

## Introduction

The ability a state possesses to implement the administrative affairs of that state is, described in simple terms as power. While the final owner of power is the public, that power owned by the public is described as sovereign power. The three areas: administrative power, voting powers and basic rights, are included in this. While there are several aspects of power, political power, administrative power, social power, economic power etc., are several of them. One way of defining the concept of power from the point of view of political science is the administration of power according to their wishes in order to control those subject to their power and should those being controlled fail to acquiesce, ensure acquiescence through the use of force.

This power developing on a state cannot only be decentralized, it can also be devolved. Accordingly, power is not only decentralized but devolved by present day states. The power of a state is subject to decentralization as well as devolution based on the need of that state. If some country, for convenience of administration devolves administrative power only, upon a regional administrative units, this is called decentralization of power. Similarly if some part of the threefold power involving legislative, executive and judiciary of the government is devolved upon a regional unit of administration through the constitution, this is described as devolution of power.

By studying this lesson unit very well you will be able to understand the concept of power, its different facets, decentralization of power and devolution of power, unitary and federal systems of government, as well as how power is devolved in countries like the United States of America and Switzerland.

# Power

The ability a state possesses to implement the administrative affairs of that state is, defined as power. While the final owner of power is the public, that power owned by the public is described as sovereign power. The three areas: administrative power, the power to vote and fundamental rights are included in this.

The manner in which sovereign power is implemented in accordance with the 4<sup>th</sup> (1978) constitution is as follows,

The sovereignty of the people shall be exercised and engaged in the following manner.

- (a) The legislative power of the people shall be exercised by the parliament, consisting of elected representatives of the people and by the people at a referendum.
- (b) The executive power of the people, including the defence of Sri Lanka shall be exercised by the president of the Republic elected by the people;
- (c) The judicial power of the people shall be exercised by parliament through courts, tribunals and institutions created and established, or recognized, by the constitution, or created and established by law, except in regard to matters related to the privileges, immunities and powers of parliament and of its members wherein the judicial power of the people may be directed by parliament according to law.

## Types of the Power

It could be identified that the concept of power takes various forms. Political power, administrative power, social power, economic power etc., are a few examples of it.

In accordance with the view point of political science, power has been described as “ the ability to govern the subordinates as per the consent of the governors and the ability to obtain immunity by force when it is contrary to the consent.”

“ The attempt which is to be taken to control others in an economy by a group of authorized persons” has been defined as power with the view point of economic science.

It has been described sociologically as “the ability to exceed persons of the society and existing social organizations as power.”

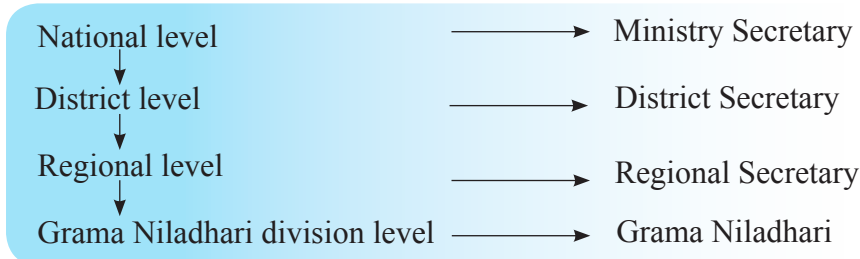
## Decentralization of Power

Decentralization of power means the assignment of some of the powers vested in the Central Government, upon regional units of administration or otherwise, the devolution of the powers of the Central Government upon regional units in order to facilitate administrative functions and also to involve regional individuals in administrative activities.

One outstanding feature evident in the decentralization of power is that it is implemented through an Act passed by the legislature. Similarly, it must be noted that such power can be re-vested in the central government at any moment. The best example of this, that can be given is the decentralization of power on Local Government Bodies in Sri Lanka.

Through the decentralization of power the responsibility of formulating plans, management, acquisition of resources and their distribution have been assigned to regional level administrative bodies, local government bodies, provincial governments, semi - independent public authorities and corporations.

Decentralization of the powers of the central government can be implemented in various ways. Decentralizing the pattern of administration is one of them. It will be possible to understand how the administrative powers from national level to regional level, have been decentralized, from the examples below.



Assignment of the functions of central government to regional administrative units, is one aspect of decentralization of power. Under this, formation of the local authorities (Local Government Bodies): Municipal Councils, Urban Councils, Regional Councils can be given as examples.

Another aspect of decentralization of power is the assignment to regional units the powers that belong to state enterprises or state authorities. In this regard, necessary powers have been given to different departments, corporation and authorities to run state enterprises. Eg. State Petroleum Corporation, Sri Lanka Ports Authority.

