occasionally to bring people across borders, to small rings, to large criminal networks run by organized gangs with enormous resources (ibid.; Bowen 4 Jan. 1996; IWG 9 Nov. 1995). Typically the smuggling networks are ethnically organized, the smugglers and the migrants coming from the same nationality (IWG 9 Nov. 1995). One-fifth of the cases come from China, but organized alien smuggling systems can also be found in several other countries, including India, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Romania, Israel and Sudan, as well as Sri Lanka (ibid.; Bowen 4 Jan. 1996; *Le Timestre du Monde* 1st Trimester 1995, 50). Since the late 1980s, Sri Lankans have consistently been in the top one or two groups smuggled into Canada, according to Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) Corporal Fred Bowen, a specialist in alien smuggling and the forgeries associated with the trade (Bowen 4 Jan. 1996).

Professional alien smugglers use myriad routes to transport their human cargo. The *Newsday* report cites US law-enforcement officials who

said that more than 40 countries serve as transit points for alien smugglers. The routes change frequently and are often complex....

The main smuggling routes for Asian immigrants, experts say, are through Bangkok, Singapore and Taiwan. From there, they travel by tramp steamer across the Pacific to South and Central America, or by air to easy-to-enter Eastern European capitals.... From these areas, the route leads to Western European cities for airline flights to the United States or smuggling in container ships to North America (ibid.).

Sources indicate that there has been an exponential increase in alien smuggling in recent years (Bowen 4 Jan. 1996; *Migration World* 1995b, 21; *Electronic Telegraph* 2 Aug. 1995; IWG 9

Nov. 1995). The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the opening of Eastern Europe have acted as catalysts, with organizations taking advantage of relaxed border controls, inexpensive air fares, and, in some cases, disorganization among civil authorities (*Electronic Telegraph* 2 Aug. 1995; Rodgers 18 Dec. 1995; AP 25 Oct. 1994; Reuters 25 Nov. 1993a; *Migration World* 1995a, 5; *ibid.* 1995b, 21-23). As well, large numbers of migrants are often "parked" in various regions, waiting for transit elsewhere (IWG 9 Nov. 1995; *Newsday* 12 June 1994). Thus, the Romanian Interior Ministry reported in 1994 that there were 18,000-20,000 illegal immigrants in the country (Romanian Press Agency 15 Apr. 1994); in 1993 the Bulgarian Interior Ministry estimated it had 11,000 illegal immigrants and a further 40,000 "transiting foreigners" (Reuters 25 Nov. 1993b; *ibid.* 18 Jan. 1993); and in 1995 the Russian Federal Migration Service estimated that about half a million people had arrived, "mostly from Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Ethiopia, Iran, Sudan, Angola, Pakistan and Nigeria, and mostly awaiting a turn to go west in Moscow" (ctd. in *Migration News* June 1995a). Reports indicate some 60,000 of these are Chinese, along with an estimated 3,000-5,000 Sri Lankans (Rodgers 18 Dec. 1995; *Le Trimestre du Monde* 1st Trimester 1995, 50; *The Sri Lanka Monitor* Feb. 1994; Official Kremlin International News Broadcast 31 Mar. 1993). South and Central America and the Caribbean have also become major staging areas for groups moving into the U.S., according to a report by the U.S. Government Interagency Working Group studying alien smuggling (U.S. Government Interagency Working Group (IWG) 9 Nov. 1995). According to their report, while 200,00 to 300,000 South and Central Americans try to illegally enter the U.S. annually, an additional 100,000 aliens from other regions--many from China and South Asia--travel to the area every year for the same reason (*ibid.*).

Internal instability in many countries, rising population pressures, the increasingly visible gap in living standards between poor and wealthy nations, official corruption and tighter visa restrictions in many Western countries have also been cited as factors behind the growth in alien smuggling networks in recent years (IWG 9 Nov. 1995; *Migration World* 1995b, 21-22; Official Kremlin International News Broadcast 31 Mar. 1993; *Migration News* Feb. 1995a; Rodgers 18 Dec. 1995). Organized criminal gangs are also said to be strongly involved, taking advantage of improved international communications and travel to devise transport routes and methods that adapt rapidly to changing law-enforcement strategies (*ibid.*; *Migration World* 1995b, 21-22; *The Sri Lanka Monitor* July 1995, 4; *Le Trimestre du Monde* 1st Trimester 1995, 50; AP 25 Oct. 1994; *Newsday* 12 June 1994; AFP 2 Oct. 1991).

There is also a great deal of money associated with alien smuggling. The International Center for Migration Policy Development in Vienna estimates that worldwide alien smuggling amounted to US\$5-7 billion of income for traffickers in 1993 (*Migration World* 1995b, 23). According to UN figures cited by the U.S. Government Interagency Working Group, a full US\$3.5 billion annually is grossed by gangs and associates bringing Chinese aliens to the United States (IWG 9 Nov. 1995). A number of sources have likened the profits to those associated with narcotics smuggling, while pointing out that the legal penalties are usually far less severe (Bowen 4 Jan. 1996; *Migration World* 1995b, 22; *Migration News* Feb. 1995a; *The Toronto Star* 13 Dec. 1991a). A full "package" from a smuggler including false documents, transportation using an underground network, and help with the immigration system of the target country, can reportedly cost \$30,000 to \$70,000 for Chinese migrants, and currently about \$20,000 for Sri Lankans coming to Canada (Bowen 4 Jan. 1996; see also *The Guardian* 7 Dec. 1995; *CJ International* Nov.-Dec. 1994, 4; *The Sri Lanka Project Briefing* Feb. 1994; *The Sri Lanka Monitor* July 1995; *ibid.* Oct. 1994; *ibid.* Feb. 1994). Corporal Bowen estimates that in the Sri Lankan case, about three-quarters of the typical \$20,000 fee is profit (*ibid.*). The Sri Lankan

smugglers usually bring in groups of 5-7 at a time and make about four runs per year, although the groups have been known to be as large as 70 at a time (ibid.).

