



# **UNDERSTANDING PRESS COVERAGE ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM**

**#MINORMATTERS**

**PERIOD COVERED : JULY 2020**

## INTRODUCTION

Ethno-religious violence has been a growing problem in post-war Sri Lanka. Events in Mawanella (2001),<sup>1</sup> Gintota (2017),<sup>2</sup> Aluthgama (2014),<sup>3</sup> Digana (2018)<sup>4</sup> and more recently in Kurunegala/Minuwangoda (May 2019)<sup>5</sup> demonstrate the extent and frequency of this type of violence.

This report is the 15<sup>th</sup> in a series of reports prepared by Verité Research (VR) for Minor Matters. These reports examine how the print media reports on religious freedom in Sri Lanka. They aim to analyse the frequency and tonality of coverage in various newspapers in English, Sinhala and Tamil to provide both quantitative and qualitative insights.

Press coverage is assessed by observing articles in terms of their sentiment on religious freedom, i.e., supporting, neutral or opposing. This sentiment analysis is based on an assessment of two components: a) news grading, in which the substance of the news article/content is analysed, and b) view grading, in which the tonality of the coverage, pictures, and any other additional cues used to position sentiment regarding the news item are analysed.

This report also qualitatively analyses articles related to religious freedom within the context of broader themes such as physical violence towards people and property; inflammatory speech; court cases, laws and regulations pertaining to religious freedom; religious inequality and discrimination; and other related reporting relevant to religious freedom. Newspaper summaries that have a bearing on religious freedom are listed in chronological order at the end of the report.

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<sup>1</sup> G.H. Peiris, *A reappraisal of evidence and claims. Emerging Buddhist – Muslim rivalry in Sri Lanka?* The Island (2017) at [http://www.island.lk/index.php?page\\_cat=article-details&page=articledetails&code\\_title=167737](http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=articledetails&code_title=167737) [Last accessed 11 December 2018].

<sup>2</sup> Dharisha Bastians, *Gintota and the shadows of extremism*. Daily FT (2017) at <http://www.ft.lk/opinion/Gintota-and-the-shadows-of-extremism/14-643843> [Last accessed 11 December 2018].

<sup>3</sup> Dharisha Bastians, *Death toll rises to 4 from Aluthgama riot*. Daily FT (2014) at <http://www.ft.lk/article/308988/Death-toll-rises-to-4-from-Aluthgama-riots> [Last accessed 11 December 2018].

<sup>4</sup> Daily FT, *Digana turns divisive* (2018) at <http://www.ft.lk/top-story/Digana-turns-divisive-/26-650661> [Last accessed 11 December 2018].

<sup>5</sup> BBC, *Sri Lanka extends nationwide curfew after anti-Muslim riots* (2019) at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-48269240> [Last accessed 21 May 2019].

## METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this study, religious freedom is understood as:

- ✦ The freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of one's choice;<sup>6</sup>
- ✦ The freedom not to be discriminated against or to suffer any disability on the grounds of religion;<sup>7</sup>
- ✦ The freedom not to be subject to any restriction or condition with regard to access to places of public worship of one's own religion;<sup>8</sup> and
- ✦ The freedom to be entitled to manifest one's religion or belief in worship, observance, practice or teaching.<sup>9</sup>

Press reports on religious freedom that appeared during July 2020 were monitored. The following 10 daily and weekend newspapers in the 2 local languages (Sinhala and Tamil) were examined (see table below).

Sinhala Newspapers	Tamil Newspapers
<i>Lankadeepa/Sunday Lankadeepa</i>	<i>Virakesari/ Sunday Virakesari</i>
<i>Divaina/Sunday Divaina</i>	<i>Thinakaran/ Sunday Thinakaran</i>
<i>Dinamina/Silumina</i>	<i>Uthayan</i>
<i>Anidda</i>	

These newspapers were selected based on readership data in the National Demographic and Media Survey produced by Kantar LMRB for the year 2017. *Lankadeepa* and *Virakesari* have the highest readership among the daily Sinhala and Tamil newspapers respectively. *Divaina* has the second highest readership among the daily Sinhala newspapers. Meanwhile, *Dinamina* and *Silumina* were selected on the basis of them being state-owned newspapers.

Despite the absence of readership data, the weekly publication *Anidda* was selected as its content generally differs from coverage in the mainstream press and can be considered to provide alternative insights into events.

<sup>6</sup> Article 10 of the Sri Lanka Constitution.

<sup>7</sup> Article 12 (2) and article 27 (6) of the Sri Lanka Constitution.

<sup>8</sup> Article 12 (3) of the Sri Lanka Constitution.

<sup>9</sup> Article 14 (1) (e) of the Sri Lanka Constitution.

Likewise, *Uthayan*, a Jaffna-based publication, was selected, despite the absence of its readership data, as it is a regional publication. As a state-owned newspaper was included for the Sinhala sample, *Thinakaran* was selected to represent a state-owned Tamil newspaper to maintain consistency, despite it having relatively low readership. Since Covid-19, most newspapers have been published as e papers in addition to the physical copies. The newspapers monitored for the month of July were e-versions.

In these newspapers, articles that **had a bearing on religious freedom** were selected to assess the tonality of the reporting. These articles included:<sup>10</sup>

- ✦ Articles that referred to instances of physical violence that were religiously motivated, or targeted religious communities, figures or sites;
- ✦ Articles that referred to or contained speech prompting physical violence or threatening remarks targeted at religious communities, leaders or institutions; and
- ✦ Articles that discussed court cases, laws or regulations pertaining to religious freedom.

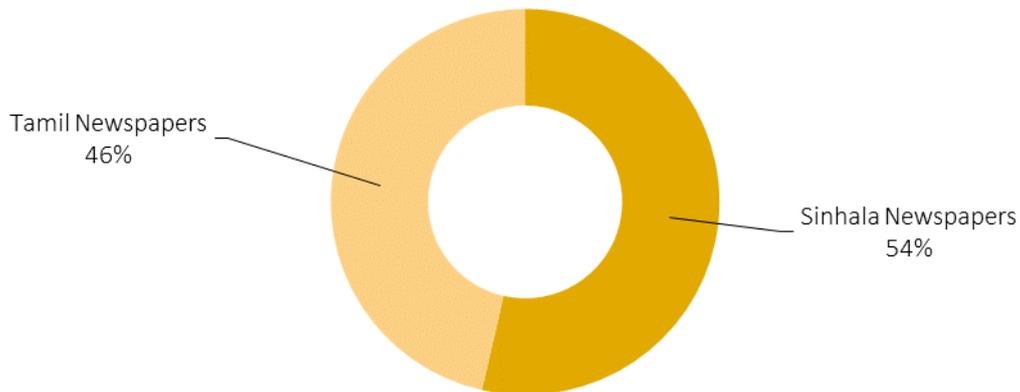
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<sup>10</sup> NB: the aforementioned list is only illustrative and not exhaustive.

## QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

### Overview

#### Percentage of Articles by Language

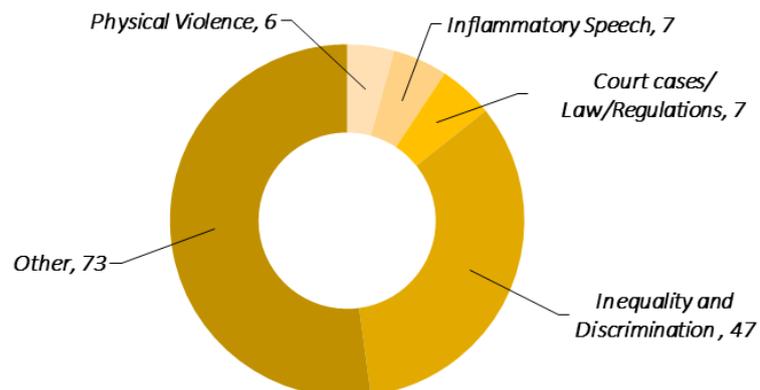


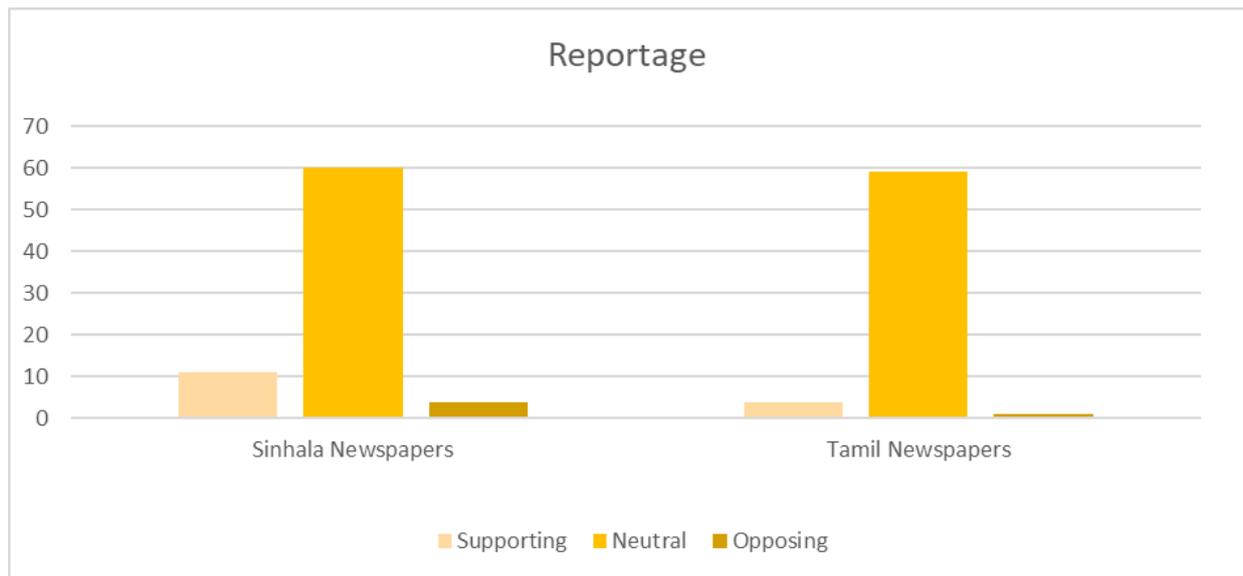
In July 2020, the Sinhala and Tamil newspapers monitored carried a total of 140 articles relating to religious freedom. Out of these, 54 per cent (75 articles) were carried in the Sinhala newspapers. Meanwhile, Tamil newspapers accounted for 46 per cent (65 articles) of the coverage.

Religious freedom was discussed under the following five themes:

- ✦ Physical violence;
- ✦ Inflammatory speech;
- ✦ Court cases/law/regulations;
- ✦ Inequality and discrimination; and
- ✦ Other related reporting

#### Number of articles pertaining to religious freedom by theme

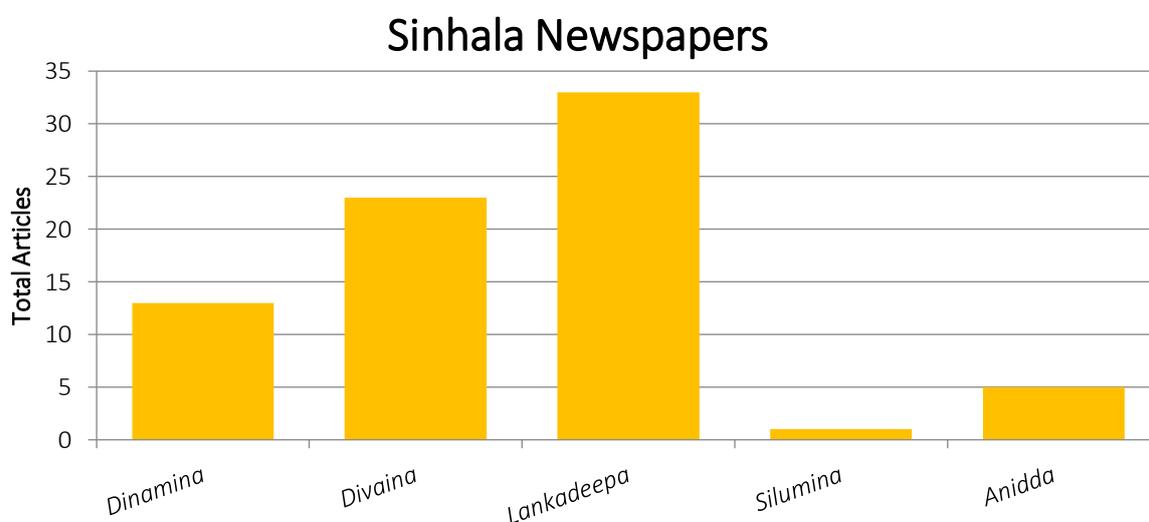




- ✦ Of the 75 articles in the Sinhala newspapers, four articles supported religious freedom, 60 articles were neutral, and 11 articles opposed religious freedom.
- ✦ Of the 65 articles in the Tamil newspapers, one article supported religious freedom, 60 articles were neutral, and four articles opposed religious freedom.

## Coverage in Sinhala newspapers

Sinhala Newspapers	No. of Articles	Reportage		
		Supporting	Neutral	Opposing
<i>Dinamina</i>	13	0	12	1
<i>Divaina</i>	23	0	16	7
<i>Lankadeepa</i>	33	1	29	3
<i>Silumina</i>	1	0	1	0
<i>Anidda</i>	5	3	2	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>11</b>



The Sinhala press featured 75 articles that had a bearing on religious freedom. Four articles supported religious freedom, 60 articles were neutral, and 11 articles opposed religious freedom.