## Unitary State

What happens in the decentralization of powers is the assignment of only administrative powers of the state to regional administrative units. In other words, legislative, executive and judicial powers are handled by a single center of power. A state where the legislative, executive and judicial powers are in the hands of a single central government, is called a Unitary State. No devolution of power takes place in a Unitary State. Local government bodies can exist as some administrative powers of the central government have been decentralized in order to facilitated ministrative functions. Local government bodies operating in Sri Lanka can be shown as examples. While the assignment of administrative powers to local government bodies can be executed through an Act of Parliament, there is also the ability for the Central Government to withdraw such powers from local bodies, at any moment.

Professor Herman J. Finer, the eminent political scientist, points out that, “If all types of executive powers are concentrated on a single institution, this becomes a Unitary State.”

### Characteristics of a Unitary State

- Exercising the Executive, Legislative and Judicial power by a single central government.
- Decentralization of only the above administrative powers to regional administrative units with the objective of facilitating the administrative functions of the central government.
- Decentralization of administrative powers is only possible through an Act passed by the executive of the Central Government.
- The ability to have the administrative powers that has been decentralized, can be reverted at any instance if the Central Government desires.

## Devolution of Powers

The assignment of the executive, legislative and judicial powers vested in the Central Government to local Government Bodies by Act of Parliament is considered as devolution of power. This can be implemented only through the constitution.

The existing constitution should be amended if power is devolved newly by any means or powers which were devolved are subject to amendment.

## Reasons for the devolution of powers in Modern States

- Need for unity to be built up amidst diversity.

What this implies is that while respecting the identity of groups speaking different languages, following different religions and belong to different ethnic groups collecting all such groups under a common principle of nationhood to participate in the functions of government.

- The difficulty of administration from a single central position because of the size of the state.
- Ensure national security.

## Federal States

You must have learned that the assignment of the Legislative, Executive and Judicial powers of the Central Government to regional units of administration is devolution of power. States that have implemented such devolution of power are called Federal States or in other words the states where Legislative, Executive and Judicial powers of the Central Government are assigned to regional units of administration by the constitution itself are Federal States. Division of power between the Central Government and State Governments is a basic feature of the Federal System of government. Instead of a single power center, two types of centers as central and state, can be seen in Federal States. Similarly, at times, the existence of two systems of law, such as laws of the Central Government and the laws of the State Government can be seen in a Federal State.

Federal States are formed due to various reasons and factors. One such factor is the union of several independent states and the creation of a Federal State to facilitate administrative functions.

Normally, Local Governments or Federal States are called states, the Federal Systems are called Federations, at times some other specific terms are in use to designate a federation.

Eg - The Local Governments functioning in Switzerland are called Cantons.

## Characteristics of a Federal State

- There is a written constitution.
- Insertion of powers of federal states as well as Central Government clearly in the constitution.
- Assignment of power of interpretation to the constitution. e.g. Federal jurisdiction of the United State of America.
- Establishment of an upper house of representatives (Senate) e.g. : Senate of United State of America.

## Qualities a federal states should possess for it effective existence

- Affecting as per the existing constitution of the state.
- All ethnic groups existing with commonality of feeling
- Providing financial resources to federal states in a fair manner.

## New tendencies of federal states

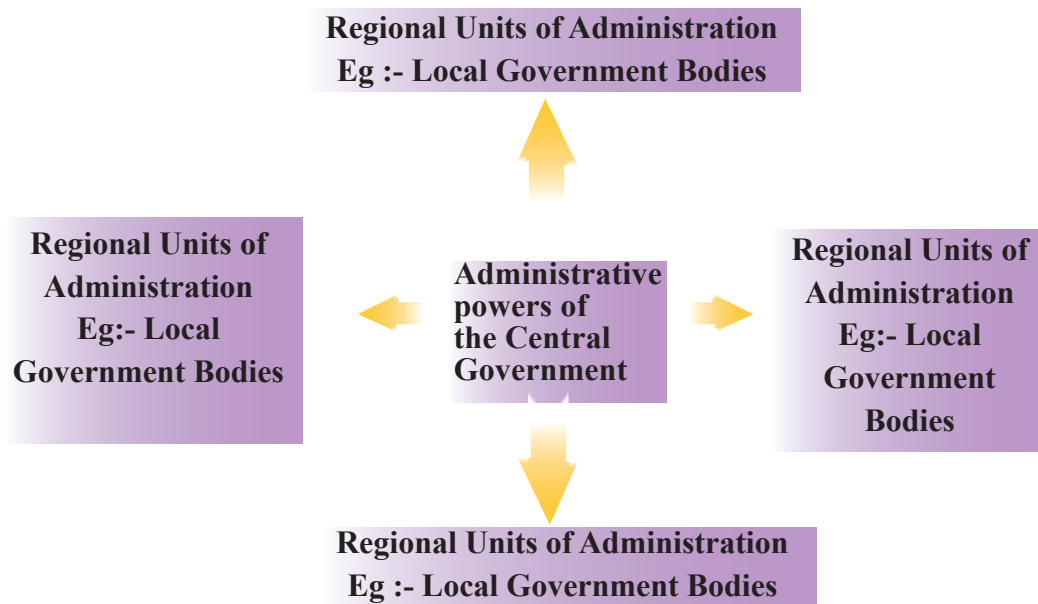
Federal states as well as the Central Government are treated equally in a federal system. Nevertheless the general tendency for the central government to become powerful could be seen coming into operation. The central government has the ability to lead federal states. Some factors which have been affected to create the said situation can be pointed out.