NOTE

[1] Jonas Widgren, Director of the International Centre for Migration policy Development in Vienna, writes: "Trafficking of aliens in most cases implies the criminal circumvention of entry, asylum and immigration procedures and regulations of the receiving States." (*Migration World* 1995b, 21). [\[back\]](#)

3. SRI LANKAN ALIEN SMUGGLING

3.1 Introduction

In July 1995 18 Sri Lankans were found suffocated to death sealed into the back of a truck in a deserted car park in Hungary. Twenty other Sri Lankans were rescued along with an Iraqi and a Bangladeshi; they were found asleep and barely alive in the 95°F heat, the dead bodies beneath them (Reuters 31 July 1995; *The Sri Lanka Monitor* July 1995, 4). *The Sri Lanka Monitor*, a London, UK publication produced by the British Refugee Council, reported the odyssey of one of the survivors. He had paid US\$10,000 to an agent to take him from Sri Lanka to Moscow on a student visa; others had smuggled him into Bulgaria, where he boarded the truck to be taken to Germany (ibid.). According to Deutsche Presse-Agentur, the Bulgarian truck was followed by a car carrying extra fuel for the journey. "When the truck driver made a fuel stop in the Hungarian town of Gyor he noticed that the refugees had suffocated and fled the scene with four Romanian helpers" (Deutsche Presse-Agentur 21 July 1995). The driver and the person who allegedly ferried the travellers across the Danube River from Bulgaria into Romania were later among five people arrested in the case (ibid.). Some days later 30 more suspected Sri Lankans were found "packed like sardines" in the back of a truck abandoned on a highway in eastern Germany (AFP 27 July 1995). Sri Lankans have also been picked up on several occasions in the last few years in lifeboats in the Baltic Sea on their way to Scandinavian countries, in lifeboats off the coast of Italy, and stranded in Venezuela (*The Sri Lanka Monitor* Oct. 1994; Reuters 8 Nov. 1994; Rodgers 18 Dec. 1995; UPI 27 Aug. 1993; ibid. 12 June 1993; Bowen 4 Jan. 1996).

Malcolm Rodgers, an official with the Sri Lanka Project based at the British Refugee Council in London, estimates that the vast majority of Sri Lankan asylum-seekers in Europe in 1995 made the journey from Sri Lanka with the help of alien smugglers (Rodgers 18 Dec. 1995). Many Western countries have introduced visa restrictions, making it more difficult for Sri Lankans, and Tamils in particular, to travel or emigrate using conventional channels: thus the proliferation of clandestine travel using the services of human traffickers (ibid.; Bowen 4 Jan. 1996; *The Guardian* 7 Dec. 1995).

3.2 Smuggling Networks

In a 7 December 1995 *Guardian* article, Suzanne Goldenberg cites Sri Lankan police sources in estimating that there are about 1,000 "travel agencies" in the Sri Lankan capital, Colombo, offering "a one-stop service for Tamils wanting to leave Sri Lanka by fraudulent means, from guides, accommodation and airline tickets to travel documents--real and false." Corporal Bowen says there are "dozens and dozens and dozens" of small services for clandestinely transporting Sri Lankans, and estimates that there are 10 to 15 large international groups involved (Bowen 4 Jan. 1996). According to Bowen, the large groups

have branch offices in Toronto, Montréal, Buffalo, throughout Europe, Germany, France, Switzerland, Denmark, and India, the Madras area in particular. And in

Colombo, Jaffna, and a few of the smaller villages.... They're structured on family ties, people from the same village, people that they've known, from the same caste if they're Hindus, that they've known and worked with for many many years, for generations. And they've got an incredible amount of trust in one another. So if you're paying \$20,000 in Canada you know that the people in India and in France and whoever else does the work on the way will be paid (ibid.).

Linga Tharmalingam, an enforcement investigation exhibit officer at the Ontario Securities Commission and long-time member of the Toronto Sri Lankan Tamil community who has independently investigated alien smuggling and has acted as an RCMP contact on smuggling and forgery cases, explains that a great deal of passport fraud and alien smuggling is done on an individual level (Tharmalingam 16 Jan. 1996). People would not trust unknown gangs with \$20,000 and the lives of their relatives and friends, according to Tharmalingam. Therefore they tend to only hire people with whom they have a personal connection: their own relatives and friends, or people from their own area (ibid.). Thus, says Tharmalingam, "people from Jaffna have a group of smugglers together. Other city people have a group of smugglers together" (ibid.). And smugglers from Vancouver or Montréal would not necessarily cooperate with smugglers from Toronto (ibid.).

Within networks, according to Bowen, various branch offices act almost as independent cells, taking advantage of quick electronic communication through telephone and fax, and allowing "guides" to make last-minute travel decisions according to changing conditions in various countries (Bowen 4 Jan. 1996; see also *Migration World* 1995b, 22). These guides typically speak a number of languages, including English, according to Bowen, and are furnished with unlimited credit in case officials need to be bribed or travel plans must be changed (ibid.). Tharmalingam maintains, however, that many of those involved in the trade are poorly educated, do not speak English well, and come from poor backgrounds, which makes them susceptible to the large amounts of money involved in the trade (Tharmalingam 16 Jan. 1996). Within networks there is reportedly a high degree of cooperation and trust, but according to Tharmalingam the business has become highly competitive, with different groups cutting in on one another and exposing other groups to authorities (ibid.).