The **four articles that supported religious freedom** are as follows:

- ✦ A news report on Leader of the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) Sajith Premadasa addressing an event in Jaffna saying that he is determined to obey the principles preached by the Lord Buddha as a Buddhist without favouring any race, religion or political party when developing the area. He recalled that his father, former President R.Premadasa was attacked by a LTTE suicide bomber who was supposed to be a Tamil, but stated that it is wrong to hate all Tamils or to destroy a certain religion or a race based on the wrongful actions of one or a few. He further added that huge trauma and

loss happened to Sri Lanka due to the Easter Sunday attacks, but it is not right to persecute all Muslims based on that particular incident. He stated that the goal of SJB is to eliminate terrorism and extremism to live in reconciliation and unity.<sup>11</sup>

- ✦ A long opinion piece by Professor Jayadeva Uyangoda criticising the SLPP. The op-ed argued that the SLPP was transforming the country politically into a new Sinhala-Buddhist authoritarian state. The author discusses how the SLPP won a majority of Catholic and Buddhist votes during the presidential election due to the success of anti-Muslim campaigns after the Easter Sunday attacks. It states that Sri Lanka is now becoming a majority ethnic and majority racial country instead of multi-ethnic and multi-racial country.<sup>12</sup>
- ✦ A long opinion piece by Dr. Athulasiri Samarakoon criticising the SLPP for trying to challenge minority political power, especially Muslims. The author states that the Easter Sunday attacks had a major impact on the last presidential election. He also criticises the Rajapaksa camp in the lead up to the general election, as they continue to go on with their propaganda which is "extremist and racist in all ways".<sup>13</sup>
- ✦ A long opinion piece opposing the opinions, decisions and views of the Rajapaksa regime. In particular, the author strongly criticises President Gotabaya Rajapaksa for pardoning Sunil Ratnayake, who was responsible for the Mirusuvil massacre where eight Tamil civilians were stabbed and killed. He adds that the establishment of an Office on Missing Persons in Sri Lanka will benefit all Sri Lankans; Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims. The writer further states that the new Sri Lankan Government is acting arbitrarily in the hope of getting majority votes in the elections, without considering multi-ethnic community interests.<sup>14</sup>

Meanwhile, the **11 articles that opposed religious freedom** are as follows:

- ✦ A news report on the statements made by former Court of Appeal Judge Abdul Ghafoor before the Presidential Commission on the Easter attacks. He reported what he had told former Minister Mangala Samaraweera and former Minister of Law and Order Sagala Rathnayake. He added that we should restrict people who perform unwanted religious propaganda in our country.<sup>15</sup>
- ✦ A news report on Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thera declaring that Madrasa schools, Quazi courts and the burqa should be banned by the state and the All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama or else they will begin a strike against Muslim goods. He stated that the All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama has to be responsible for all these issues and that we have to break up the extremists' monopoly for the betterment of our country.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 3, p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> *Anidda*, July 5, p. 7.

<sup>13</sup> *Anidda*, July 5, p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> *Anidda*, July 5, p. 8.

<sup>15</sup> *Divaina*, July 3, p. 11.

<sup>16</sup> *Divaina*, July 8, p. 4.

- ✦ A news report on Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thera declaring that our country started paying attention to Islamic extremism just after the Easter attack but there was ample space for those extremists to manipulate Sri Lanka. He stated that the lack of strong national security principles leads us to be more insecure and therefore, the former government was responsible for the development of extremism. The Thera blamed the All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama for giving direction to these "traitors".<sup>17</sup>
- ✦ A news report on Leader of the Ape Jana Bala Pakshaya (AJBP) Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thera accusing the leaders of the three main political parties of working only for their benefit, regardless of the Madrasa schools which promote Muslim extremism. The Thera added that Madrasa schools give weapons training and support the followers of Zahran Hashim, who led the Easter attacks. According to the Thera, these schools promote Muslim extremism, so the government has to take control of them and provide virtuous teaching for children. He stated that his political party is going to contest the election and then work accordingly in the parliament for the betterment of Sri Lanka.<sup>18</sup>
- ✦ A news report on Ven. Gnanasara Thera stating that the Sangha should be above the politicians of this country. He added that they should uplift this country according to the principles of Buddhism and that they cannot make any change without political power. He further added that there is a need to defeat Islamic extremism and build unity in the country.<sup>19</sup>
- ✦ An interview with Gampaha District Candidate Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thera claiming that Madrasas are illegal schools that teach children extremist ideologies. He added that the idea that you cannot win an election without minority votes has long been disproven.<sup>20</sup>
- ✦ A news report on Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thera sending a letter stating that the All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama is the main religious organisation for Islam, and has a great impact on the social life of Muslims, so they are responsible for the extremist acts of Muslims. He stated that Buddhists monks are ready to accept other cultural identities, but are not ready to accept religious extremism. The letter further claimed that even in Muslim countries, wearing a niqab or burqa is discouraged and therefore, such extremist conditions should be changed and Madrasa schools should be banned. He added that they will take non-violent steps to stop extremist actions if their requests are not considered.<sup>21</sup>
- ✦ A long opinion piece claiming that extremism has resulted in divisions between other ethnic groups and Sinhala-Buddhists. The author states that monks have done a great service in establishing national unity. It adds that after the Easter attacks, it is clear that there should be only one law for the whole country rather than having different laws

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<sup>17</sup> *Divaina*, July 8, p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> *Divaina*, July 17, p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> *Divaina*, July 20, p. 7.

<sup>20</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 21, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> *Divaina*, July 24, p. 6; *Dinamina*, July 28, p. 21.

for different groups. It further adds that Wesleyan missionaries during the time of the British brought in the concept of a “Tamil Homeland” and that it resulted in the division of land between Sinhalese and Tamils.<sup>22</sup>

- ✦ A news report on the letter sent by Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thera and Ven. Gnansara Thera stating that they would like to know the position of the Jamiyyathul Ulama on underage marriages as well as agreeing to common marriages in the country. The letter stated that the Jamiyyathul Ulama was responsible for the recent emergence of divisive religious tendencies between the Sinhalese and Muslim communities.<sup>23</sup> It also stated that they should take action to stop religious practices that hinder national unity and that Madrasa schools "conducting religious extremist teachings" that produce suicide bombers such as Zahran Hashim should be banned or governed by the state education system. The letter also highlighted that a large number of Sinhalese and Tamil women in this country have married Muslim youths and after marriage they have converted to Islam. The letter suggests that a citizen has the right to practice the religion of his choice and that forcible recruitment to a particular religion should be stopped.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 26, p. 8.

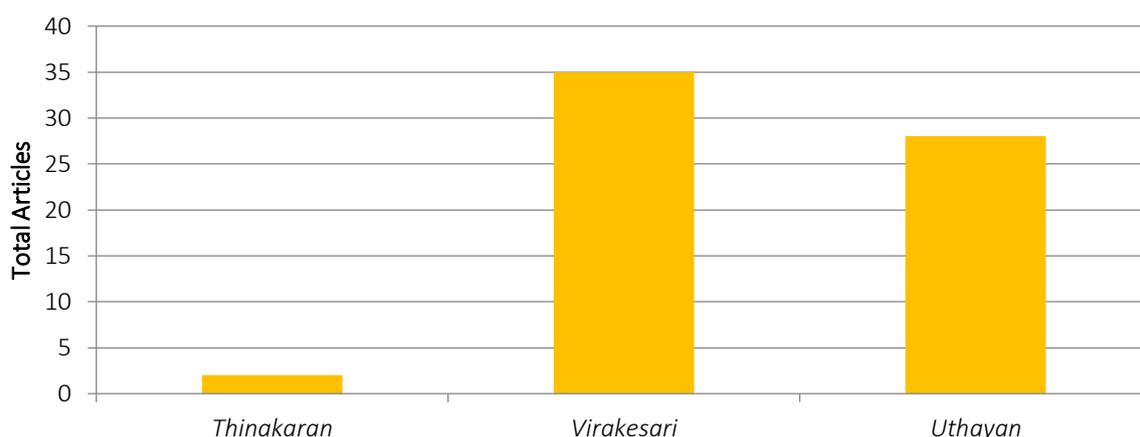
<sup>23</sup> *Divaina*, July 29, p. 14.

<sup>24</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 30, p. 2.

### Coverage in Tamil newspapers

Tamil Newspapers	No. of Articles	Reportage		
		Supporting	Neutral	Opposing
<i>Thinakaran</i>	2	0	2	0
<i>Virakesari</i>	35	0	33	2
<i>Uthayan</i>	28	1	25	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>4</b>

### Tamil Newspapers



The Tamil press featured 65 articles that had a bearing on religious freedom. One article supported religious freedom, 60 were neutral, and four articles opposed religious freedom.

The **one article that supported religious freedom** is as follows:

- ✦ A news report on Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa ordering authorities to allow 500 devotees to the Nallur Temple for the annual feast.<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile, the **four articles that opposed religious freedom** are as follows:

- ✦ A news report on the President of the National Council of Buddhist Intellectuals, Ven. Omalpe Sobitha Thera, stating that if the Tamils were attacked during Black July, it was because the LTTE had attacked the military personnel who served the country. He added that if the way of Tamils is violence, the Sinhalese response would also be the same. The violence of Black July is the best example, he added.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> *Uthayan*, July 19, front page.

<sup>26</sup> *Uthayan*, July 23, front page.

- ✦ A news report on former MP Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thera and General Secretary of the *Bodu Bala Sena* Ven. Gnanasara Thera handing a petition to the All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama stating that religious practices that "harm national integrity" should be stopped. They added that if the All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama failed to take action on this, they would take action to prevent the wearing of burqas and niqabs in public places.<sup>27</sup>
- ✦ A news report on Batticaloa District Candidate of the Tamil National Alliance M. Uthayakumar stating that a Buddhist monk who troubled the Tamil people and state officials looking for votes from the Tamil people looks odd. He added that if a Buddhist monk wanted to win, he should ask for votes from Sinhalese people.<sup>28</sup>
- ✦ A news report on candidate of the TNA E. Saravanapavan stating that the hate speech and arrogance of Buddhist monks have increased in the country. He called on the Tamil people to vote for the TNA to control the arrogance of the monks and ensure the continued existence of Tamils in the country.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *Virakesari*, July 28, p. 8.

<sup>28</sup> *Virakesari*, July 31, p. 19.

<sup>29</sup> *Uthayan*, July 26, p. 2.



## QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

The 140 articles monitored during the month of July 2020 can be categorised under four overarching themes pertaining to religious freedom. These themes are *physical violence towards people and/or property; court cases, laws and regulations pertaining to religious freedom; religious inequality and discrimination;* and *other related reporting*.

This section aims to identify and understand press sentiment in reporting on events/issues related to these overarching themes. These events/issues are selected on the basis of the volume of coverage they received in editorials, opinion articles, feature articles and statements made by political and non-political actors/groups. Only novel events/issues that received coverage were selected for in-depth qualitative analysis in this report.

One overarching issue was selected for the month of July: the 2020 General Election. Due to the wide variety of topics discussed by candidates for the election, related reporting fell under more than one theme.

The majority of reportage on this issue falls under both the themes *religious inequality and discrimination* and *other related reporting*.

Overarching themes	Events/ Issues
Religious inequality and discrimination	2020 General Election
Other related reporting	

An issue that received significant traction in the Tamil press in July 2020 was the appointment of the Presidential Task Force for Archaeological Heritage Management in the East. However, press discourse on this issue was extensively analysed in the June 2020 report and remains largely similar in coverage in July 2020. Therefore, this section will focus on an analysis of reportage connected to the 2020 General Election and ethno-religious freedom, and only delve into the Presidential Task Force for Archaeological Heritage Management in the East within that context.

## Religious inequality and discrimination and other related reporting

### The 2020 General Election through an ethno-religious lens

The theme of religious inequality and discrimination relates to any form of discrimination on religious grounds, while other related reporting covers all reportage in relation to religious freedom that cannot be brought under any of the other themes. In the monitoring period, reporting that fell within the issue of the 2020 General Election under these two themes had the highest number of articles.

Reporting on the election highlighted stances taken by candidates on ethno-religious issues. Press reportage predominantly featured candidates from, or associated with, the two strongest parties, the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) and the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP). Statements by the press and by electoral candidates typically fell under three interconnected topics: 1) maintaining Buddhism's 'foremost' position in Sri Lanka while ensuring equality; 2) securing Sri Lanka's archaeological ruins; and 3) strengthening national security. While the first two topics were discussed in both the Sinhala and Tamil press in different ways, the third was espoused only in the Sinhala press.

All three of these topics have been debated in the press in the past. However, notably, in July, each of these overarching topics was used by parties to strengthen their political platforms, by **tapping into existing fears and insecurities related to ethno-religious identities in Sri Lanka**. In this context, reportage on the three topics focused on two key perspectives: **protecting Sinhala-Buddhist interests** and **protecting minority interests**. The first topic was seen primarily in the Sinhala press while the second was seen in both the Sinhala and Tamil press. Both perspectives featured voices on all sides of the political spectrum that directed criticisms and blame towards opposing parties.

#### *Maintaining Buddhism's 'foremost' position in Sri Lanka while ensuring equality*

Similar to the period prior to the 2019 Presidential Election, reportage in **the press reflected insecurity among the country's Sinhala-Buddhist community<sup>30</sup> and featured attempts by candidates to address that insecurity**. However, the press also frequently featured candidates on both sides of the political spectrum appealing to minority concerns as well. Although one article reported Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thera's claim that "the idea that you cannot win an election without minority votes has long been disproven,"<sup>31</sup> it appears press sentiment **recognised value in appealing to minorities**.

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<sup>30</sup> Verité Research, Understanding Press Coverage on Religious Freedom (October & November 2019) at <http://www.minormatters.org/en/media-pdfs> [Last accessed on 27 August 2020].

<sup>31</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 21, p. 4.

In terms of protecting Sinhala-Buddhist interests, the press in both languages featured several candidates, include Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa and Sajith Premadasa, assuring the majority community that the privilege given to Buddhism would be maintained. They also reinforced the idea that Sri Lanka is a Sinhala-Buddhist country.<sup>32</sup> These statements and reportage bolstered the 'host-guest' perspective explored in previous reports – i.e., where Sinhala-Buddhists are viewed as the primary citizens and minorities as guests who are encouraged not to 'challenge existing power structures'.<sup>33</sup> One article reported a statement by SLPP candidate Madumadawa Aravinda, explicitly claiming, "Sri Lanka is a Sinhala Buddhist country. The Sinhalese have offered the Tamil, Muslims and Catholics the ability to live on the island."<sup>34</sup>

This narrative was further strengthened by candidates who emphasised the need for unitary rule.<sup>35</sup> This narrative was put forward by SLPP-aligned candidates and individuals and criticisms were levied towards the parties constituting the former government including the SJB and the United National Party (UNP), for supporting devolution of power.<sup>36</sup> Devolution of power was framed by the SLPP camp as an attempt to "divide the country,"<sup>37</sup> and therefore, antithetical to Sinhala-Buddhist interests. For instance, one article reported a statement by Ven. Gnanasara Thera and Ven. Omalpe Sobitha Thera claiming that, "If the Tamils demand [federalism] again, only blood will flow in the north and east".<sup>38</sup> Statements such as these may have stoked the fears of Sinhala-Buddhists further, and thereby strengthened the SLPP's political platform as the party that stood against it.

