



UNDERSTANDING PRESS COVERAGE ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

#MINORMATTERS

PERIOD COVERED : SEPTEMBER 2020

INTRODUCTION

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

This report is the 17th 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 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.

¹ 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 [Last accessed 11 December 2018].

² 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].

³ 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].

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

⁵ 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;⁶
- ✦ The freedom not to be discriminated against or to suffer any disability on the grounds of religion;⁷
- ✦ 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;⁸ and
- ✦ The freedom to be entitled to manifest one's religion or belief in worship, observance, practice or teaching.⁹

Press reports on religious freedom that appeared during September 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.

⁶ Article 10 of the Sri Lanka Constitution.

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

⁸ Article 12 (3) of the Sri Lanka Constitution.

⁹ 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 September 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:¹⁰

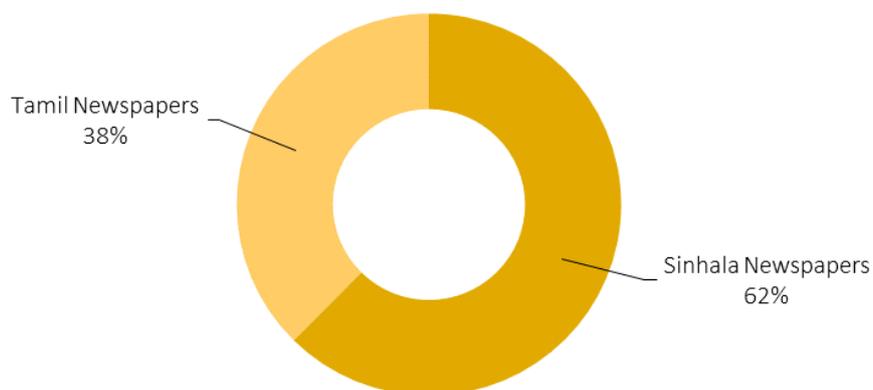
- ✦ Articles that referred to instances of physical violence that were religiously motivated, or targeted religious communities, figures or sites;
- ✦ Articles that referred to or contained speech prompting physical violence or threatening remarks targeted at religious communities, leaders or institutions;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

¹⁰ NB: the aforementioned list is only illustrative and not exhaustive.

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

Overview

Percentage of Articles by Language

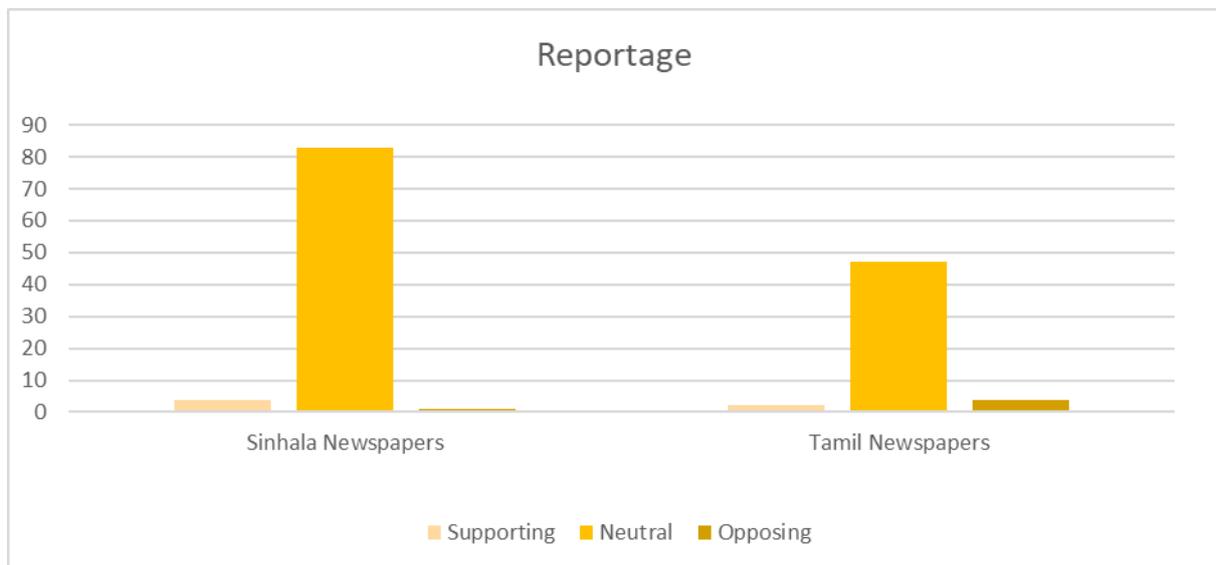
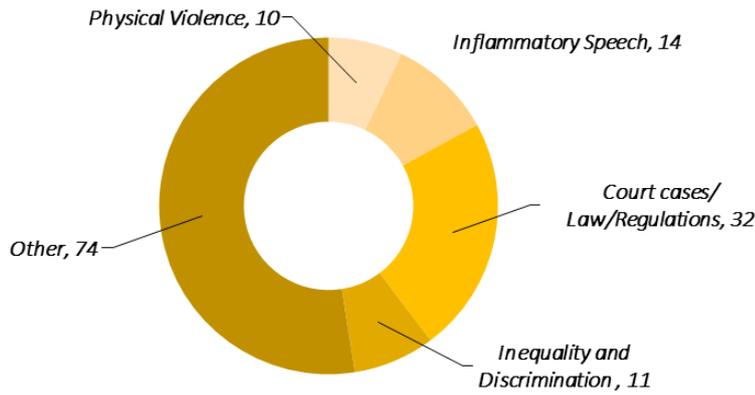