This competition, according to Tharmalingam, is a result of stricter measures by airport and international authorities in recent years, which have increased the risks and costs involved in the trade, and subsequently increased prices (ibid.). The 1987 price to be smuggled into Canada was about \$8,000, compared to the current \$20,000, according to Tharmalingam, who says that from 1987 to 1992 there were 250 to 300 refugee smugglers in the Toronto area^[2] (ibid.). That number has now dropped to 50-75, according to Tharmalingam--about 40 to 50 being "active" smugglers, according to Corporal Bowen (ibid.; Bowen 4 Jan. 1996).

3.3 Common Routes and Practices

According to Corporal Bowen, a Sri Lankan Tamil who wishes to be smuggled to Canada by an agency would typically begin by contacting, or having a relative or friend contact a number of Toronto-area smugglers in order to exchange references and negotiate a price for the service (Bowen 4 Jan. 1996). Then a fee of a few hundred dollars would be paid to an office in Toronto to cover the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) "exit visa," and the LTTE in the individual's area in Sri Lanka would be notified that he or she was allowed to leave (ibid.)^[3]. Then the first instalment of the negotiated smugglers' fee would be paid, according to Bowen, with the balance being paid en route (ibid.). Tharmalingam explains that many of the agents remain overseas in

Thailand, Sri Lanka, Kenya or elsewhere, and the payments are actually made in Canada by the family of those being smuggled to the family of the escort (Tharmalingam 16 Jan. 1996).

Typically, individuals are smuggled in groups of 5 to 7 and are accompanied by a guide or agent (Bowen 4 Jan. 1996). In order to fly out of Colombo's international airport, a person must have a passport and, if applicable, a visa for the destination country (*ibid.*; IRB 21 Apr. 1994, 22-23). However, smuggling operations often make use of forged or fake documents, which do not necessarily have to be of high quality to get past a quick check by airlines personnel (Bowen 4 Jan. 1996).

Linga Tharmalingam maintains that smugglers will commonly use a relative's passport and bring it back to Sri Lanka to escort someone else to Canada (Tharmalingam 16 Jan. 1996). An example of this sort of case was found in the UK in 1992 when Rajaratnam Kanesarajah, who was born in Sri Lanka but became a British national, allowed his wife's passport, which included his children, to be altered and used to help a woman, child and two other people to travel with him from Sri Lanka to Britain (*The Guardian* 6 May 1992; *The Independent* 15 Apr. 1992). Kanesarajah was charged under British law with "facilitating the entry [of]...an illegal entrant" but on appeal was found not guilty since those he had helped were not "illegal entrants" since they claimed asylum and did not claim that their travel documents were valid (*The Guardian* 6 May 1992; *The Independent* 15 Apr. 1992).

A Canadian of Sri Lankan origin can sell his or her passport to an agent for \$4,000, according to Tharmalingam, while a Sri Lankan passport with a Canadian Landed Immigration Form would go for \$2,400 (*ibid.*). Corporal Bowen explains a common sort of fraud:

If you sold me your Landed Immigration Form and I was Sri Lankan and it had a Sri Lankan name on it, I would take that to the Sri Lankan Embassy in Ottawa and say, "I lost my old passport and my old birth certificate. Can you issue me a new Sri Lankan one?" They would then issue me...based on the Landed Immigration Form that I gave them, a new Sri Lankan travel document, or a new Sri Lankan passport, that would have your biographical details in it but my photo.... And then if I didn't do that in person—if I mailed it in, all you'd need to do is get your people, if you want them smuggled from Sri Lanka, to mail you the photos. You get access to the Landed Immigration Forms, mail them to the Sri Lankan Embassy, and they will issue new Sri Lankan passports, and return them with your Canadian Landed Immigration Form. Then you'd just mail them back to the people in Sri Lanka. And then they travel—they leave Sri Lanka as Canadian landed immigrants, under your name but with their photos (Bowen 4 Jan. 1996).

A common first stop for those who cannot come directly to Canada is the Madras area of India, or Singapore (*ibid.*). Madras, according to Corporal Bowen, has a number of "forgery factories...that will supply you with any document that you want from any country, for the right price" (Bowen 4 Jan. 1996). Singapore is also known as a region rich in document-forgery outlets, and travellers require no visa (Reuters 1 Nov. 1992; Bowen 4 Jan. 1996). As well, a Reuters report from 1 November 1992 notes that Singaporean passports can be used by Asians of different nationalities to gain entry to many countries without a visa. Also, according to Malcolm Rodgers of the British Refugee Council, Singapore has a substantial Tamil minority, some of whom are involved in alien smuggling (Rodgers 18 Dec. 1995).

From Singapore, networks run through various eastern countries, with possible stops in Thailand, Hong Kong and Japan before the travellers land in Vancouver and, generally, head for the Toronto area (Bowen 4 Jan. 1996). Tharmalingam says that many Sri Lankan women, in particular, are vulnerable to abuse and even rape while en route, and gives the example of women being stranded in Thailand for several months and forced into prostitution (Tharmalingam 16 Jan. 1996). Fewer Sri Lankan women are being smuggled now, according to Tharmalingam, because of these problems (ibid.).