Meanwhile, the SJB was criticised for perpetuating "narrow minded communalism in politics"<sup>39</sup> to get minority votes.<sup>40</sup> These reports framed appealing to minority groups' interests as communalism, and framed appealing to Sinhala-Buddhist interests as a more holistic appeal to Sri Lanka. This perspective also draws from the 'host-guest' narrative of Sri Lanka, that positions 'Sinhala-Buddhist' as synonymous with 'Sri Lankan.' In this context, communalism is likely seen as a threat to Sinhala Buddhist hegemony in Sri Lanka. Therefore, these criticisms also likely reinforced Sinhala-Buddhist insecurity and strengthened the SLPP's platform.

In our report for October and November 2019 on the Presidential Election, it was noted that then-candidate Gotabaya Rajapaksa was positioned as a "'strong Sinhala-Buddhist' leader

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<sup>32</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 7, p. 8; *Divaina*, July 20, p. 7; *Dinamina*, July 28, p. 21; *Lankadeepa*, July 6, p. 10; *Virakesari*, July 14, p. 2; *Uthayan*, July 14, front page; *Uthayan*, July 18, p. 8; *Uthayan*, July 24, front page.

<sup>33</sup> Please see Verité Research, *Report on Understanding press coverage on religious freedom for the month of June 2019* at <http://www.minormatters.org/en/media-pdfs> [last accessed 6 December 2019].

<sup>34</sup> *Uthayan*, July 24, front page.

<sup>35</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 6, p. 10; *Lankadeepa*, July 8, p. 8; *Virakesari*, July 14, p. 2; *Uthayan*, July 20, front page; *Uthayan*, July 31, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 6, p. 10.

<sup>37</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 6, p. 10.

<sup>38</sup> *Uthayan*, July 20, front page.

<sup>39</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 6, p. 10.

<sup>40</sup> *Dinamina*, July 6, p. 6.

whose victory ensures a 'unified Sinhala-Buddhist state'.<sup>41</sup> In July, the SLPP candidates were similarly depicted in the Sinhala press,<sup>42</sup> while attempts by the SJB to appeal to Sinhala-Buddhist interests failed to gain traction.

In terms of protecting minority interests, alongside establishing the primacy of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, the Sinhala and Tamil press reported that candidates from both the SJB and SLPP superficially emphasised that all other religions would be protected,<sup>43</sup> emphasising the need for reconciliation and unity. However, these statements failed to gain traction, particularly in the Sinhala press.

The press also prominently featured criticisms levied against the SJB and the SLPP on minority issues. On the one hand, the SLPP was criticised by members of the opposition and the alternative press for stoking racism<sup>44</sup> and for carrying out Sinhala-Buddhist authoritarian rule.<sup>45</sup> Reports such as these likely perpetuated the pre-existing fear among minorities and strengthened the SJB's position among minorities as the party that promised to stand against it.

On the other hand, the SJB was criticised for failing to address the problems faced by minorities. For example, Lankadeepa reported Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa stating, "When there were clashes in areas where Muslim businesses collapsed, the previous government hid itself without resolving the conflicts."<sup>46</sup> However, these criticisms of the SJB only appeared in the Sinhala press.

### ***Securing Sri Lanka's archaeological ruins***

Both the Sinhala and Tamil press carried significant reportage on the topic of securing Sri Lanka's archaeological ruins. However, the print media in both language streams focused on two entirely separate elements of this topic with almost no overlap. The focus of the Sinhala press was primarily on the demolition of a building in Kurunegala that was reported to have archaeological value dating back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, under the reign of King Buwanekabahu II.<sup>47</sup> The focus of the Tamil press was primarily on the appointment of a Presidential Task Force for Archaeological Heritage Management in the East, as in June's reportage.

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<sup>41</sup> Verité Research, Understanding Press Coverage on Religious Freedom (October & November 2019) at <http://www.minormatters.org/en/media-pdfs> [Last accessed on 27 August 2020].

<sup>42</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 6, p. 10.

<sup>43</sup> *Divaina*, July 6, p. 6; *Lankadeepa*, July 7, p. 8; *Lankadeepa*, July 6, p. 10; *Virakesari*, July 14, p. 2; *Uthayan*, July 14, front page; *Uthayan*, July 18, p. 8; *Uthayan*, July 24, front page; *Virakesari*, July 24, front page.

<sup>44</sup> *Anidda*, July 5, p. 7; *Lankadeepa*, July 8, p. 8; *Lankadeepa*, July 10, p. 10; *Lankadeepa*, July 6, p. 8.

<sup>45</sup> *Virakesari*, July 10, p. 2; *Virakesari*, July 15, p. 7; *Anidda*, July 5, p. 7.

<sup>46</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 25, p. 5.

<sup>47</sup> For more information, see: <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2020/07/17/police-failed-to-protect-13th-century-kings-assembly-hallin-kurunegala-dg-archaeology/>.

Despite the building in Kurunegala not having explicit religious ties to Buddhism, its demolition seemed to be framed as in the context of the destruction of Buddhist culture by the Sinhala press and candidates from both the SLPP and SJB. This was done by connecting the demolition to the destruction of other sites such as temples<sup>48</sup> and by discussing the efforts undertaken by Buddhist clergy to protect sites like this.<sup>49</sup> This reportage was also sometimes tied to discussions on conversions to Islam.<sup>50</sup> This connection indicates that the event was strongly associated with Sinhala-Buddhist existential fears, of being ‘erased’ by minority groups, as discussed in previous reports.<sup>51</sup> This mindset can be understood through the lens of Stanley Tambiah’s theory that the Sinhala-Buddhist community in Sri Lanka is a ‘majority with a minority complex’.<sup>52</sup> Under this mindset, Sri Lanka’s ethnic and religious minorities are perceived to be part of larger, global communities, making Sinhala-Buddhists the ‘true’ minority. This perception has led to a persistent fear that Sinhala-Buddhist culture is under threat of eradication.

Reportage on this issue featured debate on whom to blame for the demolition. Direct blame was placed on the Mayor of Kurunegala. However, indirect blame was divided between the current and former governments. The press noted that SJB and other opposition candidates protested or criticised the SLPP government for the demolition,<sup>53</sup> calling attention to the SLPP’s perceived failure to sustain its promise to protect Sri Lankan heritage. However, reportage also showed that several SLPP candidates managed to shift some of the blame and attention away from themselves, onto the previous government, by highlighting other incidents that occurred during their tenure.<sup>54</sup> By placing blame on the opposing party, both the SJB and SLPP were able to tap into the existing fear of existential threats to Sinhala-Buddhists, and use it to strengthen their political platforms. While the narrative from both sides was present in the press, the SLPP’s side was able to gain more traction. This could be because they had already ‘taken action’ to prevent damage to Buddhist heritage sites through their previous appointment of a Presidential Task Force<sup>55</sup> and the promise to amend the archaeological act<sup>56</sup>.

Reportage in the Tamil press once again focused on the appointment of the Presidential Task Force for Archaeological Heritage Management in the East, with little change. The concerns of Sinhala-Buddhist majoritarianism and institutional decay in Sri Lanka discussed in June’s

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<sup>48</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 20, p. 10; *Dinamina*, July 22, p. 10; *Lankadeepa*, July 25, p. 8; *Divaina*, July 25, p. 14; *Silumina*, July 26, p. 3; *Divaina*, July 27, p. 9.

<sup>49</sup> *Divaina*, July 20, p. 4; *Divaina*, July 20, p. 14; *Divaina*, July 26, p. 6; *Lankadeepa*, July 27, p. 8; *Divaina*, July 27, p. 9.

<sup>50</sup> *Divaina*, July 25, p. 14; *Lankadeepa*, July 30, p. 2.

<sup>51</sup> Verité Research, Understanding Press Coverage on Religious Freedom (May 2020) at <http://www.minormatters.org/en/media-pdfs> [Last accessed on 27 August 2020].

<sup>52</sup> For example, see Stanley J. Tambiah, *Sri Lanka: Ethnic fratricide and the dismantling of democracy* (IB Tauris, 1986).

<sup>53</sup> *Divaina*, July 20, p. 4; *Divaina*, July 20, p. 14; *Lankadeepa*, July 21, p. 2; *Dinamina*, July 23, p. 6; *Lankadeepa*, July 23, p. 10; *Lankadeepa*, July 27, p. 8.

<sup>54</sup> *Dinamina*, July 22, p. 10; *Divaina*, July 25, p. 14; *Silumina*, July 26, p. 3; *Divaina*, July 27, p. 9.

<sup>55</sup> *Dinamina*, July 22, p. 10.

<sup>56</sup> *Divaina*, July 27, p. 9.

report<sup>57</sup> remained the same. However, in addition to this, the press showed some candidates from the SJB and minority parties criticising the appointment of such a Task Force.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, the press also featured SLPP candidates addressing the concerns discussed in June's report<sup>59</sup> to strengthen their platforms. For example, *Virakesari* reported Batticaloa District Candidate for the TNA M. Uthayakumar stating that those who are contesting the general election, other than the TNA, "support Buddhist supremacy which attempts to grab the Tamils' native lands in the Eastern Province".<sup>60</sup> Reports such as these also may have exacerbated existing uncertainty and fear among minority groups about the threat of "Buddhistisation". This, in turn, strengthened the political platforms of candidates that claimed to stand against it.

### ***Strengthening national security***

The final topic of strengthening national security was covered predominantly in the Sinhala press and only reflected Sinhala-Buddhist interests. Reportage stressed the need to take measures against "Islamic extremism".<sup>61</sup> In particular, the measures highlighted were the ban of Madrasas, Quazi courts, and burqas and niqabs.<sup>62</sup> The most prominent voice featured on this topic was that of former MP Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thera. These suggested bans were framed in the reports as justified measures required for national security. However, the print media overlooked the logical inconsistencies of such arguments.

By seeking to ban these elements of Muslim culture, the candidates espousing these views and the press suggest the idea that Muslims and other minorities may not fit into the larger national identity of a Sinhala-Buddhist country. This reportage also served to reinforce existing anti-Muslim sentiment among the Sinhala-Buddhist community that had grown following the Easter attacks. Furthermore, the framing of these suggestions as measures of national security, acted to justify the curtailment of religious freedom of the Muslim community.

Several articles also reported former MP Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thera, a candidate associated with strong nationalist views, placing blame on the All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama, claiming that they "care the main religious organisation for Islam which has a great impact on the social life of Muslims, so they are responsible for the extremist acts of Muslims." This narrative may have further strengthened anti-Muslim sentiment and the idea that Muslims do not fit within the 'Sri Lankan identity'. Most of the reports containing sentiment opposing religious freedom fell

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<sup>57</sup> Verité Research, Understanding Press Coverage on Religious Freedom (June 2020) at <http://www.minormatters.org/en/media-pdfs> [Last accessed on 27 August 2020].

<sup>58</sup> *Virakesari*, July 5, p. 6; *Virakesari*, July 7, p. 13; *Virakesari*, July 8, p. 13; *Virakesari*, July 9, p. 2; *Virakesari*, July 10, p. 13; *Virakesari*, July 11, p. 14; *Virakesari*, July 13, p. 7; *Virakesari*, July 13, p. 15; *Virakesari*, July 11, p. 12; *Virakesari*, July 28, p. 15; *Uthayan*, July 17, p. 6.

<sup>59</sup> *Virakesari*, July 9, FP; *Virakesari*, July 13, p. 10; *Virakesari*, July 10, p. 2; *Virakesari*, July 11, p. 7.

<sup>60</sup> *Virakesari*, July 11, p. 14.

<sup>61</sup> *Divaina*, July 20, p. 7.

<sup>62</sup> *Divaina*, July 8, p. 4; *Divaina*, July 8, p. 7; *Divaina*, July 17, p. 10; *Lankadeepa*, July 21, p. 4; *Divaina*, July 24, p. 6; *Dinamina*, July 28, p. 21; *Divaina*, July 29, p. 14; *Lankadeepa*, July 30, p. 2; *Virakesari*, July 28, p. 8.

under this topic. While there were some opposing voices noting that a whole community should not be blamed for the actions of a few,<sup>63</sup> these voices did not gain traction in the press.

By emphasising this narrative of the need for stronger national security, candidates were able to reinforce fear among the Sinhala-Buddhist community and more strongly underline the need for strong, Sinhala-Buddhist leadership. This, in turn, bolstered the platforms of candidates associated with the SLPP.

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<sup>63</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 3, p. 8; *Lankadeepa*, July 10, p. 10.

## CONCLUSION

This report was based on media reportage featured during the month of July 2020 on issues related to religious freedom. The reportage was carried in newspapers in the two national languages—Sinhala and Tamil. The analysis in this report took into account 140 articles dealing with religious freedom under five overarching themes. The events/issues that were qualitatively analysed in this report related to two of these five themes, i.e., religious inequality and discrimination, and other related reporting. The articles selected for analysis were chosen on the basis that they featured new events/issues, which gained traction in the Tamil and/or Sinhala press. These articles were analysed by taking into consideration the sentiment expressed towards religious freedom. The sentiment was identified through the content, perspectives, and tone of reporting in these respective articles. A qualitative analysis of the reported content led to the following findings.

Each of the three topics that gained traction in the press: 1) maintaining Buddhism's 'foremost' position in Sri Lanka while ensuring equality; 2) securing Sri Lanka's archaeological ruins; and 3) strengthening national security, have been examined in previous reports. However, July's reportage revealed the ways in which parties on all sides engaged with each topic to address Sinhala-Buddhist and minority interests and bolstered their political positions.

Overall, by attempting to appeal to both majority and minority interests, parties both tapped into and reinforced pre-existing insecurities and fears in the Sinhala-Buddhist and minority mindsets. Press reportage on these topics likely strengthened the political positions of some parties, including the SLPP and SJB. In the Sinhala press, the existing insecurities of the Sinhala-Buddhists were fuelled, leading to the SLPP's position seeing greater traction across all three topics.