In September 2020, the Sinhala and Tamil newspapers monitored carried a total of 141 articles relating to religious freedom. Out of these, 62 per cent (88 articles) were carried in the Sinhala newspapers. Meanwhile, Tamil newspapers accounted for 38 per cent (53 articles) of the coverage.

Religious freedom was discussed under the following five themes:

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

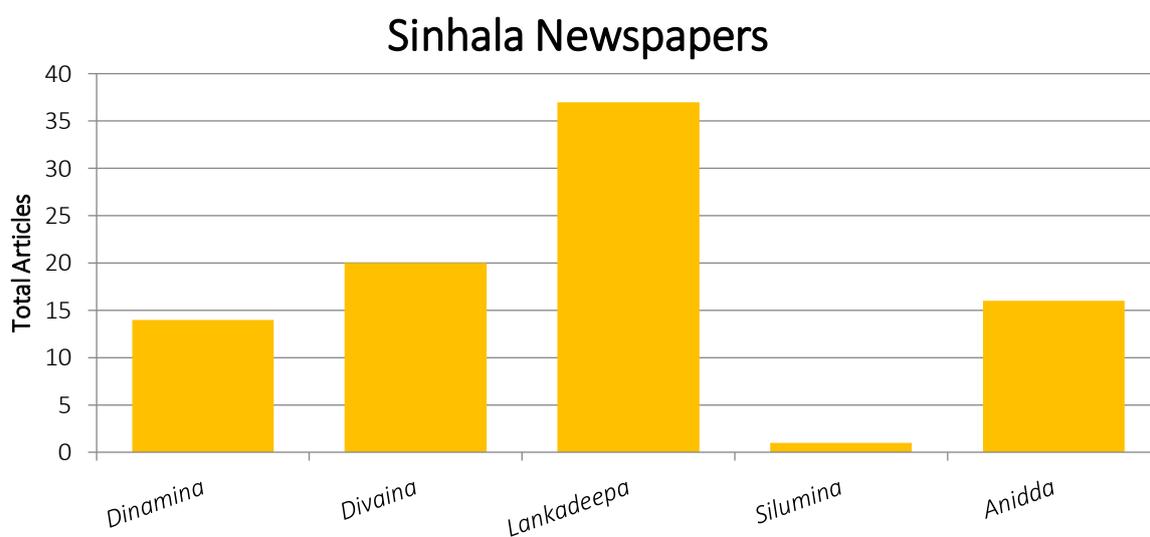
Number of articles pertaining to religious freedom by theme



- ✦ Of the 88 articles in the Sinhala newspapers, one article supported religious freedom, 83 articles were neutral, and four articles opposed religious freedom.
- ✦ Of the 53 articles in the Tamil newspapers, four articles supported religious freedom, 47 articles were neutral, and two articles opposed religious freedom.