More popular than the eastern route, according to Corporal Bowen, is the western route through European countries, with many stopping in Moscow since "you don't need a document to get into Moscow, and generally you don't need a document or any sort of visas when you leave" (Bowen 4 Jan. 1996; see also Rodgers 18 Dec. 1995; *The Sri Lanka Monitor* Feb. 1994, 4). The routes are very flexible, changing according to changing law enforcement practices in various countries (ibid.; *Migration World* 1995a, 5; *Newsday* 12 June 1994; AFP 2 Oct. 1991). For example, besides those countries already mentioned, news reports in the last several years have placed Sri Lankan alien smugglers and illegal immigrants in such diverse countries as the Philippines, Fiji, Turkey, the Netherlands, Albania, Austria, Zambia, Malaysia, Poland, Belarus, Lithuania, France, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, China, Pakistan, and Italy (Kyodo News Service 19 May 1995; *The Toronto Star* 20 May 1995; AFP 30 Sept. 1995; ibid. 23 June 1995; ibid. 8 Feb. 1995; ibid. 27 Dec. 1994; ibid. 2 Oct. 1991; Reuters 28 Apr. 1995; ibid. 25 Nov. 1993a; *Migration News* Feb. 1995b; UPI 12 June 1993; Xinhua 27 Jan. 1993; ibid. 14 Jan. 1994; AP 5 Sept. 1994; Polish Press Agency 23 Aug. 1995; ibid. 3 Dec. 1994; Deutsche Presse-Agentur 5 Oct. 1995; ibid. 20 Dec. 1994; Lithuanian Radio 29 Dec. 1994; Czechoslovak Press Agency 8 Feb. 1995; *The Washington Post* 15 Oct. 1995).

Along the way, according to Tharmalingam, the travellers will usually be briefed by the smugglers as to what to say to authorities. They will memorize, for example, subway maps and bus routes, and study videos of the CN tower and Skydome, so as to be able to answer questions as if they had come from Toronto (Tharmalingam 16 Jan. 1996).

Most Sri Lankans travelling to Canada through the underground networks, according to Corporal Bowen, land in New York holding an airline ticket for Toronto for the following day (Bowen 4 Jan. 1996). Using the documents supplied by the smugglers, the travellers will generally clear customs for an overnight stay in New York, but

what they do then is turn over all the travel documents to the escorts, and then take a bus to Buffalo. They stay at one of about three hotels—the only one that comes to mind is the Red Carpet Inn in Buffalo. If you go by it right now...you'd probably see 50 Tamils outside smoking. And then they notify their family from Buffalo... And the family will wait for them to come across, and make the [refugee] claim (ibid.).

The agents would typically tell their clients to claim that they had travelled directly to the United States, according to Bowen, rather than risk having their successful routes disclosed (ibid.). According to Tharmalingam, the relatives often visit and look after the travellers in Buffalo, and the travellers usually hand over all their valuables--travellers' cheques, jewellery, a passport if they still have one--to their relatives during this time (Tharmalingam 16 Jan. 1996).

For groups that fly directly into Canada, it is common, according to Bowen, for the guide to sit separately, and to collect the passports and travel documents during the flight (Bowen 4 Jan.

1996). When the plane lands, the escort will leave first, while the group lingers as long as possible in their seats.

That way it allows the escort time to clear Immigration, clear Customs and he's gone. He usually will have no bags. He'll just have a handbag that he carries with him on the flight. And he's normally a Canadian citizen. He won't be checked, he'll just say he was visiting friends and he lost his bags or they're being sent over later. He won't arouse anybody's suspicions. He'll have next to nothing on for clothing so he won't be suspected of being a drug courier and they're not going to strip-search him. And they're usually off the plane, or they're usually out of the terminal, before the refugee [claimants] have actually walked up to the Immigration kiosk and declared refugee status. And then the documents are re-cycled. They're a valuable commodity. And this way it keeps the costs down and the profits up (Bowen 4 Jan. 1996).

Canadian authorities regularly perform "blitzes" on international flights, checking the travel documents of passengers before they disembark (ibid.). According to Bowen, this practice has led to "the flushing routine," in which guides dispose of travel documents before arrival so as not to be caught holding a variety of passports (ibid.). An international crackdown in December 1992, in which Canadian authorities did simultaneous checks in 22 airports around the world, netted 1,405 people trying to get into Canada with false documents (*The Toronto Star* 6 Mar. 1993). Among them were reportedly many Sri Lankans using Venezuelan passports (ibid.).

3.4 False Documents

In February 1994 Loganathan Sabanayagam, alias Maran, was sentenced in Toronto to 15 months in a reformatory and 18 months on probation for his involvement in a sophisticated document forging operation that was turning out such high-quality bogus Canadian passports that the Government of Canada responded by improving passport security features (ibid. 9 Feb. 1994; *The Sri Lanka Monitor* Feb. 1994, 4; OCJ 8 Feb. 1994). According to prosecutor Paul Normandeau, Sabanayagam's operation was one of 15 forging outfits run by Sri Lankans in southern Ontario (ctd. in *The Toronto Star* 9 Feb. 1994). Sabanayagam's alleged partner in the operation, Santhakumar Kumarasamy, formerly a printer in Sri Lanka, was in 1990 reportedly the first person convicted of passport fraud in Canada (*The Toronto Star* 19 Dec. 1991). A forging "genius", according to Corporal Bowen, Kumarasamy died in jail before he could be brought to trial on the 1994 charges, along with Sabanayagam (Bowen 12 Jan. 1996; ibid. 4 Jan. 1996). Linga Tharmalingam maintains that since Loganathan Sabanayagam was put out of operation, document forging in the Toronto Sri Lankan community has dwindled--most forged documents are now obtained from Sri Lanka or India (Tharmalingam 16 Jan. 1996). However, Corporal Bowen reports that large forging operations serving the Sri Lankan community are still operating in Toronto and Montréal, as well as in New York, Singapore, and the Madras area of India (Bowen 4 Jan. 1996).