## RELATED REPORTING

**Mangala and Sagala were informed about a young man who holds the Islamic state ideology, but he was spared** (Erick Gamini Jinapriya) Former Court of Appeal Judge Abdul Ghafoor testified at the Presidential Commission on the Easter attacks that he had informed former Minister Mangala Samaraweera and former Minister of Law and Order Sagala Rathnayake that there was a young man who holds Islamic state ideology in 2016. These two ministers have not paid any attention to this complaint and no investigations were conducted until this twenty-five-year-old Ashik was arrested by the police after the Easter attacks. The judge further testified that he informed the security forces about some foreigners who distributed leaflets that insult Buddhism in 2012. They were arrested and then deported. The witness also stated that we should restrict people who perform unwanted religious propaganda in our country.<sup>64</sup>

**Karuna should be taken to the International Court of Justice – PC (President’s Counsel) Anura Meddegoda.** (Danushka Silva) This article is an interview with the PC Anura Meddegoda on the anti-national statement made by Karuna Amman. According to the history of Karuna Amman as a terrorist PC Meddegoda declares that in his own statement, Karuna states how thousands of army soldiers were killed and that he is behind the bomb attack on the Temple of Tooth Relic and the Aranthalawa massacre that happened during the war, so it is also clear that he is an assassin who has committed serious war crimes and other crimes against humanity which cannot be pardoned. International law sets out the minimum set of conditions under which both sides of a war must act, although anything serious and brutal can happen during a war.<sup>65</sup>

**Sajith Premadasa says that Samagi Jana Balawegaya Alliance is never ready to protect wrongdoers.** (Madukanda Sithum Chathuranga) Leader of the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) Sajith Premadasa addressing an event in Jaffna said that he is determined to obey the principles preached by the Lord Buddha as a Buddhist without favoring any race, religion or political party when developing the area. He further recalled that his father was attacked by an LTTE suicide bomber who was supposed to be a Tamil. However, it is cruel to hate all Tamils or to destroy a certain religion or a race based on the wrongful actions of one or a few. He added that huge trauma and loss happened to Sri Lanka due to the Easter Sunday attacks, but it is not right to persecute all Muslims based on that particular incident. The goal of SJB is to eliminate terrorism and extremism to live in reconciliation and unity.<sup>66</sup>

**People; Priests; Politics** (M.O.A. De Soysa) Former Minister Harin Fernando has made a controversial statement against Cardinal Malcom Ranjith, blaming the cardinal’s influence on Catholic people and his participation in politics as a reason for Sajith Premadasa’s losing at the last presidential election due to the lack of Catholic votes at a political meeting held in Polonnaruwa. The Church, Buddhist clergy, politicians and some religious extremists in civil

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<sup>64</sup> *Divaina*, July 3, p. 11.

<sup>65</sup> *Anidda*, July 3, p.13

<sup>66</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 3, p. 8

society have come out against him and have taken actions to spread the message that he has insulted the cardinal. The writer is of the opinion that there are conflicts taking place between clergy and laymen when the social balance is affected since the life of a layman and religious life of a priest differ. However, Minister Fernando was forced to change his views in the face of increasing religious and civil opposition, which continued to grow day by day, and took steps to apologize to the cardinal. Even though the incident was undermined, there are two issues that still remain to be discussed. First, does it matter that priests engage in politics? And second, if the clergy are engaged in politics, do civilians have the right to question them or not? These problems have been continuously rising and evolving since the creation of religion in this world, and are two of the most difficult problems to be solved by human society. The writer also highlights the fact that some clergy are involved in secular matters, unnecessarily withdrawing themselves from their religious existence, especially with regard to politics. Interestingly, he also focusses more on the priesthood, as he compares the life of a layman into a three-wheeler, where the three wheels represent wealth, power and sexual life. In human society, entering the priesthood means taking off those three wheels and covering the body with a robe or a cloak and entering a sasana life and shortening the path of samsara so that the clergymen are separated from physical obligations. Due to these commitments, they are known to be living symbols of impartiality, justice and equality. The article ensures that if clergy are engaged in politics, the laity have the right to question them, but there is no right to insult them. Also he adds that there is a difference between entering into politics suddenly and advising and guiding the rulers of a country. Finally, he said that one must look at the crisis between Minister Fernando and cardinal in this context.<sup>67</sup>

**This time Muslims will not vote Mahinda neither will they give them Biriyani- Mujibur Rahman** (Anjula Maheeka Weeraratne) Organizer of the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) of Colombo Central Mujibur Rahman addressing a meeting in Kolonnawa strictly said that they would not be supporting the Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa's political party in this election. Rahman was of the opinion that the decision taken by the Government of Sri Lanka to cremate the bodies of people who died from COVID-19 without giving permission to bury them is against the recommendations of the World Health Organization (WHO) and made the Muslim community greatly distressed, since it is completely against Islam.<sup>68</sup>

**The changing ethnic relations and politics** (Jayadewa Uyangoda) The newly emerging political trend in the world, centered on the US, is a mass movement that condemns the low treatment of minority communities in the States. Identifying Sri Lanka's new trends of ethnic relations and ethnic politics in this current context of the world is important. The SLPP (Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna) is on the path to transform the country politically into a new Sinhala-Buddhist authoritarian state. Due to the success of anti-Muslim campaigns after the Easter Sunday attacks, the SLPP won a majority of Catholic and Buddhist votes during the presidential election.

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<sup>67</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 3, p. 4

<sup>68</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 3, p. 8

The SLPP seems to be in a confusing complexity with regards to the votes of Muslims. The main strategy of the government is to create a new political class that is loyal and obedient to itself within the Muslim community and bring leaders and representatives of the same community to victory in the upcoming parliamentary elections. This new Muslim community in politics can be known as Quisling. The new quisling political class that emerges from the Tamil society in the North is primarily made up of new businessmen and professionals. It is currently unclear how Sri Lankan ethnic relations in future will look like. The reason for this is the volatile and thinner inter-ethnic political relations. However, Sri Lanka is now becoming a majority ethnic and majority racial country instead of multi-ethnic and multi-racial country.<sup>69</sup>

**Government extremism and the existence of the opposition: The need for a pluralistic democratic movement** (Athulasiri Samarakoon) Nationalists in the country, including the Rajapaksas, have always sought to focus on the most sensitive issues, namely national security, defending the powers of the majority, opposition to opposition minority, opposition to America and terrorism related issues. The Easter Sunday attacks had a major impact on the last presidential election, and this time, the SLPP is trying to challenge minority political power, especially Muslims. The writer also criticizes the Rajapaksa party, saying that in the general election because it, as usual, continues to go on with their propaganda that is extremist and racist in all ways.<sup>70</sup>

**The path of the next government** The prime minister has said that the nationalists camp was attacked and Buddhist monks were imprisoned on false charges after 2015. He also says that the elephants in the temples were chased out in order to end Buddhist perahera culture in the country. The writer of the article has strongly opposed the opinions, decisions and views of the Rajapaksa regime. Most importantly, he strongly criticizes incidents such as President Gotabaya Rajapaksa pardoning Sunil Ratnayake who was responsible for the Mirusuvil massacre where eight Tamil civilians were stabbed and killed. He adds that establishment of an Office on Missing Persons in Sri Lanka will benefit all Sri Lankans—Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims. The writer of this article further states that the new Sri Lankan Government is acting arbitrarily in the hope of getting majority votes in the elections without considering multi-ethnic community interests anymore.<sup>71</sup>

**The Thera who was killed by criminals** (Muditha Dayananda and Susil Priyantha) Chief Prelate of the Galkanda Sri Vijaya Dhamma Pirivena in Induruwa Ven. Yatiyana Buddhanda Thera has been hacked to death. The Thera's dead body with cuts was found by a person who visited the temple the next morning after the unfortunate incident occurred. The police were of the opinion that this is not a crime committed by a single person. Further investigations are being

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<sup>69</sup> *Anidda*, July 5, p. 7

<sup>70</sup> *Anidda*, July 5, p. 7

<sup>71</sup> *Anidda*, July 5, p. 8

carried out by the police, and according to Senior Superintendent of Police of Alpitoya Sathis Gamage, three police teams have been deployed to investigate the incident further.<sup>72</sup>

**There is no injustice done to any community under the government of President Gotabaya** (Pradeep Prasanna Samarakoon, Dharmasinghe Welipitiya and S.D. Abeysinghe) Chairperson of the Mother's Association of Protecting Motherland Kanthi Kodikara stated that there is no injustice happening to any of the groups in Sri Lanka under the government of Gotabaya Rajapaksa. It is evident in how the president did not do injustice to any ethnicities or religions during the eradication of COVID-19. She stated that our traditional Muslim people and Sinhalese live in unity and with a good understanding about one another. She added that our president knows that if a country drives towards ethnic division, the country would face destruction, so the president will not let any religion or a community to be subjected to injustice.<sup>73</sup>

**The Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) will form a clean government this time** (Asela Kuruluwansa) Candidate of the SLPP Ananda Aluthgamage declared that their party is building a clean government without the support of people who have racist ideas and who auction minority votes.<sup>74</sup>

**Extremism and communalism spread in the North and the South; Now no one cares about developing the country- Imthiaz Bakeer Markar** (Anjula Maheeka Weeraratne) Former Minister of Information and Mass Media Imthiaz Bakeer Marker at a press conference held in the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) office in Athul Kotte was of the opinion that by making racist and extremist statements, people like Karuna Amman are trying to win votes of the Tamil community in order to protect their seats at the upcoming election. He questioned the policies of the new government, since it is a double standard and asked about the intention behind provoking people in the North and South based on racism or extremism. The former minister finally held that this upcoming election is an opportunity for people to make the right choice.<sup>75</sup>

**The separatist principles in Sajith's manifesto are a serious issue -Mahinda Rajapaksa** Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa issuing a statement, claimed that Leader of the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) Sajith Premadasa's presidential election manifesto contained proposals to divide the country. The PM outlined proposals in Premadasa's manifesto and highlighted the word 'unitary' which was replaced by the words 'undivided and indivisible' in describing the Sri Lankan state. The PM also declared that the constitutional proposals made by Premadasa in his manifesto are identical to the proposals in the draft constitution which was tabled by Leader of the UNP (United National Party) Ranil Wickremasinghe in early 2019. The PM was of the opinion that a political party which caters to a single ethnic or religious community only looks

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<sup>72</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 5, p. 20

<sup>73</sup> *Divaina*, July 6, p. 6

<sup>74</sup> *Dinamina*, July 6, p. 6

<sup>75</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 6, p. 8

after the narrow interest of a small group, disregarding others as enemies or outsiders. The most recent example of this was the Easter Sunday terrorist attacks. As a further note, the PM requested voters to give their party an overwhelming mandate and to support them to end the narrow minded communalism in politics in this country.<sup>76</sup>

**Reconciliation has been misused in the recent past** (Chandima Karunaratne) Governor of the Eastern Province Anuradha Yahampath expressed her views about reconciliation at the initiation of the “Kalkuda Siri Seelalankara” pirivena (a monastic college for the education of monks in Sri Lanka). She said that they started this pirivena in order to bring about true reconciliation, so everyone can visit it regardless of ethnicity. Her idea is that this will help to give Buddhist teaching to all communities. She further added that we all should conquer the world through Buddhist philosophy.<sup>77</sup>

**Two Kovils in Jaffna stopped their sacrificial offerings due to the Corona epidemic.** (Dinasena Rathugamage) Two kovils in Jaffna gave up their sacrificial offerings this time due to COVID-19 and their view was that it is not good to slaughter animals during this epidemic period. Although they did prohibit these sacrificial offerings, some kovils had performed them on this occasion.<sup>78</sup>

**This land won by war was preserved by the monks** (Sujeewa Thathsara) Governor of the Eastern Province Anuradha Yahampath expressed her views at the initiation of the “Kalkuda Siri Seelalankara” pirivena (a monastic college for the education of monks in Sri Lanka). According to her purview, it is clear that our monks played a major role in protecting our land even after the victory of the war. She said that they started this pirivena in order to bring about true reconciliation so everyone can visit it regardless of ethnicity. Her idea is that this will help to give Buddhist teaching to all communities. She added that we all should conquer the world through Buddhist philosophy.<sup>79</sup>

**A mass force will be created by people and a procedure will be established to bring victory to the country- says Sajith Premadasa** (Nimala Kodituwakku) Sajith Premadasa at a political meeting in Pitakotte declared that this is a country with a Sinhala-Buddhist majority. Buddhism has been given a special place in the Constitution of our country. Additionally, the Constitution states that there is a national responsibility to protect and safeguard the rights of all religions. He further declared that his party is completely against racism, religious extremism and terrorism in the country, and it is the responsibility of all to establish a sovereign motherland, defending against all negatives and being united with other races.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 6, p. 10

<sup>77</sup> *Dinamina*, July 7, p. 7

<sup>78</sup> *Divaina*, July 7, p. 3

<sup>79</sup> *Divaina*, July 7, p. 10

<sup>80</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 7, p. 8

**Extends censorship to prevent insult to President's Counsel Ali Sabry** (Roshan Thushara) The censorship of Pangnaloa Thera because of the insults levied towards President's Counsel Ali Sabry has been extended by the Colombo District Court. Counsel Ali Sabry was an activist who worked hard to promote coexistence among all nations. The court was of the opinion that such an insult should be avoided to a person who is dedicated to the betterment of the country and the nation.<sup>81</sup>

**Within a week Madrasa schools, Kati courts and the burqa should be banned otherwise the whole country will line up for a Muslim goods strike** (Sirimantha Rathnasekara) Athuraliye Rathana Thera declared that Madrasa schools, Quazi courts and the burqa should be banned by the state and the All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama or they will begin a strike against Muslim goods. He stated that the All Ceylon Jamiyathul Ulama has to be responsible for all these issues and that we have to break up the extremists' monopoly for the betterment of our country.<sup>82</sup>

**If more wrong messages are received, the non-violent weapon will have to be raised towards the Muslim community** (Sirimantha Rathnasekara) Athuraliye Rathana Thera declared that our country started paying attention to Islamic extremism only after the Easter attacks, but there was ample space for those extremists to manipulate Sri Lanka. According to the Thera's view, lack of strong national security principles lead us to be more insecure, and therefore, all former governments are responsible for the development of extremism. The Thera added that our country should bring out a strong project to eradicate extremism. The Thera revealed that there are many kinds of extremists acts and further blamed the All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama for giving directions to these traitors. Rathana Thera's opinion is that we should take preventive measures to protect Sri Lanka from this extremist violence.<sup>83</sup>

**Stand in front of the mirror to see who are racists and traitors; the SJB Alliance will never do politics with double standards - Leader of SJB Sajith Premadasa** (Anjula Maheeka Weeraratne) Premadasa addressing a political gathering in the Welivita area said that reconciliation between religions and races should be extended in order to preserve national security in a unitary Sri Lanka. Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa is referring to the person who initiated the cruel act of terrorism, Zahran and so, Premadasa questions as to who supported and assisted an extremist like Zahran? Moreover, he recalled the promises made by Rajapaksa when he was the president based on the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Sri Lankan Constitution.<sup>84</sup>

**Presidential Commission on Easter Attack: There were details received on hundreds of Islamic extremist teachers who had visited Sri Lanka from time to time.** (Dasun Rajapaksa) Former National Intelligence Chief Retd. Major General Kapila Hendrawitharana testified before the Presidential Commission of Inquiry on the Easter attacks and said that he had received

