

CHAPTER IV
LANGUAGE

Official Language **18.** ⁴[(1)]The Official Language of Sri Lanka shall be Sinhala.

⁵[(2) Tamil shall also be an official language.

(3) English shall be the link language.

(4) Parliament shall by law provide for the implementation of the provisions of this Chapter.]

National Languages **19.** The National Languages of Sri Lanka shall be Sinhala and Tamil.

Use of National Languages in Parliament, Provincial Council and Local Authorities **20.** A Member of Parliament or ⁶[a member of a Provincial Council or a Local Authority] shall be entitled to perform his duties and discharge his functions in Parliament ⁷[or in such Provincial Council or Local Authority] in either of the National Languages.

Medium of instruction **21.** (1) A person shall be entitled to be educated through the medium of either of the National Languages:

Provided that the provisions of this paragraph shall not apply to an institution of higher education where the medium of instruction is a language other than a National Language.

(2) Where one National Language is a medium of instruction for or in any course, department or faculty of any University directly or indirectly financed by the State, the other National Language shall also be made a medium of instruction for or in such course, department or faculty for students who prior to their admission to such University, were educated through the medium of such other National Language:

Provided that compliance with the preceding provisions of this paragraph shall not be obligatory if such other National Language is the medium of instruction for or in any like course, department or faculty either at any other campus or branch of such University or of any other like University.

4 - Renumbered as paragraph (1) by the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution Sec. 2(a).
5 - Inserted by the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution Sec. 2(b).
6 - Substituted by the Sixteenth Amendment to the Constitution Sec. 2(1) for “or a Member of a Local Authority”.
7 - Substituted by the Sixteenth Amendment to the Constitution Sec. 2(2) for “or in such Local Authority”.

(3) In this Article “University” includes any institution of higher education.

⁸[22. (1) Sinhala and Tamil shall be the languages of administration throughout Sri Lanka and Sinhala shall be the language of administration and be used for the maintenance of public records and the transaction of all business by public institutions of all the Provinces of Sri Lanka other than the Northern and Eastern Provinces where Tamil shall be so used:

**Languages of
Administration**

Provided that the President may, having regard to the proportion which the Sinhala or Tamil linguistic minority population in any unit comprising a division of an Assistant Government Agent, bears to the total population of that area, direct that both Sinhala and Tamil or a language other than the language used as the language of administration in the province in which such area may be situated, be used as the language of administration for such area.

(2) In any area where Sinhala is used as the language of administration a person other than an official acting in his official capacity, shall be entitled:

- (a) to receive communications from and to communicate and transact business with, any official in his official capacity, in either Tamil or English;
- (b) If the law recognizes his right to inspect or to obtain copies of or extracts from any official register, record, publication or other document, to obtain a copy of, or an extract from such register, record, publication or other document, or a translation thereof, as the case may be, in either Tamil or English.
- (c) where a document is executed by any official for the purpose of being issued to him, to obtain such document or a translation thereof, in either Tamil or English;

(3) In any area where Tamil is used as the language of administration, a person other than an official acting in his official capacity, shall be entitled to exercise the rights and to obtain the services, referred to in sub paragraphs (a), (b) and (c) of paragraph (2) of this Article, in Sinhala or English.

(4) A Provincial Council or a Local Authority which conducts its business in Sinhala shall be entitled to receive communications from and to communicate and transact business with, any official in his official capacity, in Sinhala and a Provincial Council or a Local Authority which conducts its business in Tamil shall be entitled to receive communications from and to communicate and transact business with, any official in his official capacity, in Tamil:

Provided, however, that a Provincial Council, Local Authority, Public Institution or any official receiving communications from transacting business with any other or Provincial Council, Local Authority, Public Institution or an official functioning in an area in which a different language is used as the Language of administration shall be entitled to receive communications from and to communicate and transact business in English.

(5) A person shall be entitled to be examined through the medium of either Sinhala or Tamil or a language of his choice at any examination for the admission of persons to the Public Service, Judicial Service, Provincial Public Service, Local Government Service or any public institution, subject to the condition that he may be required to acquire a sufficient knowledge of Tamil or Sinhala, as the case may be, within a reasonable time after admission to such service or public institution where such knowledge is reasonably necessary for the discharge of his duties:

Provided that a person may be required to have a sufficient knowledge of Sinhala or Tamil, as a condition for admission to any such service or public institution where no function of the office or employment for which he is recruited can be discharged otherwise than with a sufficient knowledge of such language.