There are reportedly many ways to falsify identity documents (Bowen 4 Jan. 1996). Perhaps the most common method is to use genuine passports and match up a client with someone whose passport photo looks similar (ibid.; Tharmalingam 16 Jan. 1996). It is also quite common for a forger to simply replace page 2 of the Canadian passport, which gives biographical details, with a forged page 2 (Bowen 4 Jan. 1996). Investigators have found, for example, that forgers have been able to use a razor blade to open the binding of a genuine passport, then to peel back the lamination and shave away the top layer of page 2. They then glue in a forged top layer, replace the lamination, re-stitch the passport, and finally flatten the altered page using C-clamps and wood (ibid. 12 Jan. 1996; ibid. 18 Jan. 1996).

The silkscreening method of printing up a new page 2 can be accomplished using materials that fit in a desk drawer and are available at any good office supply store (ibid. 4 Jan. 1996; ibid. 12 Jan. 1996). According to Corporal Bowen, a forger can photograph a genuine passport page, then switch the photographic negative into a positive and enlarge it to the proper document size. Then using a light source, such as from a photographic enlarger, an image of the page is beamed onto a silkscreen which is mounted on a frame and treated with a light-sensitive solution. The image hardens on the silkscreen, and can be used to print out high-quality phoney pages (ibid. 4 Jan. 1996; ibid. 12 Jan. 1996; ibid. 18 Jan. 1996). If certain inks are used, such as those that dry instantly under ultraviolet light, a few hundred copies can be produced in an hour, according to Corporal Bowen (ibid. 4 Jan. 1996). As well, with the same artwork one could make a plate and "print up a few thousand [copies] in a few minutes using an off-set printing press" (ibid.).

Document forgery also reportedly extends to Landed Immigration Forms and visa stamps (ibid. 12 Jan. 1996). While the silkscreening method is often used to reproduce government forms, new technology now enables forgers to take laser images of genuine visas in passports, for example, and produce rubber stamps which can reproduce the visas perfectly and innumerable. This technology can also be used to reproduce cheque certification and other official stamps (ibid.). Finally, forgers and fraud artists are not limited to reproducing official materials. Investigators have found bogus Canadian Citizenship cards, for example, which had been sold to unsuspecting Sri Lankans for \$500 apiece (ibid.). As Corporal Bowen says, "You are only limited by your imagination" (ibid. 4 Jan. 1996).

3.5 LTTE Role

A number of sources indicate that Tamil militant groups, most notably the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), are implicated in alien smuggling (Bowen 4 Jan. 1996; *Toronto Star* 20 May 1995; ibid. 18 Dec. 1991; *Christian Worker* 1st and 2nd Quarters 1993, 12). Corporal Bowen maintains that smugglers operate only with LTTE permission, and that

the Tigers will extort a fee per body, a fee for leaving, a fee for documents. Some people they don't want to leave because they've got a particular skill or trade that's valuable to the Tigers. And if you don't pay your fees then...I've heard [of] instances of them actually kidnapping the person that wants to be smuggled to Canada, holding him for an extended ransom, because they didn't pay the departure tax basically. And then because they know that you're going to pay \$20,000 to get smuggled, what's a few thousand dollars more to go to the Tigers? (Bowen 4 Jan. 1996).

The convicted forger Loganathan Sabanayagam, mentioned above, is one of the six founding members of the LTTE and a first cousin of LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran (Bowen 4 Jan. 1996; OCJ 8 Feb. 1994; *The Toronto Star* 9 Feb. 1994; *The Sri Lanka Monitor* Feb. 1994). Linga Tharmalingam stresses, however, that the LTTE and other armed groups are not directly involved in alien smuggling. Sri Lankans would not be likely to trust \$20,000 to such groups, Tharmalingam argues--that is why they tend to use close contacts such as friends, relatives, and people from their own villages (Tharmalingam 16 Jan. 1996).

Sources indicate that the LTTE does however collect regular fees from Tamils abroad--a minimum of \$50 a month per person, according to Tharmalingam (ibid.; 2 Feb. 1996). The *Tamil Times*, a British publication, cited Deputy Inspector General (DIG) for Colombo G.B.

Kotakadeniya as saying that most Tamil businesses in Sri Lanka and abroad are forced to pay money to the LTTE as well (Tamil Times 15 Sept. 1995, 8). According to the DIG, Tamil businesses send receipts from these payments to relatives in Jaffna to show to the LTTE (ibid.). *MacLean's* cites a Sri Lankan foreign ministry source, Nanda Godage, who claims that the LTTE collects more than half a million dollars per month from the UK, and more from Canada (MacLean's 27 Nov. 1995, 29). Tharmalingam reports however, that since the fall of Jaffna to the Sri Lankan military in December 1995, many Tamils in the Toronto area have stopped paying fees to the LTTE, so far without repercussion (Tharmalingam 16 Jan. 1996). Manickavasagam Suresh, a refugee claimant who is reportedly the LTTE leader in Canada, was arrested in Toronto in October 1995 for alleged terrorist connections (MacLean's 27 Nov. 1995, 28; Tharmalingam 16 Jan. 1996). According to Tharmalingam, Suresh's arrest has undermined the Tiger's power base in Canada (Tharmalingam 16 Jan. 1996).

In general, however, according to Bowen, Tamils in Canada have shown significant fear of the LTTE, and

The money that the Tigers make through their Toronto address is just phenomenal... The Tigers are very active in Canada... Like the East Indian, especially the Tamil stores, they've been told you're not allowed to buy produce from this company or this company, you have to buy from this company, because [they're] the ones that support the Tigers. You're not allowed to have this newspaper or that newspaper... It's just incredible, the pressures that are put on the people (Bowen 4 Jan. 1996).