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<sup>81</sup> *Dinamina*, July 8, p. 8

<sup>82</sup> *Divaina*, July 8, p. 4

<sup>83</sup> *Divaina*, July 8, p. 7

<sup>84</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 8, p. 8

intelligence reports of more than hundred foreign preachers who came to Sri Lanka from time to time to deliver Islamic extremist speeches. Most such preachers were deported from this country since our intelligence officers who went after those foreign extremists found that their preaching nurtured extremism. He added that most of such deported extremists were Indians. Further Hendrawitharana revealed that there were conflicts between the Bodu Bala Sena and some Muslim religious leaders and there is no connection between the actions of Gnanasara Thera and the Easter Sunday attacks which were steered by Zahran Hashim. There was a tense atmosphere witnessed in parts of the Eastern Province in June 2011 by Muslims, and Muslim groups behaved in a riotous manner by setting fire and causing inconveniences to the government, and this was due to fake promotions on social media about a devil called “grease yaka” which is a myth used by extremists to provoke Muslim civilians. A few names of ones who engaged in extremist activities were revealed later on. Furthermore, some of the extremist acts carried out by Zahran were frequently attacking mosques for various conflicting religious views. They were using social media platforms very well. Finally, the witness said that those three days after the Easter attacks, he was called by the army commander seeking information on Muslim groups carrying out extremist activities.<sup>85</sup>

**In the past as well as in the present, Buddhist monks were subjected to various pressures in carrying out religious activities - Prof. Kiyulegedara Naradha Thera** (Nalaka Sanjeewa Dahanayake) According to Prof. Kiyulegedara Naradha Thera, Buddhist monks are under pressure when carrying out their duties and responsibilities towards Buddhism and this is mainly due to the emergence of various social groups trying to destroy Buddhist principles. The Thera added that it is the best period for the upliftment of Buddhism with the new leadership in the country.<sup>86</sup>

**We are starting a journey with people of all races: In the previous government there were leaders who just sold Muslim people for their benefit - Prime Minister says in Kurunegala** (Pushpakumara Jayarathna) The prime minister addressing a District Muslim Conference highlighted the fact that there were politicians in this country who exploited Muslim people for their own benefit and that there were really good Muslims leaders too. He recalled his own past experiences about working with his fellow Muslim leaders.<sup>87</sup>

**It is not the real Buddhists who are trying to set the country on fire by religious discrimination and racism—we will eradicate religious discrimination, racism, extremism and terrorism from the country.** (Anjula Maheeka Weeraratna) Former Opposition Leader and Leader of the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) Sajith Premadasa declared that a true Buddhist would never provoke different races and create violence in the country. He declared that the current government is attempting to consolidate power through religious discrimination and racism.

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<sup>85</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 9, p. 12

<sup>86</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 10, p. 5

<sup>87</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 10, p. 8

He added that today's racist politics were low and narrow to blame Muslims for the spread of COVID-19 in Sri Lanka.<sup>88</sup>

**A complaint against banning social media for Galagodaththe Gnanasara Thera** (Sujatha Jayarathna) Gnanasara Thera was actively engaging in national, cultural and political activities in the country and has been declared a terrorist by a group of people. Rathana Thera has taken action against this by filing a Fundamental Rights case.<sup>89</sup>

**Ven. Gnanasara Thera has been labelled a terrorist. This is a violation of Human Rights - Athuraliye Rathana Thera** (Sujatha Jayarathna) Rathana Thera said that Galagodaththe Gnanasara Thera raised awareness against Islamic extremism in society and especially after Zahran's attack, what he said was proved. Despite all this, the previous government called him a terrorist and banned his political propaganda. He added that social media is the only platform for them to express their views, but now that is also banned.<sup>90</sup>

**A burial ground has been built on land considered to be of archaeological value** (K. Priyankara Kalupahana) This has happened in an area in Kalpitiya where a powerful minister of the previous government destroyed the ruins of an ancient temple and resettled a displaced group of people in Mannar. This burial ground was built to bury the bodies of the residents. Bhikkus allege that this is a site of an ancient temple of archaeological value and if the president does not pay attention to this, they will go on a protest fast.<sup>91</sup>

**The Kilinochchi incident needs more attention** There were two incidents that happened recently which were of great importance: a former LTTE cadre who was admitted to the hospital with serious injuries after a bomb exploded while he was making a bomb at home in Kilinochchi, and the discovery of a stock of explosives found on the banks of Kotmala Oya in Dambagalla by a group of residents. Both these incidents are not simple, as they can result in tragic end. Such acts are conducted by rehabilitated former LTTE cadres, and it seems that they have not been subjected to an ideological change. Although various details of Muslim extremism had been uncovered and details of certain suspicious organizations and individuals had been revealed, authorities had remained silent, thinking that it will be an obstacle to co-existence.<sup>92</sup>

**The case of damaging Buddha statues in Mawanella: 34 suspects remanded till the 27<sup>th</sup>** (Chaminda Wevathenna and P. Shantha Bandara) This case was based on an incident that

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<sup>88</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 10, p. 10

<sup>89</sup> *Divaina*, July 11, Front Page

<sup>90</sup> *Divaina*, July 11, p. 3

<sup>91</sup> *Dinamina*, July 13, p. 12

<sup>92</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 14, p. 4

happened in December 2018. Eight Buddha statues and one God statue erected at several junctions in Mawanella and nearby areas were attacked and damaged by mobs.<sup>93</sup>

**The country does not benefit from rulers who forget the real issues of the country - Leader of Ape Jana Bala Pakshaya Athuraliye Rathana Thera** (Sirimantha Rathnasekara) Athuraliye Rathana Thera of Ape Jana Bala Pakshaya (AJBP) accused the leaders of the three main political parties of working only for their benefit, regardless of the Madrasa schools which promote Muslim extremism. The Thera further declared that they all worked together to elect a president, but now they are disappointed as the leaders neglect the impact done by Madrasa schools. He added that madrasa schools give weapon training and support the followers of Zahran. According to the Thera, these schools promote Muslim extremism, so our government has to take control of them and provide virtuous teaching to children. The Thera's party is deeply frustrated about the politicians, as they never took a proper decision to handle extremism, so the Thera's political party is going to contest at the election and work accordingly in the parliament for the betterment of Sri Lanka.<sup>94</sup>

**The same disc playing the same thing on stage** (M.S.M.Ayubi) Extremism is a major issue on election platforms in the North and the South. Tamil and Muslim politicians say on their political stages that there are threats from Sinhala extremist groups and ask the people for power to speak out against them. Although Sinhala politicians deny this, they too are talking about Tamil extremism leading to separatism and Muslim extremism that led to Easter Sunday Attack. If a Tamil politician expresses his non-acceptance of armed conflict as a means of resolving ethnic conflicts, he faces the displeasure of the majority of Tamils. The writer further held that President Gotabaya Rajapaksa stated that development is the only way to solve the problems of Tamils, not devolution of power.<sup>95</sup>

**Preliminary Investigations have revealed that the Kurunegala Municipal Council has demolished an old building that belonged to the Kurunegala Kingdom** The building which was demolished by the Kurunegala Municipal Council using backhoes belonged to the Kingdom of Kurunegala and was considered the king's assembly hall. The director general of archaeology said that these buildings of ancient value were handed over to private institutions for maintenance under strict rules, and this building supposed to be one such building.<sup>96</sup>

**The report on the destroyed Kurunegala archaeological building will be handed to the Prime Minister today** (R.M.W.Bandara) This building which was considered to be the Royal Assembly

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<sup>93</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 14, p. 6

<sup>94</sup> *Divaina*, July 17, p. 10

<sup>95</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 18, p. 4

<sup>96</sup> *Dinamina*, July 20, Front Page

Hall used by King Buwanekabahu II to solve public problems during the Kurunegala Kingdom has been bulldozed on the orders of the present mayor of the Kurunegala Municipal Council.<sup>97</sup>

**The Sanghas are now like lightning conductors protecting thieves. If it is not possible in 2025, we will capture power in 2030 says Ape Jana Bala Party Leader, Galagodaththe Gnanasara Thera (Wijayarathna)** The Sanghas should be above the politicians of this country. We should uplift this country according to the principles of Buddhism. We cannot do any change without political power. Gnanasara Thera has further said that there is a need to defeat Islamic extremism and build unity in this country.<sup>98</sup>

**Protests over the demolition of the King's Assembly Hall of Buwanekabahu II (Ranaweera Manukulasuriya)** Certain protests were held in front of the demolished building which is of an archaeological value by the Kurunegala Municipal Council for road development work. This ancient building has been maintained as a hotel until recently.<sup>99</sup>

**The frustrated young boy who was taken away 12 at night and has married at three in the morning suicides. Management Council of the Mosque is responsible for my son's death-Father of the deceased (Suranga Dilhan)** The deceased boy of this incident is a nineteen year old resident of Gampola. He was allegedly having an affair with an eighteen year old girl who had become pregnant. According to the father of the deceased person some men from the Ulapane Mosque had taken the young man to the Mosque and without conducting any trial he has given said girl in marriage. He has committed suicide due to this reason. The deceased person's father said that such marriages should be conducted in consultation with both parties under Muslim law so, the Council has no right to take decisions alone without getting the advice of a Moulavi.<sup>100</sup>

**Why are the archaeological laws applicable to village people not applicable to the chiefs? Did Champika speak against destroying antiquities in the East? - Galagodaththe Gnanasara Thera says in Kurunegala (Pushpakumara Jayarathna)** Gnanasara Thera said that it was regrettable that Buddhist antiquities in the Northern and Eastern Provinces were being bulldozed by pagans while Buddhist politicians in the South carried out the same kind of destruction. Muslim extremists in the reserve area near the Deegawhapi Dagoba destroy it while an ancient royal pavilion building belonging to the Kurunegala Kingdom has been damaged. He questioned whether the Sri Lankan law applies only to the poor.<sup>101</sup>

**Is the Somawathie Dagoba in Seruwila? Or Polonnaruwa? It is a problem for making a decision says Director General of Archaeology (R.P. Dharmadasa)** The present president has appointed

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<sup>97</sup> *Divaina*, July 20, p. 4

<sup>98</sup> *Divaina*, July 20, p. 7

<sup>99</sup> *Divaina* July 20, p. 14

<sup>100</sup> *Divaina*, July 20, p. 15

<sup>101</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 20, p. 10

a special committee to identify and protect archaeological sites in the Eastern Province. This Wilgam Vihara complex covers an area of forty seven acres and the issues raised by some people in this regard have now been fully resolved.<sup>102</sup>

**The report on the destroyed Kurunegala archaeological building will be handed to the prime minister today** (R.M.W Bandara) The ruins of the Royal Assembly Hall of the King Buwanekaba II has been demolished on the orders of the current mayor of the Kurunegala Municipal Council. Monks, opposition politicians and the people have lodged complaints on this.<sup>103</sup>

**Protests over the demolition of the Royal Assembly Hall of Buwanekaba II** (Gokaralla Ranaweera Manukulasooriya) The ruins of the Royal Assembly Hall of the King Buwanekaba II have been demolished on the orders of the current mayor of the Kurunegala Municipal Council. Monks, opposition politicians and the people have lodged complaints on this.<sup>104</sup>

**Take the Department of Archaeology under the Ministry of Defence and protect the Nation's valuables – Dr. Omalpe Sobhitha Thera requests the government** (Nimala Kodituwakku) A conservation site under the Archaeological Department in Kurunegala, an ancient pavilion belonging to the 13<sup>th</sup> century has been destroyed under the guise of widening the road by the Road Development Authority at the behest of the mayor. Although it is clear that there are well-organized groups to destroy antiquities, and the police and the government have been informed about this, they have taken no action against them.<sup>105</sup>

**Elle Gunawansa Thera at the commemoration of Prof. F.R Jayasuriya stated that making Sinhala the official language is not something that was done against our Tamil brothers and sisters** (Upali Karunaratne) Ven. Elle Gunawansa Thera stated that making Sinhala the official language is not an action against the Tamil people. The Thera declared that there was a rebellion in this country between the Tamils and Sinhalese of the North and South during the months of August and September in 1977. The Thera stated that they have done their best to solve the issues of people in North and East who came to their temple and added that people have to give their support only to quality politicians. Prof. Induragare Dhammarathana Thera stated that our country needs people just like F.R. Jayasuriya for the wellbeing and protection of our history. According to the idea of Harischandra Wijetunga, F.R. Jayasuriya was a person who did a great job in making Sinhala the official language. The senior Prof. Raj Somadeva stated that Sri Lankans must be aware of our proud and long history. If not, we cannot move forward as one country. He further declared that our monks do a great service to protect this country.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 20, p. 12

<sup>103</sup> *Divaina*, July 20, p. 4

<sup>104</sup> *Divaina*, July 20, p. 14

<sup>105</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 21, p. 2

<sup>106</sup> *Divaina*, July 21, p. 7

**The peoples' mandate is formed after an election** In an interview Gampaha District Candidate Ven. Athuruliye Rathana Thera claimed that Madrasas are illegal schools that teach children extremist ideologies and the idea that you cannot win an election without minority votes has long been disproven.<sup>107</sup>

**Those who bulldozed historical sanctuaries are now protesting to preserve cultural heritage - SLPP Candidate Sisira Jayakody** (Chandima Karunaratna) The UNP as well as its associated groups have been working against the national and cultural heritage of this country for a long time. Historical sanctuaries were destroyed under the influence of extremist groups. Those who broke away from the UNP have now started protesting against destroying archaeological sites. He questioned where they were when the historic Vijithapura was bulldozed and while the archaeological site in East Muhudu Maha Viharaya was destroyed for the implementation of Sajith Premadasa's projects. The behaviour today of those who did not allow the cremation of the chief incumbent of the Gurukanda Vihara is ironic. There are examples of when Sajith Premadasa did not provide electricity to the Keragala Temple. Due to these reasons, a task force has been set up by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa under the leadership of the secretary of defence, especially in the Eastern Province.<sup>108</sup>

**Investigations into five who hosted election meetings in religious places** (Sujith Hewajulige) The Election Commission stated that investigations against five candidates in the upcoming General Election have begun regarding campaigning in religious places such as temples and mosques.<sup>109</sup>

**This time Muslims are taking the lead to form a government led by Gotabaya. Hypocritical politicians deceived them in the presidential election - Minister Nimal Siripala de Silva** (S.M.Farook) The minister said that in the past, Sinhalese people and Muslim people lived in peace and harmony. Innocent Muslims in this country have suffered the most after the Easter Sunday attack done by a small group of people like Zahran.<sup>110</sup>