- Although the consent of federal states is obtained to amend the constitution of the government, neglecting the consent of federal states at making ordinary laws.
- In instances of interpretation of the constitution, it is being affected to the advantage of the Central Government.
- The Central Government has become the strongest in the implementation of financial deals between the Central Government and federal states. Federal states depend on the financial allocations made by the Central Government. These are provided subject to various conditions.
- As the welfare provided by the government increases its responsibility is assigned to the Central Government.
- Co-ordination is accelerated as a result of modern developments in communication and transport services.

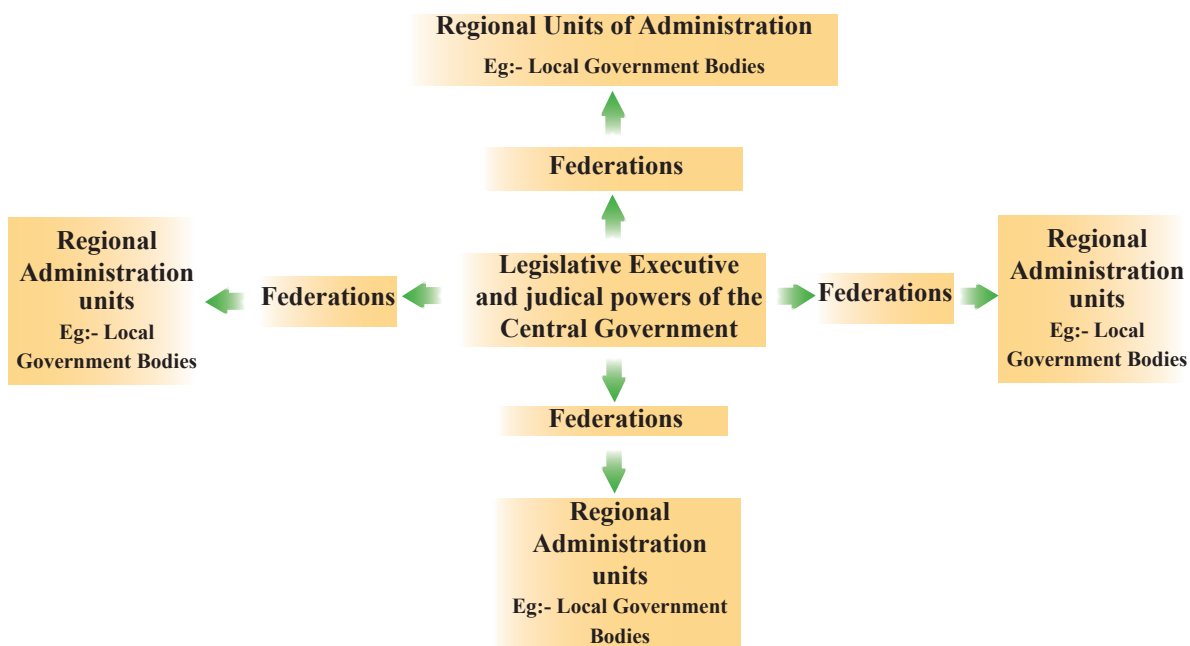
- Assigning the responsibility of taking economic decisions with effect to the whole country in face of world economic crises to the Central Government.
- Situation in the international field after the Second World War.  
e.g. : Enhancement of power of the president of the United States of America.

You can understand the difference between the two concepts of decentralization and devolution after studying the below diagram;

## Decentralization of power



## Devolution of Power



According to the above diagram what has taken place in decentralization is, vesting only administrative powers of the Central Government in administrative units. You should understand that the said Regional administrative units are not called prefectures or independent states. The Provincial Councils system which is implemented now in our country is a fine example.