Coverage in Sinhala newspapers

Sinhala Newspapers	No. of Articles	Reportage		
		Supporting	Neutral	Opposing
<i>Dinamina</i>	14	0	12	2
<i>Divaina</i>	20	0	19	1
<i>Lankadeepa</i>	37	0	36	1
<i>Silumina</i>	1	0	1	0
Anidda	16	1	15	0
Total	88	1	83	4



The Sinhala press featured 88 articles that had a bearing on religious freedom. One article supported religious freedom, 83 articles were neutral, and four articles opposed religious freedom.

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

- ✦ A feature article states that the Easter attacks were a blow that struck national Buddhist-Muslim relations. It adds it seemed that the attack was a confirmation of the jihadist influences that the Bodu Bala Sena claimed was in the country. However, it also served as fuel to ignite groups of young Buddhists to counterattack, which led to Muslims being targeted and attacked. The feature is critical of mainstream media and social media channels that contributed to the propagation of anti-Muslim agendas, and of security forces for failing to contain the situation. The writer goes on to state that these attacks cannot be allowed to fade into history. The article explains that after the

end of the civil war, Muslims were painted as the 'new enemy' and the Easter attacks contributed towards anti-Muslim rhetoric and fear of Muslims.¹¹

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

- ✦ An article reported that at a meeting with the commission investigating the Easter Sunday attacks, Ven. Galagodaaththe Gnanasara Thera remarked that Muslim separatism started in Sri Lanka at the time it was a colony of the British and that "normal" Muslims have to take the bad reputation that Wahhabis give them.¹²
- ✦ An article stated that Ven. Gnanasara Thera told the commission investigating the Easter Sunday attacks that with the establishment of the Saudi embassy in Sri Lanka, Wahhabism was also established in the country, and when Wahhabis gained control of the All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama, Muslim extremism started to spread in society. He added that the process of making something halal is problematic. He also accused the Tablighi Jamath organisation of destroying several Buddhist statues and also claimed that the Kingsbury Hotel bomber was a member of the organisation. Meanwhile, his interviewer stated that the organisation is one of peace.¹³
- ✦ An article reported that former senior deputy chief of police of the Northern District told the commission investigating the Easter Sunday attacks that the 'likes of' Rishad Bathiudeen, M.L.A.M. Hizbullah and Athaulla were working with Muslim extremist groups such as Al-Qaeda and jihadist groups.¹⁴
- ✦ An article reported that Ven. Munghene Mettharama Thera stated that Islamic extremism is far more dangerous than Eelam extremism, and if nothing is done now to stop its spread, then the country could be in great danger in the future.¹⁵

¹¹ *Anidda*, September 6, p. 10.

¹² *Dinamina*, September 11, p. 21.

¹³ *Dinamina*, September 12, p. 11.

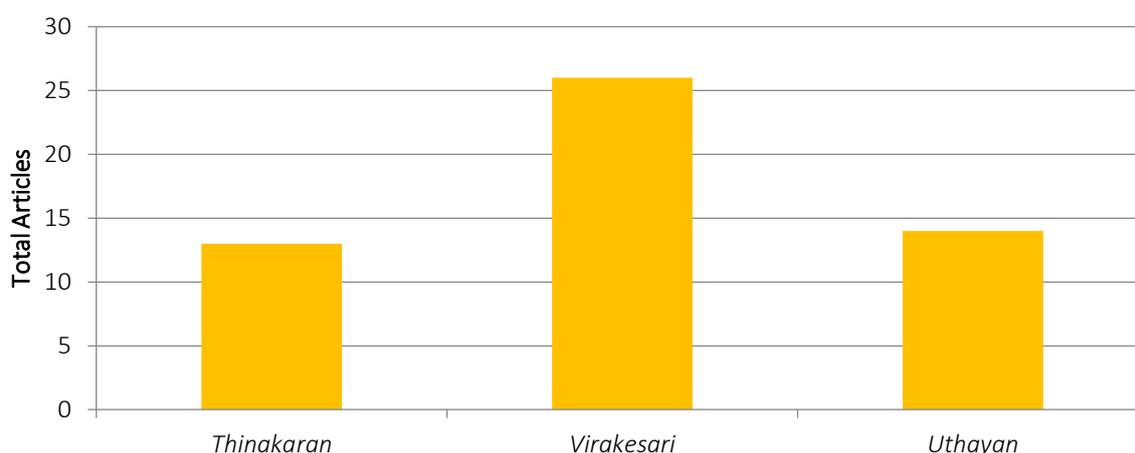
¹⁴ *Lankadeepa*, September 14, p. 12.

