

District Development Councils (1981)

The DDC scheme was Sri Lanka's first post-independence statutory attempt at devolution — gutted before it functioned, and overshadowed by the 1981 Jaffna District election violence and the Jaffna Public Library burning.

Introduced by the 1978 constitution's framers as an alternative to federal demands, the District Development Councils Act (No. 35 of 1980) created elected councils with narrow administrative powers. The first elections, held in Jaffna District on 4 June 1981, were marked by state-aligned violence that culminated days later in the burning of the Jaffna Public Library. The councils were never meaningfully resourced and were superseded by the Provincial Councils system after 1987.

§1 Why it matters

DDCs are the bridge between the Bandaranaike–Chelvanayakam (1957) and Dudley–Chelvanayakam (1965) Pacts — both abrogated — and the externally-imposed 13th Amendment (1987). They demonstrate that even a constrained devolution framework, accepted by Tamil parliamentary leadership of the time, could not be implemented without violence directed at the electoral process itself.

Sources

- A.J. Wilson — The Break-up of Sri Lanka (1988).
- S.J. Tambiah — Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide (1986).
- UTHR(J) — contemporaneous reports on the 1981 elections.

What this is not

- This article does not name individual officials present at the 1981 Jaffna election.
- This article does not aggregate casualty figures from the 1981 events.