Decentralization in such a way means a split of the task of the Central Government and it could be realized that federal states or independent administrative units will be created thereby. Decentralization will occur if necessary to facilitate independent administrative units. You should understand that decentralization has occurred in some federal states as well as devolution in some other federal states.

### Activity

- Create simple definitions of ‘decentralization’ and ‘devolution’ based on the facts you have learnt.



## Unitary Government

You have studied as to what decentralisation of power is, earlier. We have identified the states which have decentralised power as unitary states. The governments which are in power in the unitary states are called unitary governments. Let's consider the definitions.

**"If the authorized power has been agglomerated in one central authorized institute however it is called a Unitary State"**

**- professor Hermon J. Fainer -**

The following governments are examples of unitary governments.

- Sri Lanka
- Great Britain
- France

## Characteristics of a Unitary Government

You have learned what a Unitary Government is. Two ideologies views are expressed by two political scientists on several characteristics of a unitary Government.

**"One central authority vested with the power to enforce law is the basic feature of a unitary government."**

**- Prof. A.V. Dicey -**

**Supremacy of the Central Government and absence of extra sovereign bodies in the Government is the main feature of a Unitary Government.**

**-Prof. C.F. Strong -**

Accordingly, features of a Unitary Government can be noted as below.

- Parliament, the legislature of the Central Government, is the highest law making authority.
- Decentralization of power to Local Government Bodies to facilitate administrative functions. (Eg: Provincial councils, town councils and Municipal Councils functioning at present in Sri Lanka)
- Centralization of Sovereign power of the state into one center (Central Government)
- Centralization of Legislative, Executive and Judicial powers to the Central Government.

### Advantages of a Unitary Government

- The ability of taking quick decisions easily by the government
- Inconsistencies between bodies which exercise power such as Central Government and State Government are less due to the absence of such bodies.
- Government and the Judiciary is common to the whole state.

## Federal Government

The governments which exist in federal states are called federal governments. The outstanding feature of a Federal Government is the division of power of government between the Central Government and the Local bodies.

Two definitions given by political scientists are given below.

"It is a government which paves the way for unity through diversity".

- A.V Dicey -

"Though it has independence to act within the power range, at times, the way is open for acting together on some aspects"

- Professor K.C. Wier -

### Examples of countries where Federal Governments exist :-

United States of America, Switzerland, Australia

## Salient features of a Federal Government

- Building a common nationality respecting ethnic diversity in a multi ethnic community.
- Facilitates administrative in countries with a large land mass
- Facilitates prevention of a state becoming dictatorial as a result of the force and influence brought upon the Central Government by the regional government.
- Strengthening of the framework of democracy.

## Unwholesome features of a Federal Government

- The dissatisfaction among the State Governments about the powers given under decentralisation.
- The trend of states attempting to be separated themselves from the Central Government.
- The collapse of administration as a result of inconsistencies in decision making between the Central Government and the State Government.
- Delay in constitution - mating process due to the presence of a second legislature.
- Scarcity of efficient officers resulting failures in administration of states.

### Activity

- Prepare a list of differences between the unitary and the federal government.

## History of decentralization and devolution of power in Sri Lanka

### History of decentralization of power in Sri Lanka

The concept of decentralization of power is not novel to Sri Lanka. When observing the systems of government that prevailed in the distant past of our country it is obvious that decentralization of power had taken place in different forms to facilitate the functions of government.

## Examples

- Appointment of officials named “**Gambara**”, “**Gamini**” by King Pandukabaya during the Anuradhapura era to govern villages.
- Appointment of local government officials with administrative powers by King Parakramabahu during the Polonnaruwa era.
- Appointment of local government officials to maintain the condition / nature of the governance unchanged with the migration of westerners.

Eg: Appointment of a “**Resident officer**” at provincial level by the British in 1815 A.D.

## The manner in which power had been decentralized in Sri Lanka during the British colonial era

The manner in which decentralization of power had taken place during the British rule can be identified by the act on Municipal Councils 1865 A.D. In 1865 AD and 1866 AD Municipal Councils were established based on Colombo and Kandy cities respectively. British governance has immensely influenced the present situation in Sri Lanka in which decentralization of power has been established.

Village Councils (Gam Sabha) were established in 1871 AD. An ordinance enacted in that same year assigned the Village Councils provisions to solve minor disputes arising in villages, and to solve the problems related to agriculture and irrigation and provide health protection. An executive committee appointed for local governance under Donoughmore constitutional reforms in 1931 extended the powers of Village Councils (Gam Sabha). In addition, establishment of Urban Councils in 1940, and the local government ordinance passed in 1943 further decentralized power in the British colonial era.