(6) In this Article –

“official” means the President, any Minister, Deputy Minister, Governor, Chief Minister or Minister of the Board of Ministers of a Province, or any officer of a public institution; local authority or Provincial Council; and

“public institution” means a department or institution of the Government, a public corporation or statutory institution.]

⁹[23. (1) All laws and subordinate legislation shall be enacted or made and published in Sinhala and Tamil, together with a translation thereof in English:

Language of Legislation

Provided that Parliament shall, at the stage of enactment of any law determine which text shall prevail in the event of any inconsistency between texts:

Provided further that in respect of all other written laws and the text in which such written laws was enacted or adopted or made, shall prevail in the event of any inconsistency between such texts.

(2) All Orders, Proclamations, Rules, By-laws, Regulations and Notifications made or issued under any written law other than those made or issued by a Provincial Council or a Local Authority and the Gazette shall be published in Sinhala and Tamil together with a translation thereof in English.

(3) All Orders, Proclamations, Rules, By-laws, Regulations and Notifications made or issued under any written law by any Provincial Council or Local Authority and all documents, including circulars and forms issued by such body or any public institution shall be published in the language used in the administration in the respective areas in which they function, together with a translation thereof in English.

(4) All laws and subordinate legislation in force immediately prior to the commencement of the Constitution, shall be published in the Gazette in the Sinhala and Tamil Language as expeditiously as possible.]

24. ¹⁰[(1) Sinhala and Tamil shall be the languages of the Courts throughout Sri Lanka and Sinhala shall be used as the language of the courts situated in all the areas of Sri Lanka except those in any area where Tamil is the language of administration. The record and proceedings shall be in the language of the Court. In the event of an appeal from any court records shall also be prepared in the language of the court hearing the appeal, if the language of such court is other than the language used by the court from which the appeal is preferred:

Languages of the courts

Provided that the Minister in charge of the subject of Justice may, with the concurrence of the Cabinet of Ministers direct that the record of any court shall also be maintained and the proceedings conducted in a language other than the language of the court.]

9 - Article 23 substituted by the Sixteenth Amendment to the Constitution Sec. 3.

10 - Article 24(1) substituted by the Sixteenth Amendment to the Constitution Sec. 4(1).

(2) Any party or applicant or any person legally entitled to represent such party or applicant may initiate proceedings and submit to court pleadings and other documents and participate in the proceedings in courts, ¹¹[in either Sinhala or Tamil.]

(3) Any judge, juror, party or applicant or any person legally entitled to represent such party or applicant, who is not conversant with the language used in a court, shall be entitled to interpretation and to translation into ¹²[Sinhala or Tamil] provided by the State, to enable him to understand and participate in the proceedings before such court and shall also be entitled to obtain in ¹³[such language] any such part of the record or a translation thereof, as the case may be, as he may be entitled to obtain according to law.

(4) The Minister in charge of the subject of Justice may, with the concurrence of the Cabinet of Ministers, issue, directions permitting ¹⁴[the use of English] in or in relation to the records and proceedings in any court for all purposes or for such purposes as may be specified therein. Every judge shall be bound to implement such directions.

(5) In this Article –

“Court” means any court or tribunal created and established for the administration of justice including the adjudication and settlement of industrial and other disputes, or any other tribunal or institution exercising judicial or quasi-judicial functions or any tribunal or institution created and established for the conciliation and settlement of disputes;

"judge" includes the President, Chairman, Presiding Officer and member of any court; and

“record” includes Pleadings, Judgments, Orders and Other judicial and Ministerial acts

**Provision for
adequate facilities
for use of
languages provided
for in this Chapter**

25. The State shall provide adequate facilities for the use of the languages provided for in this Chapter.

11 - Substituted by the Sixteenth Amendment to the Constitution Sec. 4(2) for “in either of the National Languages”.

12 - Substituted by the Sixteenth Amendment to the Constitution Sec. 4(3) (a) for “the appropriate National Language”.

13 - Substituted by the Sixteenth Amendment to the Constitution Sec. 4(3)(b) for “either of the National Languages.”

14 - Substituted by the Sixteenth Amendment to the Constitution Sec. 4(4) for “the use of National Languages.”

¹⁵[**25A.** In the event of any inconsistency between the provisions of any law and the provisions of this Chapter, the provisions of this Chapter shall prevail.]

**Provision of any
law inconsistent
with this Chapter
deemed to be
repealed**