**Mahinda who was the executive president for ten years asking for the post of prime minister is a joke. If what Sajith said was paid attention to, there won't be Covid in Sri Lanka – Samagi Jana Balawegaya Candidate Ajith Mannapperuma** (Shivanthi Fernando) A conservation site under the Archaeological Department in Kurunegala which was an ancient pavilion belonging to the 13<sup>th</sup> century has been destroyed under the guise of widening the road by the Road Development Authority at the behest of the mayor. Although it is clear that there are well-organized groups to destroy antiquities and the police and the government have been informed about this, no action has been taken against them.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 21, p. 4

<sup>108</sup> *Dinamina*, July 22, p. 10

<sup>109</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 22, Front Page

<sup>110</sup> *Dinamina*, July 23, p. 6

<sup>111</sup> *Dinamina*, July 23, p. 6

**Samagi Jana Balawega Party Protests at Colombo Lipton Junction** (Nimala Kodituwakku) Samagi Jana Balawega members protested for the immediate arrest of the government officials involved in destroying the ancient Pavillion of King Buwanekabahu II from the 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>112</sup>

**The election candidate's vehicle convoy of Rishad's party under Samagi Jana Balawegaya was attacked** (Pushpakumara Jayarathna) A group of people has attacked the vehicle convoy of the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) Kurunegala Candidate Mohomad Nazeer. According to the police, this attack was done against Rishad Bathiudeen, claiming that the business activities of the Muslim community have collapsed after the Easter Sunday attacks and his "racist" ideas and political activities had influenced it.<sup>113</sup>

**I am committed to running a good government with Buddhism at the forefront. When we come to power, we will tear up the MCC agreement and throw it away.** (Nimala Kodituwakku) SJB Candidate Sajith Premadasa was sharing his thoughts in Colombo and said that they saw the then opposition making clear statements about the MCC agreement during and before the last Presidential Election. The country will be divided into two parts by this MCC agreement and it would be an American colony thereafter. In order to save the country from this agreement, the monks went on a fast to the death in front of the Independence Square. While respecting public opinion, he has stated that he will not sign the MCC agreement and has promised to tear it up as soon as they come into power.<sup>114</sup>

**Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thera writes to All Lanka Jamiyyathul Ulama Council to intervene immediately to abolish social divisions brought by Islam extremists** (Sirimantha Rathnasekera) Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thera stated that the Jamiyyathul Ulama Council is the main religious organization of Islam which has a great impact on the social life of the Muslims so they have a responsibility for the extremist acts of Muslims. He stated that Buddhists monks are ready to accept other cultural identities but are not ready to accept religious extremism. His letter further stated that even in Muslim countries, wearing a niqab or a burqa is discouraged, so such extremist conditions should be changed and Madrasa schools should be banned. The Thera assured that they will take non-violent steps to stop extremist actions if their requests are not considered.<sup>115</sup>

**Let's strongly condemn the attack on the candidate's vehicle** The writer has said that the attack on Easter Sunday in 2019 has left a deep scar on the conscience of all mankind. This attack exposed the madness of religious extremism and religious fanaticism. There are two main groups of victims of that attack as direct victims and indirect victims. The attack of damaging the vehicles of the candidate contesting for the Kurunegala District from the Samagi Jana Balawegaya was led by a Muslim group according to the news. They belong to the second group

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<sup>112</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 23, p. 10

<sup>113</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 24, p. 2

<sup>114</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 24, p. 8

<sup>115</sup> *Divaina*, July 24, p. 6

of indirect victims. This is mainly because their businesses had collapsed due to the Easter Sunday attack. The writer further says that politicians belonging to different races or religions must have an understanding of the needs of that particular group of people. He finally stated that in this upcoming election, politicians will have to reap what they have sown.<sup>116</sup>

**The country has not achieved anything despite having a ministry of reconciliation.** According to the prime minister, billions of rupees were spent on conducting workshops and creating ethnic divisions. When there were clashes in various areas where Muslim businesses collapsed, the previous government hid without resolving the conflicts.<sup>117</sup>

**When I was the minister of culture, I dedicated my life to protecting archaeological sites. Corrupt officials make false accusations to protect their position. – Former Minister Akila Viraj Kariyawasam** (Anjula Maheeka Weeraratne) The former minister made a statement regarding the destruction of King Buwanekabahu's Assembly Hall. The commissioner of archaeology has said that he has exerted great pressure as the minister of culture to allow the establishment of a hotel on this archaeological site. Although the murals at Sigirya collapsed, these archaeologists didn't take steps to conserve them. After he became the minister, foreign experts were brought to take action to conserve, on the expense of the government, said the former minister.<sup>118</sup>

**I came to Anuradhapura not to get ministerial posts but to protect the Sinhala-Buddhist heritage - United National Party Anuradhapura Candidate Dr. Mervyn Silva** Mervyn Silva has declared that he is not ready to defend his position and betray the nation if injustice is done to our religion and our nation. He stated that previously, we lost some lands of Muhudu Maha Viharaya and more property of Mullaitivu Gurukanda Viharaya. The cremation of the body of the late prelate of that temple was not allowed to be done. In order to nurture Buddhism, temple property must be protected. Similarly, action should be taken against giving financial benefits to Buddhists and converting them to other religions.<sup>119</sup>

**Planting racism against Sri Lankans** (Piyasiri Amarakoon) Extremism has resulted in creating divisions between other ethnic groups and Sinhala-Buddhists. The story brings out an issue related to ethnic violence during the Kandy period. The monks have done a great service in establishing national unity. After the Easter attacks, it was clear that there should be only one law for the whole country rather than having different laws for different groups. Ethnic violence has been planted in Sri Lanka since the time of the British government. The Wesleyan

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<sup>116</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 24, p. 4

<sup>117</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 25, p. 5

<sup>118</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 25, p. 8

<sup>119</sup> *Divaina*, July 25, p. 14

missionary brought out the concept of a “Tamil Homeland” and it finally resulted in the division of land between Sinhalese and Tamils.<sup>120</sup>

**The story of Appu in the Kurunegala throne** (Pushpakumara Jayarathna) The story presents an incident related to the Kurunegala era and describes the harassment done by Muslim people against Buddhist temples. The King Wathimi Bandara was Muslim, so during his period, Buddhism was under threat, and then he was killed by a conspiracy. After his death Appu, who was the real crown prince, was brought in and he became King Parakramabahu IV. Then our Buddhist culture was preserved once again.<sup>121</sup>

**My goal is to save Muslim youth from extremism - Colombo District UNP Candidate M.S.H. Mohomad** (Nishantha Kumara Bandara) The candidate expressed his opinions, saying that there have been many Muslim leaders in the past. Many years ago, the Muslim community engaged well with the governments they had and no problems arose. He stated that the so-called Muslim leaders today have created racist parties and personal agendas to spread extremist ideas in order to gain various privileges.<sup>122</sup>

**Draft legislation secretly went to the attorney general on "brainwashing camps"** (Tharindu Uduwaragedara) It is reported that the attorney general has approved a draft rehabilitation regulation to rid those who bear extremist religious ideology. Three types of people who were involved in extremist activities and serious crimes and extremist ideology supporters were planned to be sent to these camps for rehabilitation. This rehabilitation process is questioned by the writer, drawing out negative examples of what is happening in such camps in China. If this rehabilitation process is carried out by giving lectures on Islamic teachings for suspects and Moulavis, it is acceptable to a certain extent, but the current model of such rehabilitation camps is more like a prison where suspects are brainwashed according to the desired ways of the government.<sup>123</sup>

**Is it the exact Royal Assembly Hall of King Buwanekabahu which was bulldozed?** (Mathugama Seneviruwan) Most of the temples throughout Sri Lanka were renovated after independence, yet the process was slow in the North and East but in some places they were preserved by the presence of the Maha Sangha. Many sanctuaries were destroyed during the period of terrorism. These important historical ruins have been destroyed by the clutches of treasure hunters and extremists. Existing governments have not been able to stop the destruction of places of worship because of the extremists' grip and extortion. With the arrival of the bulldozer in the construction industry in Sri Lanka, it is not surprising that a dagoba was bulldozed overnight, so many places of religious as well as historical value have been destroyed through the fault of the rulers. A government that spends very little money on cultural activities

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<sup>120</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 26, p. 8

<sup>121</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 26, p. 26

<sup>122</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 26, p. 4

<sup>123</sup> *Anidda*, July 26, p. 3

will not go ahead with archaeology, so a new set of rules must be developed to preserve and manage these ancient artifacts.<sup>124</sup>

**This is how antiquities were destroyed during the period of Good Governance** (Nihal P. Abeysinghe) It has been reported that the largest dagoba believed to belong to the Anuradhapura era has been bulldozed and chillies and vegetables have been grown there. The complaint has been lodged by the Dimbulagala "Buddha Sravaka Sangha Sabha". The writer said that even during the war period, the LTTE terrorists did not destroy our culture and archaeological sites as much as in 2015 to 2019. The destruction of Buddha statues and many other cultural destructions have taken place within this period. No authorities investigated the destruction of antiquities in Vijithapura which has been bulldozed for a village and other places of historical importance till they were destroyed. In addition, several elephant owners were arrested on various false charges in connection with a conspiracy to reduce the number of elephants in the Esala Perahera. It seems that these destructive activities have continued due to the archaeological laws of the country not being properly implemented by the then MPs, ministers, archaeological authorities and officials.<sup>125</sup>

**The Royal Assembly Hall was demolished: discussion is about Queens. Seems like the Kurunegala incident will be hidden soon - Lakshman Kiriella** (JAL Jayasinghe) The mayor of Kurunegala is being protected by former ministers primarily for the demolition of the Kurunegala Royal Assembly Hall. In the past years, Buddhist monks who were taking initiative to protect the national heritage, culture, history, and antiquities of this country are now silent.<sup>126</sup>

**Muslims protest against the destruction of antiquities in Kurunegala** (Kamal Bogoda) The image shows how Hasan Isadeen, Chief Organizer of the Muslim Organization of the North and East protested with a group of other Muslim against the mayor of Kurunegala for the demolition of the archaeological site in that city.<sup>127</sup>

**The Archaeological Act will be amended - President Gotabaya Rajapaksa** According to President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the Archaeological Act is being amended with the intention of stopping the destruction that has been caused to antiquities for a long time in this country and to pass on the country's heritage to future generations and solve problems of practicality. In addition to the president, several veteran Theras also expressed their opinions about the issue of conserving historical sanctuaries and temples of great archaeological value. For the past five

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<sup>124</sup> *Divaina*, July 26, p. 6

<sup>125</sup> *Silumina*, July 26, p. 3

<sup>126</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 27, p. 8

<sup>127</sup> *Divaina*, July 27, p. 7

years, antiquities as well as historical sites have been severely damaged. This was due to the degrading behaviour of various groups damaging ancient Buddhist heritage.<sup>128</sup>

**Police investigations and national security following the Easter Sunday attacks** An unnamed Eastern Province intelligence official testified before the Presidential Commission of Inquiry and stated that following the April 21 Easter Sunday attacks, the three forces launched a special operation in the Eastern Province and the Saindamarudu suicide attack took place at that time. Those investigations had later revealed that Zahran's second attack could have taken place if the operation had not been carried out, and the planned target was the Kandy Esala Perahera. The extremists who are suffering from religious fanaticism are Muslim youth. It is true that this is a very complicated situation, especially in a country where the seriousness of racism is hidden. It is a no secret that the police, who are responsible for maintaining law and order, have created a mysterious environment in which the enforcement of the law against young people of different ethnicities may have caused breach of peace, but in any case, negligence of the officials is unforgivable.<sup>129</sup>

**The actions that are an obstacle to peace in a Sinhala-Buddhist country must be stopped non-violently - Former MP Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thera (Amoda Jayamaha)** According to Rathana Thera, social division and mistrust have arisen among the Sinhala and Muslim communities in Sri Lankan society. It is essential to get out of this situation and create a peaceful environment. Jamiyyathul Ulama is the main religious organization that has a great impact on the social life of the Muslim people. Sinhala and Tamil minors have been converted to Islam after marriage and their relationships with relatives have been severed. Quazi courts have no objection to resolving issues in the Muslim community but have the right to go to court under common law regarding marriage. Any citizen has the right to practice his or her religion in accordance with his or her conscience, without being influenced by others. Ven. Galagodaaththe Gnanasara Thera has said that a special letter had been submitted to the Jamiyyathul Ulama since the Madrasa schools posed a threat to national security due to the system of extremist teachings. Issues on burqas and niqabs were also raised.<sup>130</sup>

**The position of common law on marriage in the country should be revealed - A stern letter from Ven. Rathana Thera and Ven. Gnanasara Thera to the Jamiyyathul Ulama Organisation.** The joint letter from the two Theras has stated that they would like to know the position of the Jamiyyathul Ulama regarding underage marriages, as well as agreeing to common marriages in the country. It was further stated that the Jamiyyathul Ulama was responsible for the recent emergence of divisive religious tendencies between the Sinhala and Muslim communities.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> *Divaina*, July 27, p. 9

<sup>129</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 28, p. 4

<sup>130</sup> *Dinamina*, July 28, p. 21

<sup>131</sup> *Divaina*, July 29, p. 14

**Submit all files and reports related to Buwaneka Hotel building immediately - Court orders mayor and governor** (Manopriya Gunasekera) It was stated that they should take action to stop religious practices that hinder national unity. The Madrasa schools conducting religious extremist teachings that produce suicide bombers like the Zahran should be banned or should be governed under the state education system. A large number of Sinhala and Tamil women in this country have married Muslim youth and after marriage they have completely converted to Islam. The letter further suggested that a citizen has the right to practice the religion of his choice and that forcible recruitment to a particular religion should be stopped.<sup>132</sup>

**After the end of the war, Sinhala and Muslim society was divided into two factions and Zahran Hashim took advantage of that division - Former Director of the State Intelligence Service testifies** (Nimanthi Ranasinghe) The former senior DIG testified before the Presidential Commission on the Easter Sunday attacks and declared that although the authorities were informed about this, there was no positive response to the report which was handed to them. Both Sinhala and Muslim groups have complained to the police against each other and he has asked the authorities to create a mechanism that represents all religions. Organisations formed on social media such as “Sinhale” revolutionized the ideas of the youth and as a result, in response to this, Muslims also formed organisations. This behavior went as far as racism. There were many conflicts between the races as well as protests. People like Abdul Razik became popular characters in their community and he even staged protests in Maligawatte and disrespected monks. Ideas were spread on social media to boycott Muslim shops. The witness further said that the divisive nature of the society was spread through hate speech on the internet and that was a serious attack on the country’s religious harmony. He also informed the responsible authorities that international terrorism could come to Sri Lanka as a result of people like Zahran taking advantage of such religious divisions.<sup>133</sup>