## Attempts to decentralize power after independence

The existence of local government bodies could be noticed even after gaining independence in 1948. The political authority system was established in 1973 to decentralize power. This attempt was of the United Front government to provide leadership for the enforcement of administration at district level. Subsequently, district minister system in 1980 established the District Development Sabha abolishing the Village Councils and Town councils. Later, in 1981, Divisional Councils (pradeshiya mandala) and Village Councils (gramodaya mandala) started functioning and Pradeshiya Sabhas were created according to the Pradeshiya Sabha act, No 15 of 1987.

## Attempts to devolve power in Sri Lanka

Opinions on devolution of power had been presented in our country nearly a century ago. The proposal to establish a federal state in the up country regions forwarded by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike in 1926 is prominent as an effort to devolve power. Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam pact signed between S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike and S.J.V. Chelvanayakam in 1957 and Dudley-Chelvanayakam pact in 1965 are examples of attempts to devolve power after independence. But the enforcement of these pacts was not possible in the expected manner.

In the recent past, 1970's and 1980's, a tendency towards the process of power devolution could be seen. But the then governments did not intervene directly and they were more inclined to decentralization of power than devolution of power.

## Establishment of Provincial Councils in Sri Lanka

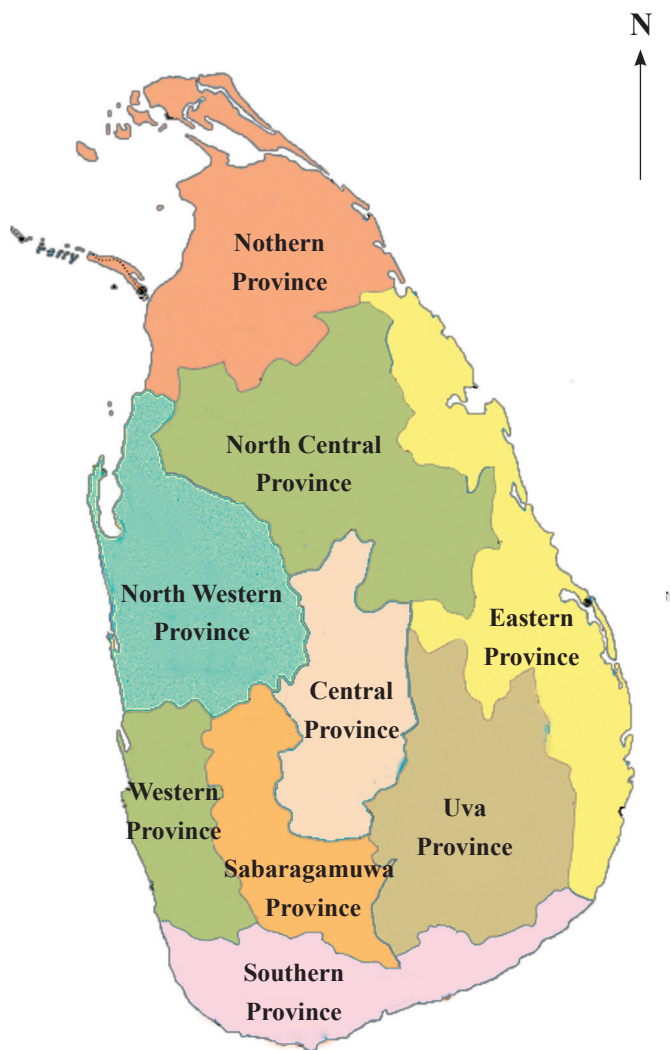
Provincial Councils were established by the 13th amendment to the constitution of 1978 and act of parliament No 42 of 1987 based on the 09 provinces prevailed. Chapter XVII A and article 154A (1) of the 1978 constitution states thus

“Subject to the provisions of the constitution, a Provincial Council shall be established for every province specified in the eighth schedule with effect from such date or dates as the president may appoint by order published in the gazette. Different dates may be appointed in respect of different provinces”

The 9 provinces which were established under 13th Amendment to the constitution are as follows.