Some Tamil sources have charged that government and law enforcement accounts of LTTE fundraising abroad are exaggerated (*Tamil Times* 15 Sept. 1995, 8; *MacLean's* 27 Nov. 1995, 29). Nehru Guna, a representative of the Federation of Associations of Canadian Tamils, contends that Tamils in Canada, for example, are not able to contribute as much money to the LTTE as claimed, and that the majority of the money that is sent back to Sri Lanka goes to family members and relief organizations (cited in *MacLean's* 27 Nov. 1995, 29). As well, the *Tamil Times* cites Sri Lankan Tamil sources as saying that it is a common practice for expatriate Sri Lankans to use middlemen in transmitting money back to relatives in Sri Lanka (Tamil Times 15 Sept. 1995). Indeed, Sri Lanka has a large number of people working abroad, remittances from whom were the largest single source of foreign currency for the country in 1994, some US\$33 million (IPS 24 Mar. 1995).^[4]

3.6 Government Role

The University Teachers for Human Rights (UTHR-Jaffna), a Sri Lankan human rights organization, stated in a 15 November 1993 publication that Sri Lankan alien-smuggling networks encompass "key persons and institutions including airport authorities, government ministers and officials from a number of Western embassies in Colombo together with those of neighbouring countries" (9). According to Corporal Bowen, however, the problem is not endemic, but touches rather "the odd individual" in a key position, such as someone who has access to the production of travel and identity documents (Bowen 4 Jan. 1996). According to Bowen, the Sri Lankan government is distracted by the civil war and not overly concerned by the exodus of Tamils from the country (ibid.). Tharmalingam argues, however, that corruption is widespread among Sri Lankan authorities. Since officials are so poorly paid, the bribes available from the alien smuggling business are very enticing (Tharmalingam 16 Jan. 1996). In addition, according to Tharmalingam, authorities in many other transit countries are in a similar position and are susceptible to corruption (ibid.). High-level meetings between Sri Lankan and foreign officials,

and airlines representatives, have taken place in Sri Lanka over the issue of the use of false documents by Sri Lankan travellers (Xinhua 12 Feb. 1994; *Sri Lanka Monitor* Feb. 1994).

For its part, the U.S. Government Interagency Working Group found that "staggering levels of corruption" exist in many countries which have become links in alien smuggling (U.S. Government Interagency Working Group 9 Nov. 1995). According to their report, every Central American country acts as either a gateway or transit route, or both, and official corruption is important in allowing the trade to flourish (ibid.). Similarly,

Corruption is endemic in South Asian [illegal immigrant] source countries, and smugglers continually test the will of government officials. Police have been known to protect smugglers, and both high- and low-level immigration and airline personnel have been involved with smuggling rings. Airlines have been receptive to anti-fraud training, but sustaining momentum is difficult without constant oversight.

NOTES

[2] Toronto appears to be the area of choice for many Sri Lankan Tamils who come to Canada. According to Corporal Bowen, about 80 per cent of Sri Lankan Tamils who immigrate to Canada end up in the Toronto area within two years of settling. Montréal and to a lesser extent Vancouver also have relatively large Tamil communities (Bowen 6 Jan. 1996).

[\[back\]](#)

[3] Cpl. Bowen reports that individuals not living in LTTE-controlled areas would not necessarily have to pay the "exit visa." However, if they have relatives in LTTE areas they will often pay a smaller fee to make sure that their relatives will be allowed to leave at a later date (Bowen 12 Feb. 1996). [\[back\]](#)

[4] The IPS article mentions that a large percentage of the Sri Lankans working abroad are doing so illegally. "The desirability of seeking gainful employment outside the country has caused a sharp increase in the number of employment agencies that often take their unsuspecting customers for a ride by supplying illegal documents, stealing their money or demanding huge payments for procurement of jobs. The [Sri Lanka] Department of Labor has been trying to weed out the black sheep in the community and has so far outlawed 14 such agencies which it said were resorting to unscrupulous practices. But monitoring the agencies is no easy task as there are at least 332 registered ones" (IPS 24 Mar. 1995).

[\[back\]](#)

4. NOTES ON SELECTED SOURCES

Bowen, Corporal Fred. RCMP, Milton, Ontario detachment. Interviews 18, 12 and 4 January 1996.

Corporal Fred Bowen, an 18-year RCMP veteran, is a senior investigator in the Anti-Smuggling Unit of the Immigration and Passport Section of the Milton detachment, a new section of the RCMP formed to combat alien smuggling and forgery operations in Canada. Bowen lectures on Immigration and Passport courses nationally for the RCMP, and has been declared an expert witness in front of high and low courts on alien smuggling and the prices and uses of documents.

Rodgers, Malcolm. 18 December 1995. Sri Lanka Project based at British Refugee Council. Telephone interview, London.

Malcolm Rodgers is an official with the Sri Lanka Project based at the British Refugee Council in London. In this telephone interview, he stressed that his knowledge of alien smuggling among the Sri Lankan Tamil community has been pulled together from "bits and pieces" gathered over the last four or five years. People who know a great deal about the topic, he stressed, rarely want to talk about it.

Tharmalingam, Linga. 16 January 1996. Telephone interview, Toronto.

