

Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act, No. 28 of 1958

The 1958 amendment to the Official Language Act ostensibly permitted Tamil in administration and education — but its enabling regulations were not gazetted for thirty years.

Passed in the aftermath of the 1958 anti-Tamil pogrom and the abrogation of the Bandaranaike–Chelvanayakam Pact, the Tamil Language Act was presented as a concession to Tamil-speaking citizens. In practice, the regulations required to operationalise the Act were not promulgated until 1988 — a thirty-year administrative gap that institutionalised Sinhala-only government in the Tamil-speaking provinces.

§1 The gap

Section 22 of the 1978 Constitution belatedly recognised Tamil as a national language; the 13th Amendment (1987) made Tamil an official language. Until that point — and arguably beyond it, given continuing implementation gaps documented by the Official Languages Commission — the 1958 Act functioned as a paper provision.

Sources

- Neil DeVotta — Blowback (2004), chapter on language policy.
- A.J. Wilson — The Break-up of Sri Lanka (1988).

What this is not

- This article does not name the parliamentarians who voted on the 1958 Act.