

# North-East Provincial Merger (1988) and 2006 De-merger

The Northern and Eastern Provinces were merged under the Thirteenth Amendment in 1988, and de-merged by the Supreme Court in October 2006 — extinguishing the only constitutional vehicle for a contiguous Tamil-speaking province.

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The merger was conditional on a southern referendum that was never held. For eighteen years the merged province operated under successive governors. In 2006 the Supreme Court ruled the 1988 merger proclamation invalid. The de-merger ended the only existing constitutional space in which a Tamil-speaking majority could exercise devolved powers across both provinces simultaneously.

## §1 What happened

Under the Indo-Lanka Accord (1987) and the 13th Amendment (1987), the Northern and Eastern Provinces were temporarily merged in September 1988 pending a referendum in the East. The referendum was postponed indefinitely. The merger remained in force until 16 October 2006, when the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka held the merger proclamation invalid in three petitions filed by JVP MPs.

After 2006 the two provinces operate as separate units. The Eastern Provincial Council has subsequently been administered with state-led settlement and security-sector continuity. The Tamil National Alliance has consistently sought re-merger as a precondition for any settlement based on the 13th Amendment.

## Sources

- International Crisis Group — North-East structural reports.
- Tamil Guardian archive — de-merger judgment coverage (2006–).
- OHCHR A/HRC/46/20 — devolution and accountability.

## What this is not

- This article does not adjudicate the Supreme Court's reasoning; it records the structural outcome.
- This article does not aggregate population figures by ethnicity in TLTE voice.