Nine provinces established according to 8th schedule of the constitution are given below

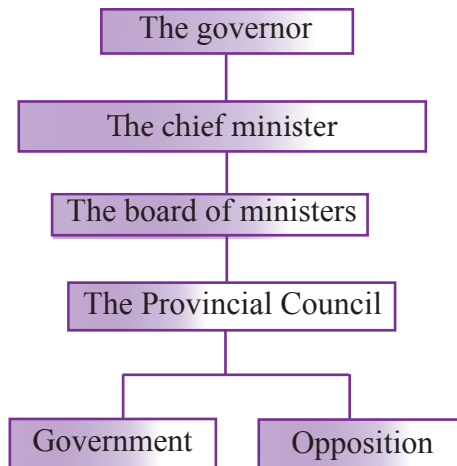
- |                  |                  |
|------------------|------------------|
| 1. Western       | 6. Eastern       |
| 2. North western | 7. Southern      |
| 3. Uva           | 8. North central |
| 4. Sabaragamuwa  | 9. Northern      |
| 5. Central       |                  |



**The nine provinces of Sri Lanka**

## **Organizational structure of a Provincial Council**

The Provincial Council is organized into institutions such as governor, the chief minister, the board of ministers and the members of the Provincial Council. The organizational structure can be illustrated by the diagram shown below;



Accordingly, an attempt is made to provide brief knowledge about the institutions: the governor, the chief minister, the board of ministers and the Provincial Council.

## Governor of the province

A governor shall be there in each province and he is the delegate co-ordinator of the Central Government and the Provincial Council. The appointment of the governor is done by the president and his tenure is 5 years. The governor can resign before the end of his term. A governor can be removed by addressing a proposal passed by a two- thirds majority of the Provincial Council to the president. Article 154 B (1) and (2) of the constitution (1978) states about the governor, thus;

‘There shall be a governor for each province for which a Provincial Council has been established in accordance with article 154A’

The Governor shall be appointed by the president by warrant under his hand, and shall hold office, in accordance with Article 4 (b), during the pleasure of the president.

## Powers and functions of governor

- Summon the Provincial Council, prorogue and dissolution
- Addressing the council and sending messages
- Appointing the chief minister, board of ministers, and other executive officials in the province
- Assenting to statutes passed by the Provincial Council

- Performing according to president's advice in emergencies  
Eg. Failure of administrative machinery in the Provincial Council  
Financial instability
- Co - ordinating between the Central Government and the Provincial Council
- Exercising his functions on the advice of the chief minister as a nominal executive

## **Chief Minister and the board of ministers**

It is mentioned in the 1978 Constitution that Provincial Councils in each province should consist of a chief minister and a board of ministers with not more than 4 ministers. They are selected out of the members of the Provincial Council. The main function of this board of ministers is to assist the governor in his functions and give him necessary advice. Appointment of the chief minister is one of the functions of the governor and the person to be appointed should possess the consent of the majority in the Provincial Council. The governor should appoint the rest of the ministers on the advice of the chief minister. The chief minister and the board of ministers are collectively responsible and answerable to the Provincial Council.

## **Powers and functions of the chief minister and the board of ministers**

- Render advice to the governor in the exercise of his functions
- Preparation of the provincial budget
- Drafting and execution of economic development and administrative plans of the province

## **Provincial Council**

You have already realized that Provincial Councils were established in the 09 provinces into which Sri Lanka had been divided; (Article) 154 (2) states that Provincial Councils will be constituted after the establishment of the legislature of each Provincial Council separately.

"Every Provincial Council established under paragraph (1) shall be constituted upon the election of the members of such council in accordance with law relating to Provincial Council elections".

Article 154D (1) of the constitution states about the content of the provincial legislature. Accordingly, having regarded to the area and population of the province the number of members is determined by or under law.



The term of office of a Provincial Council is continued for a period of five years and the expiration of the said period of five years is operated as a dissolution of the council. Every member of the Provincial Council is elected only by Provincial Council elections.

The main functions of the Provincial Council legislature are to formulate and pass statutes on matters in accordance with the list of powers of Provincial Councils stated in the 9<sup>th</sup> schedule of the constitution. Similarly, passing the budget of the Provincial Council, making decisions relevant to development of infrastructural facilities are implemented. The election of the chief minister and the board of ministers is also executed by the legislature of the Provincial Council.

### **Powers and functions of Provincial Councils.**

Powers have been classified into three lists according to the 13th amendment to the 1978 constitution.

- ❖ 1<sup>st</sup> List (Provincial council list)
- ❖ 2<sup>nd</sup> List (Reserved list)
- ❖ 3<sup>rd</sup> List (Concurrent list)

Accordingly, functions and powers have been classified under three main fields: central government, provincial council and concurrent powers which both institutions can exercise. Next you can learn about the three lists and the powers relevant to each of them.

### **List I (Provincial Council List/ Powers of Provincial Councils)**

Provincial Council List describes the functions and powers of Provincial Councils. Functions and powers of 37 subjects that Provincial Councils are vested with, are denoted in this list.

Eg:-

- Planning – implementation of provincial economic plans
- Affairs related to local government
- Provincial housing and construction: implementing housing development programmes and projects
- Social services and Rehabilitation
- Agricultural extension. Rehabilitation and maintenance of minor irrigation works

Provincial Councils can pass statutes on these subjects, but significantly, it cannot exercise any powers in respect of any subject in the reserved list and it cannot pass any statute in regard to them. It has no power to pass an act.

