



EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATION

TOPIC: INDIA & NEIGHBOURS

DATE: 31.01.2025

AN OPPORTUNITY TO SETTLE SRI LANKA'S ETHNIC PROBLEM

India-Sri Lanka Relations: The 13th Amendment and the Path Forward

1. Symbolic Gesture: Jaffna Thiruvalluvar Cultural Centre

- India's decision to name the **Jaffna Cultural Centre after Thiruvalluvar** underscores New Delhi's commitment to reinforcing strong cultural ties with Sri Lanka.
- Initially, the omission of 'Jaffna' caused dissatisfaction among Sri Lankan Tamils, but India quickly corrected it, renaming it the "**Jaffna Thiruvalluvar Cultural Centre.**"
- This landmark, built with Indian assistance, is a testament to the **shared historical and cultural** bond between the two nations.

2. Indo-Lanka Relations Since the 1983 Pogrom

- The 1983 anti-Tamil violence in Sri Lanka **drew India into the conflict** as a mediator and later an active player.
- This led to the **Indo-Lanka Accord of 1987**, which introduced the **13th Amendment (13A)** to the Sri Lankan Constitution.
- 13A aimed to provide **limited autonomy** to Provincial Councils, but it faced opposition from:
 - **Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)**, now led by Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake.
 - **Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)**, which demanded full independence for Tamil Eelam.

3. India's Stance on the 13th Amendment

- India has consistently advocated for the **full implementation of 13A**, urging successive Sri Lankan governments to act.
- In **October 2024**, Indian External Affairs Minister **S. Jaishankar** reiterated this demand during discussions in Colombo.
- However, **Prime Minister Narendra Modi's silence** on 13A during Sri Lankan President Dissanayake's December 2024 visit raised speculation about India's shifting position.



- Modi emphasized "**full implementation of the Sri Lankan Constitution and Provincial Council elections**", but without a direct mention of 13A.

4. The JVP's Position on Devolution

- The **JVP has traditionally opposed 13A**, viewing it as an Indian imposition.
- However, the party's stance has evolved:
 - Sri Lankan PM **Harini Amarasuriya (Feb 2023)** stated that 13A **should be implemented**, but the NPP debated its feasibility as a long-term solution.
 - **Dissanayake avoided** discussing power devolution during his 2024 election campaign in Jaffna.
 - The **NPP manifesto (Sept 2024)** promised a **new constitution** ensuring democracy and equality.

5. The Role of Local Bodies vs. Provincial Councils

- The NPP government plans **early local body elections**, but these cannot replace Provincial Councils.
- **Local self-governments** in Sri Lanka lack:
 - **Sufficient autonomy** to address major regional issues.
 - **Financial independence**, relying heavily on **fiscal transfers**.
- The **2017 Constitutional Steering Committee** emphasized that **provinces should be the primary unit of devolution**.

6. The Way Forward: A Durable Political Solution

- The JVP-led NPP government must recognize that Provincial Councils are **not merely India's creation** but part of Sri Lanka's **constitutional evolution** (1983–87).
- Sri Lanka's **three constitutions (1948, 1972, 1978)** were influenced by **British, American, and French models**, making foreign inspirations common.
- The NPP, with its **two-thirds parliamentary majority**, has a **historic opportunity** to:
 - Address the **Tamil ethnic issue**.
 - Implement a **balanced devolution framework**.
 - Uphold Sri Lanka's **democratic character**.



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Conclusion

The 13th Amendment remains a **pivotal but unresolved issue** in Sri Lanka's ethnic reconciliation process. While India has traditionally pushed for its **full implementation**, the **JVP-led government's stance remains unclear**. Given Sri Lanka's history of democratic governance, a **durable and inclusive political solution**—not mere local body elections—will be key to long-term stability. The NPP must use its **unprecedented mandate** to navigate a **political settlement that upholds democracy, equality, and national unity**.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/an-opportunity-to-settle-sri-lankas-ethnic-problem/article69160515.ece>