**The enrollment of Muslim students in to the Law College has increased abnormally, the Former Director of the State Intelligence Service told the Easter Commission.** (Gayan Kumara Weerasinghe) The former director of state intelligence services revealed to the commission that five Muslim students were admitted to the Law College in 2003 and that the number increased to 78 in 2012. When the commission asked him why there was such an increase in Muslim students, he has said that this was due to a struggle between expansionism in the country and the struggle between the minority and majority populations.<sup>134</sup>

**The cynics who break the nation's donation box!** The purpose of establishing the Central Cultural Fund of Sri Lanka was to promote cultural activities while safeguarding national heritage. The committee report on the Central Cultural Fund has been handed to the prime minister and a number of irregularities in the fund have been clearly stated. Rulers do not have

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<sup>132</sup> *Lankadeepa*, July 30, p. 2

<sup>133</sup> *Lankadeepa* July 30, p. 18

<sup>134</sup> *Dinamina*, July 30, Front Page

the right to plunder the resources of the nation just by gaining political power. The Central Cultural Fund can also be considered a donation box in a temple. The reason is that, in a way, it is something that is run for the betterment of the nation and there is no difference between a person breaking a donation box or misusing public funds, which is a grave mistake. Various projects were paid for using this fund without any regulation. Such corruption and fraud should not happen in the future, even if they have happened before.<sup>135</sup>

**Although I informed about ISIS and terrorists of the Easter Sunday attack, it did not help - Former Director General of the State Intelligence Service (Gayan Kumara Weerasinghe)** During the period of 2013 to 2014 many Buddhist organizations came to the society under different names. Such organizations exerted a strong influence on society and incited racism. Meanwhile, various protests were held and Buddhist monks were criticizing each other. Minor incidents were publicised on social media as a racist conflict. Although Abdul Razik the Leader of the Sri Lanka Thowheed Jamath was arrested for his statements insulting Buddhism, Muslims continued to lodge more complaints with the police against the Sinhalese. It has been argued that Muslim politicians have sided with Muslims in Sinhala- Muslim conflicts, but no politician has sided with Sinhalese. The witness further stated that there were Muslims who were supporting Syria and it was revealed that there was a program to provide educational scholarships to the Middle East.<sup>136</sup>

**This is not a conspiracy: political culture is not the correct word to use - President's Counsel Faisza Mustapha says in the Court of Appeal (Nelka Medagedara)** Several officials have been accused of embezzling government funds worth Rs. 600 million from the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission of Sri Lanka (TRCSL) during the 2015 Presidential Election for a 'sil cloth' distribution project. The attorney general filed cases against the suspects in the High Court and the High Court judge found the accused guilty of the charges. The defendants appealed seeking to set aside this decision. President's Counsel Faiz Mustapha, appearing for the petitioner, former Secretary to the President Lalith Weeraratunga, further stated that the TRCSL has stated that funds can be provided for various activities under the Social Welfare Fund so the distribution of 'sil clothes' were done in accordance with a legal procedure as it is a social service and a charitable activity.<sup>137</sup>

**The State Intelligence Service did its best, but to no avail - Former Chief of State Intelligence DIG Nilantha Jayawardena.** (Eric Gamini Jinapriya) As a witness in front of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry of the Easter Sunday attacks, he said that since Sinhalese formed different organizations, Muslims did the same in response. So minor incidents went as far as racism. Buddhist monks started criticising each other. A person named Abdul Razik said to raise black flags on Friday. He strongly criticised Buddhist monks at a meeting held at Maligawatte.

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<sup>135</sup> *Dinamina*, July 30, p. 4

<sup>136</sup> *Dinamina*, July 30, p. 8

<sup>137</sup> *Dinamina*, July 30, p. 13

There was a strike movement against Muslims. Meanwhile, Muslims clashed with other Muslims due to different opinions on religion. By 2016, Muslims took their opinions to the European Union, trying to say to the international community that minorities are being harmed. There was an opinion that there were no Sinhala leaders even though Muslim leaders were involved in the clashes between Sinhalese and Muslims. There were also allegations that the police are slowing down the complaints of Muslims. The witness further held that state intelligence officials acknowledge that they did their best, but there was no result.<sup>138</sup>

**“Aluthgamage, Weerawansa, Karuna escalate hatred among the communities”- Lebbe** High profile member of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) Uduma Lebbe said that Mahindananda Aluthgamage, Wimal Weerawansa and Karuna Amman have been acting in a way to escalate hatred among communities. He added that the Presidential Task Forces (PTFs) on archaeological heritage management in the Eastern Province have no representatives of the Tamil or Muslim communities. He added that Muslim politicians allying with the ruling party should consider it.<sup>139</sup>

**"Those who support Buddhistisation should be defeated at the election" - Thurairatnam** Former Member of the Eastern Provincial Council R. Thurairatnem said that those who support the government's move for Buddhistisation in the East should be defeated at the general election. He added that the Sinhala Buddhistisation had been on track through the Presidential Task Forces (PTFs) on Archaeological Heritage Management in the Eastern Province.<sup>140</sup>

**Security for churches in Vavuniya** Security tightened around the churches in Vavuniya following a tip on a bomb threat received by the security forces.<sup>141</sup>

**Leadership training for Hindu priests** A leadership training programme was conducted for the Hindu priests in the Kalmunai North Divisional Secretariat Division by the Department of Hindu Culture.<sup>142</sup>

**"Attempt to control the public by escalating religious, ethnic extremism"- Premadasa (R. Yasi)** Leader of the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) Sajith Premadasa said that attempt has been made to control the public by inciting religious and ethnic extremism. He added that even though they (the SJB) are Sinhala Buddhists, they refrain from controlling the minority groups.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> *Divaina*, July 30, p. 7

<sup>139</sup> *Virakesari*, July 3, p. 11

<sup>140</sup> *Virakesari*, July 5, p. 6

<sup>141</sup> *Thinakaran*, July 6, p. 7

<sup>142</sup> *Thinakaran*, July 6, p. 13

<sup>143</sup> *Virakesari*, July 6, p. 2

**Buddhist monks enter Tamil areas; people are in a panic** Panic has been felt among the areas in Batticaloa where mainly Tamil people live. Military personnel visited Kusanar Hill where archaeological remains lay and claimed that it belongs to them.<sup>144</sup>

**"No bomb threat to churches" - Police** Vavuniya police said that there was no bomb threat issued, but security had been strengthened as a precautionary measure.<sup>145</sup>

**"Military appointments in civil service are new chapters in oppression" - Uthayakumar** (Thurayoor Thasan) In an interview with the *Virakesari*, Tamil National Alliance (TNA) Batticaloa District Candidate M. Uthayakumar said that the oppression of the Tamil community has been ongoing. He added that appointments of military personnel and the presidential task force on archaeological sites in the East are new chapters of such oppression. He questioned why other religious leaders other than Buddhist monks had not been included in the PTF.<sup>146</sup>

**"Attempt to grab the lands in the East under the guise of archaeological sites"- Mahrooff** Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) candidate Abdulla Mahrooff said that an attempt has been made to grab the lands in the East under the guise of archaeological sites from Pulmottai to Pottuvil.<sup>147</sup>

**Condemn the PTF at the Vellaveli Pradeshiya Sabha sitting** Vellaveli Predeshiya Sabha condemned the activities made by the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on archaeological heritage management in the Eastern Province in the Batticaloa District.<sup>148</sup>

**"Koneswaram Temple was built on Gokanna Viharaya" - Methananda Thera.** (R. Hashan) Member of the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on archaeological heritage management in the Eastern Province Ven. Ellawala Medhananda Thera stated that that a Buddhist Temple named Gokanna Viharaya, built by King Mahasen, was located at the site where the Koneswaram Temple now stands. "Invading armies from South India destroyed this temple, and built a Hindu Kovil on top of it," he claimed. But the Tamil people consider this preposterous. They believe it is of the Ramayana era and has been in concrete from since the 7<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>149</sup>

**"Minority people did not come forward to work in PTF" - President** (R. Yasi) President Gotabaya Rajapaksa stated that no one from the Tamil or Muslim community came forward to work in the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on archaeological heritage management in the Eastern

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<sup>144</sup> *Virakesari*, July 6, p. 12

<sup>145</sup> *Virakesari*, July 6, p. 14

<sup>146</sup> *Virakesari*, July 7, p. 13

<sup>147</sup> *Virakesari*, July 8, p. 13

<sup>148</sup> *Virakesari*, July 8, p. 13

<sup>149</sup> *Virakesari*, July 9, FP

Province. He made the remarks at a cabinet meeting when Minister Douglas Devananda brought up the issue.<sup>150</sup>

**"Ven. Methananda Thera who disgraced the Hindu religion should apologise" - Kuhawarathan** United National Party (UNP) Candidate Sann Kuhawarathan stated that Member of the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on archaeological heritage management in the Eastern Province Ven/ Ellawala Medhananda Thera who stated that the Koneswaram Temple was built on a Buddhist temple named Gokanna Viharaya should apologise as he had insulted the Hindus and Hinduism.<sup>151</sup>

**"Don't forget" - Samaraweera reminds** (N. Thanuja) Former UNP MP Mangala Samaraweera said that people should not forget what had happened to the countries where the constitutions were made by governments that included religious persons and extremists. He added that the people should throw such attempts into the bin.<sup>152</sup>

**"Military and Buddhist invasion towards us"- Shriritharan** (R. Yasi) Former TNA MP S. Shriritharan said that a dangerous political environment prevails among the Tamil community. He added that Buddhist and military invasion has been coming towards the Tamils. He further added that Buddhist temples had been built in the areas where the Tamil people live.<sup>153</sup>

**"Those who are not part of the TNA are supporting the Buddhist supremacy" - Uthayakumar** TNA Candidate for Batticaloa District M. Uthayakumar said that those who are contesting the general election other than the TNA are supporting Buddhist supremacy, which attempts to grab the Tamils' native lands in the Eastern Province. He added that such people support Buddhistisation across the country.<sup>154</sup>

**"The military and Buddhist monks will change the fate of the East" - Wigneswaran** Leader of the Tamil People's Council (TPC) C.V. Wigneswaran alleged that according to the statement made by member of the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on archaeological heritage management in the Eastern Province Ven. Ellawala Medhananda Thera, the purpose of the PTF is for the military and Buddhist monks to change the fate of the Eastern Province. He added that they wanted to declare the Eastern Province a Sinhala-Buddhist region.<sup>155</sup>

**"I have been in talks with professors" - Devananda** Minister of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Douglas Devananda said that he has not given up attempts to include representatives of minority communities in the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on archaeological heritage

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<sup>150</sup> *Virakesari*, July 9, FP

<sup>151</sup> *Virakesari*, July 9, p. 2

<sup>152</sup> *Virakesari*, July 10, p. 2

<sup>153</sup> *Virakesari*, July 10, p. 13

<sup>154</sup> *Virakesari*, July 11, p. 14

<sup>155</sup> *Virakesari*, July 13, p. 7

management in the Eastern Province. He added that he had been in talks with respective professors.<sup>156</sup>

**"The government attempts to create ethnic crisis and hatred" - Srinesan** Former TNA MP and Candidate G. Srinesan said that the government has been attempting to create tension and hatred among the ethnic groups. He alleged that the government makes trouble for the Tamil people through the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on archaeological heritage management in the Eastern Province.<sup>157</sup>

**"Top priority for Buddhism under a unitary state" - PM** (R. Hashan) Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa said that top priority would be given to Buddhism under a system of unitary rule. He added that other religions would also be protected. He added that harmony among all communities would be ensured.<sup>158</sup>

**Petitions on cremation of COVID-19 victims to be taken up in September** (M.F.M. Fazeer) The Supreme Court (SC) has decided to take up the 12 fundamental rights (FR) petitions filed in the SC challenging the gazette notification stipulating that a Covid-19-related death must be cremated within 24 hours in September 9, 2020.<sup>159</sup>

**President Gotabaya Rajapaksa is not president only for the Buddhists - Janakan** Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) candidate Dr. V. Janakan said that President Gotabaya Rajapaksa is not president for Buddhists alone. He added that Rajapaksa should realise that he is the president for all communities. He further added that the Tamil community is now forced to fight against authoritarian rule that creates a crisis based on religions in the country.<sup>160</sup>

**"PTF's aim is to create ethnic crisis" - Jeevaruban** The recent statement made by member of the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on archaeological heritage management in the Eastern Province Ven. Ellawala Medhananda Thera clearly exposes that an initiative has been formed to create ethnic crisis in the country.<sup>161</sup>

**"I was framed as ethnic extremist as I had pointed out fundamental extremism" - Rajapakshe** (R. Hashan) Former Minister Wijeyadasa Rajapakshe said that the subject minister of education of the Yahapalana government did not consider Buddhist archaeological sites as he had enmity with Buddhist monks.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> *Virakesari*, July 13, p. 10

<sup>157</sup> *Virakesari*, July 13, p. 15

<sup>158</sup> *Virakesari*, July 14, p. 2

<sup>159</sup> *Virakesari*, July 14, p. 2

<sup>160</sup> *Virakesari*, July 15, p. 7.

<sup>161</sup> *Virakesari*, July 17, p. 13.

<sup>162</sup> *Virakesari*, July 21, p. 3.