## **List II (Reserved list/Powers of Central Government)**

Powers relevant to 17 subjects exercised by the central government are denoted in List II or Reserved list. Subjects which are of great significance are included in this reserved list and parliament is vested with the sole power to formulate law relevant to these subjects – Accordingly, several powers included in list II are given below.

- **National policy on all subjects and functions**

The power to make policies regarding defence and national security, internal security, law and order is provided.

- **Foreign affairs**

All matters which bring the government of Sri Lanka into relation with any foreign country; Diplomatic affairs; United Nations Organization; participation in international conferences, implementation of decisions made there; entering into treaties and agreements with foreign countries and implementing treaties, war and peace; and foreign jurisdiction are included in this.

- **Finance in relation to national revenue, monetary policy and external resources**
- **Justice in so far it relates to the judiciary and the courts structure**
- **Immigration and Emigration and Citizenship**
- **Census and Statistics**

## **List III (Concurrent List)**

Power that can be equally exercised by both Central Government and Provincial Council are classified into List III. It consists of 36 subjects. Some of them are given below;

- **Planning**

Formulating and appraisal of plan implementation strategies at the provincial level; progress control; Monitoring progress of public and state sector investment programmes

- **National housing and construction**

The promotion of integrated planning and implementation of economic, social and Physical development of urban development areas

- **Social services and rehabilitation**

Relief, rehabilitation and resettlement of displaced persons, relief for distress due to floods, droughts, epidemics or other exceptional causes and rehabilitation and resettlement of those affected

- **Agriculture and Agrarian Services**

Establishment and promotion of agro - linked industries, the establishment and maintenance of farms and supervision of private nurseries; soil conservation

## Local Government Bodies / Local Authorities

Local Authorities in Sri Lanka have been established with the objective of facilitating the administration of the central government and with the aim of providing an efficient service to the public. The possibility of fulfilling public needs through the participation of the public as well as the public representatives based on a certain land area can be seen through Local Authorities. You have already studied about these Local Authorities and their functions in grade 09. Therefore, you have the opportunity to study only their functions here. Local Authorities function in our country at present and the main posts of their administration are denoted below.

Municipal Council	—————>	Mayor/ Deputy Mayor
Urban Council	—————>	Chairman / Deputy Chairman
Divisional Council / Pradeshiya Sabha	—————>	Chairman / Deputy Chairman

## **Powers and functions of Mayor / Chairman**

- Act as the executive officer of Municipal Council, Urban Council, Divisional Council (Pradeshiya Sabha / Sabhai)
- Summon, Preside and postpone the council
- Formulation of budget and plans as well as obtaining approval from the council
- Formulation of development plans relevant to their territorial limits
- Co - ordination with Central Government and the Provincial Council
- Providing public utility services

## **Powers and functions of Deputy Mayor / Deputy Chairman**

- Rendering necessary assistance to the Mayor of the Municipal Council / Chairman of the Urban Council and the Divisional Council (Pradeshiya sabha / Sabhai)
- Proceeding with the functions of the council at the absence of the Mayor / Chairman

## **General Assembly**

This can be regarded as the policy making body of the Local Authority. It consists of representatives elected by public franchise in the respective areas of the local authority. Mayor, Chairman, deputy mayor and deputy chairman are elected through this General Assembly. Formulating of policies and plans, passing the council's budget; assisting the Mayor Chairman to execute administrative functions are of priority among the powers and functions of the General Assembly.

## **Structural differences between selected countries**

### **Reason behind the formation of the United States of America as a federal government**

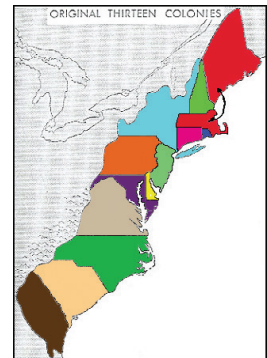
United States of America formed with 13 states at its early stages, is a federal government with 50 states at present. The 13 states were located around the Eastern coast of the United States of America.

The 13 states had been independent administrative units prior to the formation of the federal government. But, later they were united as United States with the intention of ensuring national security and achieving economic development. It formed a government named the United States of America which consisted 13 states. There had also been the need to build a strong nation to prevent the experiences they had to face during the British colonial rule happening again in the future.

Laws related to devolution of power had been included in the constitution when the United States of America was formed in 1787. Accordingly, powers of the central government were included in the constitution while the state governments were vested with the rest of the powers. The intention of it was to strengthen the state governments.