¹⁵ *Divaina*, September 28, p. 2.

Coverage in Tamil newspapers

Tamil Newspapers	No. of Articles	Reportage		
		Supporting	Neutral	Opposing
<i>Thinakaran</i>	13	1	12	0
<i>Virakesari</i>	26	3	22	1
<i>Uthayan</i>	14	0	13	1
Total	53	4	47	2

Tamil Newspapers



The Tamil press featured 53 articles that had a bearing on religious freedom. Four articles supported religious freedom, 47 were neutral and two articles opposed religious freedom.

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

- ✦ A feature stated that even though there are 20 Muslim MPs in parliament, their politics have been weakened and now the 'Buddhist racist organisations' are the decision-makers of the government. It criticised anti-Muslim and anti-Islam campaigns being carried out by Buddhist 'racists' who had received a two-thirds majority with the votes of the Buddhists. It also criticised 'racist Buddhist monks' for being against cow slaughter in the country and states that Muslims should not be trapped in a plan implemented by racist Buddhists.¹⁶
- ✦ News reports stated that Addalaichenai in the Ampara District had organised an all-religious demonstration to mark World Peace Day. The reports added that the

¹⁶ *Virakesari*, September 13, p. 1.

demonstration was organised to emphasise peace, co-existence and reconciliation among the religious communities.¹⁷

The **two articles that opposed religious freedom** are as follows:

- ✦ An article reported that Spokesperson of the Tamil People's National Alliance (TPNA) Suresh Premachandran believed that the threats, warnings and condemnations of Leader of the TMTK C.V. Wigneswaran's parliament speech by Sinhala-Buddhist 'racists' should be considered a threat for all Tamils.¹⁸
- ✦ An article that noted the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) has taken steps to review the proposed 20th Amendment to the Constitution after concerns escalated among the SLPP and the constituent parties of the SLPP. It reported that a prominent Tamil politician claimed the Maha Sangha might get scared that Buddhist monks may have to bow before military leaders if Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism is dominated by the military, and that is why certain Buddhist monks have expressed concerns over 20A. It added that Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists might wish that rights of Tamils and Muslims are rejected.¹⁹

¹⁷ *Virakesari*, September 20, p. 6; *Thinakaran*, September 21, p. 11; *Virakesari*, September 22, p. 15.

¹⁸ *Uthayan*, September 3, p. 4.

¹⁹ *Virakesari*, September 18, p. 4



QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

The 141 articles monitored during the month of September 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.

Two overarching issues were selected for the month of September: 1) The proposed ban on cattle slaughter, and 2) the actions of Ven. Ampitiye Sumanarathana Thera.

The majority of reportage on this issue falls under the themes of *court cases, laws and regulations* and *physical violence.*

Overarching themes	Events/ Issues
Court cases, laws and regulations	Proposed ban on cattle slaughter
Physical violence	Actions of Ven. Ampitiye Sumanarathana Thera

An issue that received significant traction in the Sinhala and Tamil press in September 2020 was the findings of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into the Easter Sunday attacks that took place in April 2019. However, press discourse on this issue focused primarily on the political and administrative elements of the investigations, and not the religious elements. Therefore, this section will only focus on an analysis of reportage on the two given topics.

Court cases, laws and regulations

The Proposed Ban on Cattle Slaughter

The above theme accounts for all reportage related to court cases, laws and regulations that promote or restrict religious freedom. In the monitoring period, reporting on the proposed ban on cattle slaughter fell under this theme.

On September 8, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa introduced a proposal to ban the slaughter of cattle in the country. On September 29, the cabinet granted approval to implement the proposal. Reporting on this issue in the Sinhala and Tamil press was polarised. This report aims to unpack the reporting on and the response to this issue with a view to the ethno-religious context in Sri Lanka.

The Prime Minister and government were praised by some of the mainstream Sinhala press and some of the Buddhist clergy for taking this measure to ban the slaughter of cattle. An editorial in *Lankadeepa* asserted that the ban is 'one of the greatest things that Mahinda Rajapaksa has done for this country.'²⁰ This positive response can be analysed through two lenses: 1) a religious and cultural lens, and 2) an anti-colonial lens.