**"Committee appointed by PM a waste of time"- Ven. Sobitha Thera** (R. Hashan) Ven. Omalpe Sobitha Thera said that archaeological sites have been systematically destroyed, and therefore, the Department of Archaeology should be brought under the Ministry of Defence.<sup>163</sup>

**"Good lesson should be taught to the government and the chauvinists" - Bathiudeen** Leader of the All Ceylon Makkal Congress (ACMC) Rishad Bathiudeen said that false allegations have been levelled against him and his brother on Easter Sunday attacks. He added that how the government had acted over the burial of Muslim Janazas of the Covid-19 victims cannot be accepted.<sup>164</sup>

**Gnanasara Thera complains to HRC against Facebook** (M. Manochthra) A Sinhala nationalist monk, Leader of the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) Ven. Gnanasara Thera lodged a complaint with Sri Lanka's Human Rights Commission (HRC), as his account had been blocked on Facebook due to complaints of racism.<sup>165</sup>

**"The Buddhists now claim King Ravana" - Premachandran alleges** Tamil People's National Alliance (TPNA) candidate Suresh Premachandran alleged that the Buddhists now claim the Tamil Hindu King Ravana. He added that the history of the Tamils in the country is 3,000 years long. He added that before Prince Vijaya arrived in Sri Lanka, there had been five Hindu Temples.<sup>166</sup>

**Petition failed at SC on 33 monks murder** A petition failed at the Supreme Court on the murder of 33 including 31 Buddhist monks at Arandalawa. The petition seeks for an investigation to be carried out and culprits be punished.<sup>167</sup>

**"Story of Ravana's rule is a myth" - Medhanand Thera** Member of the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on archaeological heritage management in the Eastern Province Ven. Ellawala Mahananda Thera stated that the story of the rule of King Ravana in Sri Lanka is a myth. He added that there is no evidence to prove the claim made by some people.<sup>168</sup>

**"99 percent of archaeological sites belong to Buddhism" - Mahananda Thera** Member of the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on archaeological heritage management in the Eastern Province Ven. Ellawala Medhananda Thera said that 99 percent of the archaeological sites in the North and East belong to Buddhism. He added that there is no evidence to prove that the regions are native places of the Tamils.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> *Virakesari*, July 21, p. 3.

<sup>164</sup> *Virakesari*, July 21, p. 11.

<sup>165</sup> *Virakesari*, July 23, p. 2.

<sup>166</sup> *Uthayan*, July 1, p. 2

<sup>167</sup> *Uthayan*, July 1, p. 2

<sup>168</sup> *Uthayan*, July 2, p. 20

<sup>169</sup> *Uthayan*, July 3, p. FP

**Foundation stone placed at an archaeological site in Chavakachcheri** A foundation stone was placed at an archaeological site where a Temple of Lord Siva existed. The temple is believed to have been demolished by the Portuguese.<sup>170</sup>

**Security for churches in Vavuniya** Security tightened around the churches in Vavuniya following a tip of bomb threat received by the security forces, the police said. The intelligence unit urged the authorities to strengthen security of places of worship.<sup>171</sup>

**"Koneswaram Temple was built on Gokanna Viharaya"- Methananda Thera.** Member of the Member of the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on archaeological heritage management in the Eastern Province Ven. Ellawala Medhananda Thera stated that that a Buddhist Temple named Gokanna Viharaya, built by King Mahasen, was located at the site where the Koneswaram Temple now stands. "Invading armies from South India destroyed this temple, and built a Hindu Kovil on top of it," he claimed. But the Tamil people consider this preposterous. They believe it is of the Ramayana era and has been in concrete from since the 7<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>172</sup>

**"Nallur Temple too is ours" - Methananda Thera** Member of the Member of the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on archaeological heritage management in the Eastern Province Ven. Ellawala Medhananda Thera stated that the Nallur Temple was built by a Sinhala King called Chapumal Kumara. He added that they do not claim the Nallur Temple as there has been close relationship between Hinduism and Buddhism.<sup>173</sup>

**"It is not important whether Ravana is Tamil or Sinhalese'he was Srilankan"- Ravanabalaya** General Secretary of the hard-line organisation Ravana Balaya Ven. Iththaekande Saddhatissa Thera said that it is not important whether King Ravana was a Tamil or Sinhalese, but that he was a Sri Lankan. Meanwhile, Member of the Member of the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on archaeological heritage management in the Eastern Province Ven. Ellawala Medhananda Thera stated that the story of King Ravana a myth.<sup>174</sup>

**"King Ravana was a devotee of Lord Shiva" - Hindu Maha Sabha** The Hindu Maha Sabha condemned the statement made by Member of the Member of the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on archaeological heritage management in the Eastern Province Ven. Ellawala Medhananda Thera stating that a Buddhist Temple Gokanna Viharaya, built by King Mahasen, was located at the site where the Koneswaram Temple now stands. It added that the Hindus are worried about the Thera's statement.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> *Uthayan*, July 3, p. 12

<sup>171</sup> *Uthayan*, July 8, p. 6

<sup>172</sup> *Uthayan*, July 8, p. FP

<sup>173</sup> *Uthayan*, July 9, p. FP

<sup>174</sup> *Uthayan*, July 9, p. 3

<sup>175</sup> *Uthayan*, July 9, p. 3

**"I will speak to president on the controversial statement of Medhananda Thera" - Ramanathan** (R. Hashan) Former SLFP MP Angajan Ramanathan said that he would speak to President Gotabaya Rajapaksa on the controversial statement made by Member of the Member of the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on archaeological heritage management in the Eastern Province Ven. Ellawala Medhananda Thera who stated that the Koneswaram Temple was built on a Buddhist temple named "Gokanna Viharaya".<sup>176</sup>

**"I will resolve the issues faced by Hindu temples" - Ananthakumar** UNP Ratnapura District Candidate S. Ananthakumar stated that he would resolve the problems faced by Hindu temples.<sup>177</sup>

**"India should intervene to stop Sinhala Buddhist invasion" - Sathiyalingam** Former Minister of the Northern Provincial Council P. Sathiyalingam said that India should intervene to stop the Sinhala Buddhist invasion in the North and East of Sri Lanka, as it is the motherland for Tamil and Hindu culture and is very closely connected to the Northern and Eastern culture. He added that minority communities were purposely excluded from the Presidential Task Force on archaeological sites in the East.<sup>178</sup>

**"I will take measure to ensure of trade without ethnic religious discrimination" - Rajapaksa** (R. Hashan) Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa promised that he would take measures to ensure trading activities without ethnic or religious discrimination.<sup>179</sup>

**Annual celebration of Neeraavi Pillaiyar Temple begins** (K. Kumanan) The annual feast celebration of the Neeraavi Pillaiyar Temple at Chemmalai in Mullaitivu District began. There had been a court case regarding the temple as a Buddhist temple was being built and a statue of Lord Buddha being placed at the temple premises.<sup>180</sup>

**Annual celebration of Neeraavi Pillaiyar Temple begins** (K. Kumanan) The annual feast celebration of the Neeraavi Pillaiyar Temple at Chemmalai in Mullaitivu District began. Meanwhile, police personnel and intelligence officials took photographs of the devotees and the Hindu priests in a way to threaten them. There had been court case regarding the temple as a Buddhist temple is being built and a statue of Lord Buddha being placed at the temple premises.<sup>181</sup>

**"Devananda renovated ruined Hindu temples and protected Hindus' identity" - Hindu priests** Hindu priests applauded that Minister Douglas Devananda had renovated the Hindu temples

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<sup>176</sup> *Virakesari*, July 10, p. 2

<sup>177</sup> *Virakesari*, July 11, p. 7

<sup>178</sup> *Virakesari*, July 11, p. 12

<sup>179</sup> *Virakesari*, July 24, front page

<sup>180</sup> *Virakesari*, July 24, p. 14

<sup>181</sup> *Virakesari*, July 25, p. 12

which had been ruined and damaged during the war and protected the identity of the Hindus.<sup>182</sup>

**“Religious practices which harm national integration stopped” – Ven. Rathana Thera (M.R.M. Waseem)** Former MP Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thera and General Secretary of the BBS Ven. Gnanasara Thera handed over a petition to the All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama stating that religious practices which harm national integrity should be stopped. They added that if the All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama failed to take action on the above, they would take action to prevent wearing of burqa niqab in public places.<sup>183</sup>

**“Hindu temples are endangered due to the PTF” - Thurairajasingam** Secretary of the Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi (ITAK) K. Thurairajasingam stated that the Hindu temples in the Eastern Province are in danger of extinction due the establishment of the Presidential Task Force on archaeological sites.<sup>184</sup>

**“Buddhist monk looking for Tamil votes is funny”- Uthayakumar** TNA Batticaloa District Candidate M. Uthayakumar stated that a Buddhist monk who had troubled the Tamil people and state officials looking for votes from the Tamil people looks odd. He added that if a Buddhist monk wanted to win, he should ask for votes from the Sinhalese people.<sup>185</sup>

**Foremost place for Buddhism under the unitary rule of Rajapaksas** Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa stated that under his government, foremost place would be given to Buddhism and other religions would also be protected.<sup>186</sup>

**“I will not hesitate to kill those who are against Buddhism”- Mervin Silva** Former minister Mervin Silva stated that he would not hesitate to kill those who are against Buddhism and engage in terrorist activities.<sup>187</sup>

**“Rama was Muslim Nabi; Ravana was Muslim king” - Ulama President** President of the All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama (ACJU) Mufti M.I.M. Rizwehas made a controversial statement. He said that Lord Rama was a Nabi of Islam and King Ravana was a Muslim King who ruled Sri Lanka in the past. He added that the Trincomalee Koneswaram Temple belongs to the Muslims.<sup>188</sup>

**Buddha will rise from every pit, under the guise of archaeology”- ITAK Secretary** Secretary of the Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi (ITAK) K. Thurairajasingam stated that Lord Buddha would rise

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<sup>182</sup> *Virakesari*, July 27, p. 13

<sup>183</sup> *Virakesari*, July 28, p. 8

<sup>184</sup> *Virakesari*, July 28, p. 15

<sup>185</sup> *Virakesari*, July 31, p. 19

<sup>186</sup> *Uthayan*, July 14, front page

<sup>187</sup> *Uthayan*, July 16, p. 4

<sup>188</sup> *Uthayan*, July 16, p. 8

from every pit that is dug under the guise of archaeology in the Eastern Province. He added that at every pit, a Buddhist temple would be built.<sup>189</sup>

**"Sri Lanka is a Buddhist country; government can establish army camps anywhere in the country" - CWC Secretary** Financial Secretary of the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) and SLPP candidate M. Rameshwaran said that Sri Lanka is a Buddhist country and therefore, the government could establish army camps anywhere in the country.<sup>190</sup>

**Rajapaksa orders to allow 500 devotees at Nallur Temple** Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa has ordered authorities to allow 500 devotees to the Nallur Temple for the annual feast.<sup>191</sup>

**"I will not use my Cardinal post for political purpose" - Cardinal Ranjith** Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith has urged political parties not to misuse his name and photographs during Sri Lanka's election campaign. "In this election context, my name is being quoted for the benefit of political parties and the postings are very unfair," Cardinal Ranjith told media in Colombo on Oct. 3.<sup>192</sup>

**"If the Tamils demand a separate state, a river of blood will flow in the North and East" - Buddhist monk** Samashti (federalism) means division, a separate country. If the Tamils demand it again, only blood will flow in the north and east. General Secretary of the Bodu Bala Sena Ven. Galagodaaththe Gnanasara Thera, General Secretary of the Ravana Palaya Organization Ven. Ithanande Sugatha Thera and President of the National Council of Buddhist Intellectuals Ven. Omalpe Sobitha Thera jointly stated that Tamils should accept the solution offered by the government and remain silent. The Tamil National Alliance (TNA) released its election manifesto the day before yesterday. It states that the solution is autonomy based in unitary rule.<sup>193</sup>

**"If the Tamils follow violence, the counter attack will be the same" – Ven. Omalpe Sobitha Thera** President of the National Council of Buddhist Intellectuals Omalpe Sobitha Thera stated that if the Tamils were attacked during the July 1983 violence, it was because the LTTE had attacked the military personnel who served the country. He added that if the way of the Tamils is violence, the counterattack of the Sinhalese would also be the same. July violence is the best example of this, he added.<sup>194</sup>

**"Sri Lanka is a Buddhist country; Tamils live with what we had offer to them" - Rajapaksa faction** SLPP candidate of the PHU Madumadawa Aravinda said that Sri Lanka is a Sinhala Buddhist

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<sup>189</sup> *Uthayan*, July 17, p. 6

<sup>190</sup> *Uthayan*, July 18, p. 8

<sup>191</sup> *Uthayan*, July 19, front page.

<sup>192</sup> *Uthayan*, July 19, p. 2.

<sup>193</sup> *Uthayan*, July 20, front page.

<sup>194</sup> *Uthayan*, July 23, p. FP

country. The Sinhalese have offered the Tamils, Muslims and Catholics to live on the island. He alleged that the Sinhalese cannot buy a piece of land in Jaffna now.<sup>195</sup>

**Maha Sanga calls on president to transfer cases related to archaeological sites to Colombo** Maha Sanga calls on president to transfer cases related to archaeological sites to Colombo from North and East.<sup>196</sup>

**"Vote for the TNA to control the arrogance of the monks" - Saravanapavan** Tamil National Alliance (TNA) candidate E. Saravanapavan stated that the hate speech and arrogance of Buddhist monks have increased in the country. He called on the Tamil people to vote for the TNA to control the arrogance of the monks and ensure the continued existence of Tamils in the country.<sup>197</sup>

**"Sara converted to Islam forcefully" - Mother claims** Rasarathinam Kavitha, mother of Easter Sunday attack suspect Pulasthini alias Sara testified before the commission of inquiry that she had been converted to Islam forcefully.<sup>198</sup>

**Research summit on Hindu culture in Sri Lanka** The Department of Hindu Religious Affairs commenced the annual research summit on Hindu culture. It has sought articles from writers to submit on these topics.<sup>199</sup>

**Intelligence official linked to Islamist terrorists** A retired intelligence official maintained links with Islamist terrorists after his retirement, a state intelligence official who was involved in the investigation said.<sup>200</sup>

**"This country belongs to the Tamils" - Sanakkiyan** Tamil National Alliance (TNA) candidate R. Sanakiyan stated that he would not accept that Sri Lanka belongs to the Sinhala-Buddhists. He added that the country belongs to the Tamils.<sup>201</sup>

**"Independent group contested to protect Saivism" - Sivasenai Leader Sachithanatham** President of the Sivasenai organization Maravanpulavu Sachithanatham stated that Tamil National Saivite People's Party was contesting the general election in order to protect Saivism. He added that the Sivasenai members are behind the party. He added that he believed that 169,000 Saivites votes would be cast for the party.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> *Uthayan*, July 24, front page

<sup>196</sup> *Uthayan*, July 25, p. 26

<sup>197</sup> *Uthayan*, July 26, p. 2

<sup>198</sup> *Uthayan*, July 26, p. 4

<sup>199</sup> *Uthayan*, July 27, p. 7

<sup>200</sup> *Uthayan*, July 27, p. 8

<sup>201</sup> *Uthayan*, July 27, p. 10

<sup>202</sup> *Uthayan*, July 30, p. 11



**"No room for devolution of powers" - Ravana Balaya** General Secretary of the Ravana Balaya Ven. Ittekande Saddhatissa Thera said that they would not allow devolution of powers for the Tamils in the North. He added that they only need to provide basic needs for the Tamils.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> *Uthayan*, July 31, p. 2