

1958 anti-Tamil pogrom

The May–June 1958 pogrom — the first island-wide anti-Tamil violence after independence — followed the Bandaranaike–Chelvanayakam Pact's abrogation and the passage of the Official Language Act 1956.

1958 set the template. The case file records it because every later pogrom (1977, 1981, 1983) operates within the same structural pattern: a Tamil-side constitutional or political claim is met with mob violence whose perpetrators are not subsequently prosecuted. Tarzie Vittachi's contemporaneous record 'Emergency '58' remains a primary historical source.

§1 Course and consequence

Violence began in Polonnaruwa and spread to Colombo and other parts of the south. The Federal Party leadership was placed under house arrest. The government declared a state of emergency. No comprehensive accountability process followed. The pogrom directly preceded — and shaped — the political conditions in which the 1965 Dudley–Chelvanayakam Pact was attempted and again abandoned.

Sources

- Tambiah — Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy (1986).
- A.J. Wilson — The Break-Up of Sri Lanka (1988).

What this is not

- This article does not name individual perpetrators or victims.
- This article does not assign collective blame to the Sinhalese community; it records state and institutional failures.