Linga Tharmalingam is an enforcement investigation exhibit officer at the Ontario Securities Commission and long-time member of the Toronto Sri Lankan Tamil community who has acted as an RCMP contact on smuggling and forgery cases. In 1994, on behalf of a number of families, Tharmalingam travelled to Thailand, Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore and Kampuchea investigating alien smuggling networks and tracking down Tamils caught in the pipeline. He is currently writing a book on his findings. According to Corporal Bowen, Tharmalingam regularly speaks out on issues affecting his community and has worked to improve relations with law enforcement and municipal authorities (Tharmalingam 2 Feb. 1996; *ibid.* 16 Jan. 1996; Bowen 12 Jan. 1996; *ibid.* 18 Jan. 1996).

U.S. Government Interagency Working Group (IWG). 9 November 1995. *Presidential Initiative to Deter Alien Smuggling: Report of the Interagency Working Group*. (Unclassified, abridged version). Washington: U.S. Government Interagency Working Group.

The Interagency Working Group report represents a collaboration of several U.S. Government departments including the State Department, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), the Justice Department, Coast Guard, and FBI and CIA, reporting on alien smuggling to the United States. An abridged, unclassified version of the report has been used for this paper. While not commenting specifically on Sri Lanka, the report gives an overview of the global growth in alien smuggling, and has sections discussing alien smuggling through and from Europe, Central America, the Caribbean, China, India and Pakistan (see also *India Abroad* 12 Jan. 1996).

REFERENCES

Agence France Presse (AFP). 30 September 1995. "Poland Deports Illegal Immigrants Back to India." (NEXIS)

_____. 27 July 1995. "30 Asians Thought to be Sri Lankan Found in Abandoned Truck." (NEXIS)

_____. 2 October 1991. "Fiji Deports 13 Sri Lankans over Fake Canadian Visas." (NEXIS)

Associated Press (AP). 25 October 1994. "U.N. Human Trafficking Thrives." (NEXIS)

Bowen, Corporal Fred (RCMP). 12 February 1996. Telephone interview, Milton, Ontario.

_____. 18 January 1996. Telephone interview, Milton, Ontario.

_____. 12 January 1996. Personal interview, Milton, Ontario.

_____. 4 January 1996. Telephone interview, Milton, Ontario.

Czechoslovak Press Agency. 8 February 1995. "International Relations; Illegal Crossings on Czech-German Border." (BBC Summary 10 Feb. 1995 NEXIS)

Christian Worker [Colombo]. 1st and 2nd Quarters 1993. Rahan Hoole. "Tamil Refugees of Sri Lanka and the West."

_____. November-December 1994. Michael Ball. "Coping with the Triad Threat."

Deutsche Presse-Agentur. 5 October 1995. "Pakistan Warns Airlines Against Flying in Illegal Immigrants." (NEXIS)

_____. 21 July 1995. "Five Bulgarians Arrested over Death of 18 Tamil Refugees." (NEXIS)

Electronic Telegraph [London]. 20 November 1995. George Jones. "Howard Stays Adamant on Immigration `White List'." (Internet: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk>)

_____. 2 August 1995. Robin Gedye and Julius Strauss. "Refugees Set Adrift at Sea by `Human Cargo' Gang." (Internet: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk>)

The Guardian [London]. 7 December 1995. Suzanne Goldenberg. "A Fortune for a Future; Suzanne Goldenberg on the Wheeler-dealing of Colombo's People Smugglers." (NEXIS)

_____. 6 May 1992. Shiranikha Herbert. "Law Report: Arrival Without Papers is not Illegal Entry." (NEXIS)

Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) Ottawa. Documentation, Information and Research Branch (DIRB). 6 January 1996. *Alien Smuggling from Sri Lanka: Interview with Corporal Fred Bowen, RCMP, Milton, Ontario Detachment, 6 January 1996.*

_____. Toronto. 19 January 1995. *Professional Development Committee: Professor Bruce Matthews: Sri Lanka—The Civil War and the Crisis of Immigration.*

_____. Toronto. 21 April 1994. *Professional Development Meeting: Speakers: Mr. Michael McCaffrey.*

India Abroad [Delhi]. 12 January 1996. Azziz Haniffa. "India Called a Top Source of Illicit Migrants."

The Independent [London]. 15 April 1992. Nick Cohen. "Convictions in Refugee Cases Quashed." (NEXIS)

Inter Press Service (IPS). 24 March 1995. Rita Sebastian. "Sri Lanka Labour: Expatriate Workers Could Turn Around Economy." (NEXIS)

Kyodo News Service. 19 May 1995. "7 Sri Lankans Nabbed in Alleged Passport Forgeries." (NEXIS)

Lithuanian Radio. 29 December 1994. "Statistics on Illegal Immigrants in Lithuania." (BBC Summary 3 Jan. 1995NEXIS)

MacLean's [Toronto]. 27 November 1995. Nomi Morris. "The Canadian Connection: Sri Lanka Moves to Crush Tamil Rebels at Home and Abroad." (NEXIS)

Migration News [Davis, CA]. September 1995. "Alien Smuggling." (Internet: Population Information Network (POPIN) Gopher of the United Nations Population Division)

_____. July 1995. "Alien Smuggling." (Internet: Population Information Network (POPIN) Gopher of the United Nations Population Division)