1) Religious and cultural lens

The positive response to the proposed ban reflects certain religious and cultural ideologies of the Sinhala-Buddhist community. Buddhism views all sentient beings as equal and does not preach prioritisation of cows. However, in Sri Lanka, some elements of religious and cultural ideology have been influenced by certain Hindu beliefs. The deep regard for cattle held by the Buddhist population is likely a result of this influence. Both in Sri Lanka and across India, the cow is venerated by the Hindu community for socio-cultural, ethno-political and religious reasons.²¹ Positive Buddhist sentiment toward cows is likely similarly motivated.

For example, the boiling of milk plays a vital role in the celebration of sacred or auspicious events for both Tamil-Hindus and Sinhala-Buddhists in Sri Lanka. The milk represents the celebration of plentifulness.²² The cow is seen as a source for this plentifulness and is therefore celebrated as well.

Similarly, the cow is sometimes referred to as 'Kiri Amma', which loosely translates to 'milk mother' and is used to refer to one's grandmother. This suggests that the level of respect afforded to one's elders can be extended to the cow.²³ Kiri Amma is also "isomorphic with the

²⁰ *Lankadeepa*, September 13, p. 4.

²¹ Stewart, J. J. (2013). *Cow protection in Sinhala Buddhist Sri Lanka*. *Journal of the Oriental Society of Australia*, p. 23.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ See *The Media Analysis*, Vol.10, #40.

goddess Pattini²⁴, who is worshipped by both Buddhists and Hindus in Sri Lanka. In the past, anti-slaughter campaigns have used the imagery of Kiri Amma as a symbol to strengthen their cause.²⁵ 'Kiri Amma' was also the focus of a popular song by the popular singer Nihal Nelson.²⁶ The song, which depicted the cow as a provider of nutrition for children, encourages one to treat the cow how one would treat their own mother, showing the level of reverence associated with cows in Sri Lanka.

The socio-economic and agricultural value of cows also likely contribute to the notion of cows being seen as a 'treasured resource' (in Sinhala, 'gawa sampatha').²⁷ Cows provide nutrition as well as fertiliser and labour for agriculture. These contributions to society bolster the veneration of cows among the Sinhala-Buddhist majority in the country.

This mindset towards cows explains why there have been several demands over the last several years by Buddhist leaders and monks to introduce a ban on slaughter.²⁸ This in turn explains why the prime minister's decision to propose a ban was seen as a moral and positive choice.

2) Anti-colonial lens

The support for the proposed ban can also be interpreted through an anti-colonial lens. The slaughter and consumption of animals, particularly of beef, is perceived to be a practice introduced by Christians and colonial rulers. Over 400 years of colonial rule in Sri Lanka resulted in the practice of eating beef spreading among the population.

Pushback against the slaughter of cows and its history can be traced back to Anagarika Dharmapala's campaign against the consumption of beef in late colonial history. Anagarika Dharmapala was a leader in Sri Lanka's Buddhist revival and is seen as a key figure in Sri Lanka's Buddhist ideological history. One of Dharmapala's positions within his broader Buddhist revivalist campaign was the discouraging of the consumption of beef, that he framed as a colonial practice. Current reporting on the ban invoked Dharmapala's name to reiterate the ban's association with Buddhist morality and ideals.²⁹ In this context, the prime minister's proposed ban on beef was seen as a way of 'disassociating from such "immoral" colonial practices'.³⁰

Overall, the Tamil press carried more reporting on this topic than the Sinhala press did. In contrast to the positive portrayal in the mainstream Sinhala media, the Tamil press and some

²⁴ Obeyesekere, G. (1984). *Cult of the goddess Pattini*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 293–94.

²⁵ Stewart, J. J. (2013). *Cow protection in Sinhala Buddhist Sri Lanka*. Journal of the Oriental Society of Australia, p. 32.

²⁶ For the lyrics, please see: https://www.lklyrics.com/songs/nihal_nelson/kiri_dunne_daruwantai

²⁷ See *The Media Analysis*, Vol.10, #40.

²⁸ *The Citizen*, September 10, available at: <https://www.thecitizen.in/index.php/en/NewsDetail/index/6/19341/The-Intricacies-of-a-Cow-Slaughter-Ban-in-Sri-Lanka->

²⁹ *Mawbima*, September 14, p.10.

³⁰ See *The Media Analysis*, Vol.10, #40.

of the alternative Sinhala press strongly criticised the move to ban cattle slaughter.³¹ This criticism can be viewed through two lenses: 1) an ethno-religious lens, and 2) an economic lens.