## The government structure of the United States of America

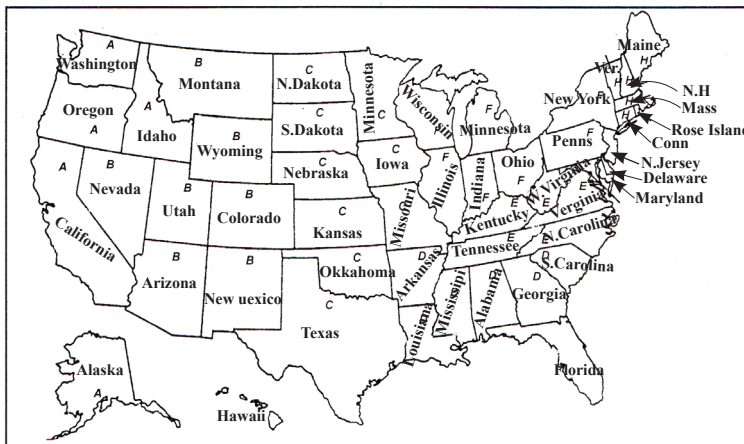
- The executive president exercises the executive powers.
- The legislature consists of two houses: congress (house of representatives) and the senate (bicameral legislature)
- The president has to get the approval of the senate to exercise certain powers.



**Examples** - Declaration of war, appointment of higher officers (ambassadors, judges of the higher courts and signing international treaties)

**Fig 2.1 - The map of U.S.A with the 13 Provinces**

- The Supreme Court is empowered to settle the disputes between the central government and the states over the execution of powers.
- Appointment of two representatives in the senate to represent the expectations of each state.
- Existence of a federal judiciary.
- If the acts approved by the congress are inconsistent with constitution, the Supreme Court has power to reject them.
- Requirements of 2/3 of the consent of the central government and the 3/4 of the states for constitutional amendment.



**Fig 2.2 - Present United States of America with 50 States**

## Devolution of power according to the federal constitution of the United States of America

The constitution has vested all the powers except the powers given to the central government in the states. It is understood that the makers of the constitution have made an effort to build a system of federal states with more powers than the central government. The powers of the central government and the states are given below.

Powers of the states	Powers of the central government
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Imposition of taxes and collection</li> <li>Financial affairs</li> <li>National Security</li> <li>Foreign affairs and foreign trade</li> <li>Development of national economy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Education</li> <li>Health</li> <li>Housing and construction</li> <li>Local government and highways</li> </ul>

There is a trend of the government succeeding in strength over the states in the U.S.A. to be seen at present. There are many underlying reasons and some of them are mentioned below.

- The complexity of social, political and economic problems.
- The struggle for power in the international arena after the Second World War.
- The financial strengthening of the central government.

# Establishment of the Swiss Confederation

## Reasons behind the establishment of a federal state

- The threat to the national security being sandwiched between three countries: France, Italy, Germany and Austria.
- The difficulty to develop Switzerland economically due to its harsh geographical differences.
- Need to reach successful solutions to ethnic, language and religious diversity.

The formation of federal state of Switzerland took place as a result of the above reasons. Before the formation of a federal state, there had been a number of small independent states in the country. As a result of the civil war between the Catholics and the Protestants in the mid of 19<sup>th</sup> century the federal state was formed and the war was called off.



**Fig 2.3 -Political Map of Switzerland**

Switzerland extends to an area of 41300 square kilometers (km<sup>2</sup>) and it comprises of communities speaking languages such as German, French, Italian and Romansh where as these languages are considered the official languages.



**Fig 2.4 - A landscape of Switzerland**

The constitution was approved 150 years back. It has been amended occasionally and the new constitution has been passed in 1999 for the last time. There are 26 cantons in the federal system. It is a significant feature that freedom of a higher level has been given to them.

## Structure of the federal system in Switzerland

- The legislature is called the federal assembly and it consists of the national council and the council of states.
- A coordinated executive council of seven members are in operation and they are appointed by the federal assembly.
- The coordinated executive is called the federal board and the president leads but he has no supremacy over the others.

## Powers of the central government

- Foreign affairs
- Declaration of war and peace
- Agreements with foreign countries
- Defence and military affairs
- Communication, post and telecommunications

## Powers of cantons

- Education and higher education
- Control of newspapers
- Highways
- Industries
- Immigration
- Prevention of infectious diseases
- Banking

## Special features of the federal system in Switzerland

- The powers of the central government and the canton are expressed and the rest is vested with the central government
- If a problem occurred in the execution of power, the federal assembly has the power to settle it
- Cantons cannot execute their power and work independently
- The use of direct democratic strategies to inquire public opinion in decision-making by the cantons