- _____. June 1995a. "Migration into Russia." (Internet: Population Information Network (POPIN) Gopher of the United Nations Population Division)
- _____. June 1995b. "Asian Maids." (Internet: Population Information Network (POPIN) Gopher of the United Nations Population Division)
- _____. February 1995a. "Alien Smuggling in Europe." (Internet: Population Information Network (POPIN) Gopher of the United Nations Population Division)
- _____. February 1995b. "Tamil Asylum Seekers in Europe." (Internet: Population Information Network (POPIN) Gopher of the United Nations Population Division)
- Migration World* [New York]. 1995a. Vol. 23, N^o. 4. "Getting There: For Immigrants, New Routes to the West."
- _____. 1995b. Vol. 23, N^o. 3. Jonas Widgren. "Global Arrangements to Combat Trafficking in Migrants."
- Newsday* [New York]. 12 June 1994. "Their Cargo is Human; Smugglers Exact Profits while Immigrants Suffer." (NEXIS)
- Official Kremlin International News Broadcast. 31 March 1993. "Press Release on the Problems of Illegal Immigration into the Russian Federation." (NEXIS)
- Ontario Court of Justice (OCJ) General Division. 8 February 1994. *Between Her Majesty the Queen and Loganathan Sabanayagam*.
- Polish Press Agency. 23 August 1995. "Thirty-eight Asians Detained at Coach Traffic Control in Suwalki." (NEXIS)
- Reuters. 31 July 1995. "Sri Lankan Truck Passengers `Slept on the Dead'." (NEXIS)
- _____. 28 April 1995. "Thais to Deport Hundreds of Illegal Workers." (NEXIS)
- _____. 8 November 1994. "Dozens of Boat Refugees land in Sweden." (NEXIS)
- _____. 18 January 1993. "Bulgaria to Fine Airlines Carrying [sic] Illegal Migrants." (NEXIS)
- _____. 25 November 1993a. Steve Pagani. "Asian Gangs Smuggle Immigrants via East Europe." (NEXIS)
- _____. 25 November 1993b. Liliana Semerdjieva. "Bulgaria Concerned by Flood of Immigrants." (NEXIS)
- _____. 4 November 1992. "Five Questioned in Sri Lanka Fake Passport Racket." (NEXIS)
- _____. 1 November 1992. "Singapore Police Bust Emigration Syndicates." (NEXIS)
- _____. 11 March 1992. "Canada Police Uncover Passport Forgery Ring." (NEXIS)

Rodgers, Malcolm. 18 December 1995. Sri Lanka Project based at British Refugee Council.
Telephone interview, London.

Romanian Press Agency. 15 April 1994. "Dramatic Drop in Numbers Emigrating: Illegal Immigrants." (BBC Summary 15 Apr. 1994NEXIS)

The Sri Lanka Monitor [London]. July 1995. "Inhuman Cargo."

_____. October 1994. "Swiss MPs Condemn Sri Lankan Deportations."

_____. February 1994. "The Moscow Route: Western Nations Move Against False Travel Documents."

The Sri Lanka Project Briefing [London]. February 1994. "Sri Lankan Asylum-Seekers in Europe."

Tamil Times [Sutton, Surrey, UK]. 15 September 1995. "Financing the Tigers?"

Ttharmalingam, Linga. 2 February 1996. Telephone interview, Toronto.

_____. 16 January 1996. Telephone interview, Toronto.

The Toronto Star. 20 May 1995. "Ring to Smuggle People into U.S., Canada Foiled." (NEXIS)

_____. 2 July 1994. Bob Brent. "RCMP Swoops on Thriving Ring Smuggling Tamils into Canada." (NEXIS)

_____. 9 February 1994. Gary Oakes. "Passport Forger Jailed after 'Insulting' Canada." (NEXIS)

_____. 20 May 1993. Dale Brazao. "8 Accused in Fake-passport Ring." (NEXIS)

_____. 6 March 1993. Allan Thompson. "1,400 Illegal Immigrants Stopped in Canadian Crackdown Overseas." (NEXIS)

_____. 30 April 1992. Dale Brazao. "Police Seeking Alleged Kingpin in Immigration Smuggling Ring." (NEXIS)

_____. 19 December 1991. Dale Brazao and Paul Watson. "Man in Photo was Convicted of Forging Documents." (NEXIS)

_____. 18 December 1991. Paul Watson and Dale Brazao. "Police Probe Forgery Ring for Terrorist." (NEXIS)

_____. 13 December 1991a. "Profits Make Passport Fraud 'Crime of the '90s'." (NEXIS)

_____. 13 December 1991b. "How it was Done." (NEXIS)

Le Trimestre du Monde [Paris]. 1st Trimester 1995. "Activités des organisations criminelles transnationales."

United Press International (UPI). 27 August 1993. "Italian Police Detain Illegal

Immigrants." (NEXIS)

_____. 12 June 1993. "More Albanians Attempting to Flee." (NEXIS)

U.S. Government Interagency Working Group (IWG). 9 November 1995. *Presidential Initiative to Deter Alien Smuggling: Report of the Interagency Working Group*. (Unclassified, abridged version). Washington: U.S. Government Interagency Working Group.

University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna) (UTHR). 15 November 1993. *A Sovereign Will to Self-Destruct: The Continuing Saga of Dislocation and Disintegration*. Thirunelvely, Jaffna, Sri Lanka: UTHR.

The Washington Post. 15 October 1995. Daniel Williams. "No Welcome for Foreigners; Italians Across Political Spectrum Seek Curbs on Immigration." (NEXIS)

Xinhua General Overseas News Service. 12 February 1994. "Fake Travel Documents to be Prevented in Sri Lanka." (NEXIS) _____. 14 January 1994. "58 Illegal Immigrants Arrested in Zambia." (NEXIS)

_____. 27 January 1993. "Five Dead Men Likely Illegal Immigrants from Sri Lanka." (NEXIS)

_____. 25 May 1993. "6 Foreigners Arrested for Human Smuggling." (NEXIS)

_____. 30 November 1991. "13 Sri Lankans Arrested in Norway." (NEXIS)




[Top of Page](#)

[Important Notices](#)