1) Ethno-religious lens

One of the primary criticisms of the proposed ban on cattle slaughter was connected to the role played by the Muslim community in the beef industry. Muslim people are perceived as the largest producers and consumers of beef in the country. In this context, the proposal was perceived as harmful to or 'targeting Muslims'.³² Several articles noted that this ban could have a disproportionate impact on the economic activities of Muslims.³³

Historically, cow protectionism in Sri Lanka has been tied to asserting Sinhala-Buddhist identity in the face of perceived challenges from contrasting cultures, such as colonial culture as explained above. Similar to how cow protectionism in India is a way of expressing Hindu identity in the face of non-Hindu Indians—particularly Muslims,³⁴ it has been the same for Sinhala-Buddhists in Sri Lanka. This too can be traced back to the Buddhist revivalist movement. For example, the term 'gawa-mas'/'geri-mas' (cow meat), was used during the movement to ward people off of eating it. However, in the present, this same term is used when referring to Muslims in a derogatory manner³⁵ This history of anti-Muslim sentiment tied to cow protectionism in Sri Lanka may add legitimacy to the criticisms put forward by the Tamil and alternative Sinhala press.

The anti-Muslim element of this ban is further evidenced by the halal abolitionist movements of recent years. Positive reporting on the ban connected it to halal practices of slaughter, framing halal methods as inhumane and 'problematic'.³⁶ James Stewart suggests that the primary 'difference between halal abolitionist groups in particular and cow protectionism in general is that the former is usually concerned mainly with vilifying Muslims while the latter is a merely a vehicle for that end [of vilification].'³⁷ However, notably, only one article in the Sinhala press connected praise of the ban to a criticism of halal practices.

Meanwhile, criticism of the ban also noted that if the reason for the ban was to follow Buddhist principles of not harming sentient beings, the ban should apply to the slaughter of all animals and not just cows.³⁸ An article noted that while monks have protested the slaughter of cattle,

³¹ *Uthayan*, September 10, p. 5; *Virakesari*, September 13, p. 1; *Virakesari*, September 13, Front Page; *Virakesari*, September 20, p. 2A; *Anidda*, September 27, p. 4.

³² *Uthayan*, September 10, p. 5; *Virakesari*, September 13, p. 1; *Virakesari*, September 13, p. 8; *Anidda*, September 27, p. 4.

³³ *Uthayan*, September 10, p. 5; *Virakesari*, September 20, p. 2A.

³⁴ Freitag, S.B. (1980) *Sacred Symbols as Mobilizing Ideology: The North Indian Search for a "Hindu" Community*. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22, no. 4: 607, 610.

³⁵ See *The Media Analysis*, Vol.10, #40.

³⁶ *Dinamina*, September 12, p. 11.

³⁷ Stewart, J. J. (2013). *Cow protection in Sinhala Buddhist Sri Lanka*. *Journal of the Oriental Society of Australia*, p. 42

³⁸ *Ravaya*, September 20, p.12.

'none have spoken of the killing of goats or pigs in the country'.³⁹ Criticisms also noted that beef would still be imported into the country. This criticism seemed to suggest that justifying the ban on the basis of religious ideology was hypocritical.

2) Economic lens

The ban was also criticised in the Tamil and alternative press for its potential negative economic impact.⁴⁰ To justify its decision, the government claimed that cattle available for traditional farming purposes are “insufficient due to the rise of cattle slaughter” and that it impeded the dairy industry.⁴¹ However, some articles raised the question of what would happen to bulls and older cows who would not be able to contribute to the dairy industry.⁴² These animals would likely be a financial burden for their owners to maintain. As stated above, criticisms also noted the impact on sellers of beef, particularly Muslims. By highlighting the burden on dairy farmers and beef sellers alike, the Tamil press assessed the ban to be a “stupid idea.”⁴³

Physical violence

Actions of Ven. Ampitiye Sumanarathana Thera

On September 21, Ven. Ampitiye Sumanarathana Thera, a monk in Batticaloa, who has been reported in media for assault in the past⁴⁴ threatened and attempted to assault a government official of the Department of Archaeology. The Thera threatened the official with physical violence, stating that the department's delay to demarcate a particular tract of land has resulted in part of the land being acquired for cultivation.⁴⁵ The response to this incident was in line with previous trends in both the Tamil and Sinhala press.

This incident was primarily covered in the Tamil press. Voices in the Tamil press strongly criticised the Thera for his actions and reported that he had been called before the Batticaloa Magistrate's Court.

Some reporting discussed the monk's actions in the context of his previous acts against minority parties.⁴⁶ His actions were seen as a reflection of Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinism in the

³⁹ *Virakesari*, September 13, p. 8.

⁴⁰ *Virakesari*, September 20, p. 2A.

⁴¹ *The Hindu*, September 29, available at: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/sri-lanka-bans-cattle-slaughter/article32726156.ece>

⁴² *Uthayan*, September 10, p. 5; *Virakesari*, September 13, p. 8.

⁴³ *Uthayan*, September 10, p. 5.

⁴⁴ *Colombo Gazette*, December 28, 2019, available at: <https://colombogazette.com/2019/12/28/video-of-controversial-monk-assaulting-man-goes-viral/>

⁴⁵ *Colombo Gazette*, September 22, available at: <https://colombogazette.com/2020/09/22/batticaloa-monk-threatens-government-officials/>

⁴⁶ *Virakesari*, September 24, p. 4; *Virakesari*, September 25, p. 15.

East.⁴⁷ The press reported on protests and calls for the government to take action against the Thera, noting that he had never faced consequences for any of his violent actions since 2013.⁴⁸

In the past, the Tamil press has strongly criticised the Department of Archaeology for its conservation activities in the East, in the belief that its activities and presence is leading to the forceful 'Buddhistisation' of the North.⁴⁹ In this context, it is noteworthy that the Tamil press chose to highlight the injustices to a member of the Department of Archaeology. However, the Tamil press' criticism may be understood by considering the intent behind the Thera's actions. Given that the Thera's intent was to accelerate the Department of Archaeology's actions in the East, Tamil press criticism of the incident falls in line with trends in previous reporting on archaeological activity.

Meanwhile, this incident received no direct coverage in the Sinhala press. The only article that mentioned Sumanarathana Thera supported what he had said about " the destruction of ancient archaeological and historical sites in Batticaloa" but made no mention of the Thera's assault of government officials.

This polarisation in reporting and the Thera's history of not being held accountable for his violent actions are indicative of the impunity afforded to the Buddhist clergy in Sri Lanka. It is in line with the state's inaction when handling instances of violence perpetrated by Buddhist monks in the past. As noted in the report *Inaction and Impunity: Incidents of religious violence targeting Christians, Muslims and Hindus, 2015 – 2019*, normal laws and constraints are often suspended for the benefit of the clergy, who are afforded exceptionalism.⁵⁰ Violence perpetrated by the clergy is often ignored or normalised. This is likely why the incident did not draw attention in the Sinhala press.

The historical lack of response and lack of Sinhala press reporting on this incident may point to institutional decay, which prompts institutional actors to appease majoritarian sentiments to the detriment of minority groups.⁵¹ Institutional decay is thought to be a result of Sinhala-Buddhist majoritarianism within these institutional structures of the state and media.

However, this does reflect a notable shift from press reporting in August, when members of the clergy did draw criticism from the press for internal conflict over political representation. This month's reporting indicates a shift back to the status quo. Overall, reporting on this issue in the Sinhala press is in line with past trends of impunity afforded to Buddhist clergy at the expense of minorities.

⁴⁷ *Virakesari*, September 24, p. 4; *Virakesari*, September 26, p. 14.

⁴⁸ *Virakesari*, September 25, p. 15.

⁴⁹ Please see Verité Research, *Report on Understanding press coverage on religious freedom for the month of May 2020* at <http://www.minormatters.org/en/media-pdfs> [last accessed 22 October 2020].

⁵⁰ Please see Verité Research, *Inaction and Impunity: Incidents of religious violence targeting Christians, Muslims and Hindus, 2015-2019*.

⁵¹ Gunatilleke, G. (2019). *The Structural Limits of Depoliticisation in Sri Lanka*, *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 108(6). p. 613-624.

CONCLUSION

This report was based on media reportage featured during the month of September 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 141 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., Court cases, laws and regulations, and physical violence. 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.

The qualitative analysis of press reporting on religious freedom focused on press commentary regarding the Prime Minister's proposed ban on cattle slaughter and the actions of Ven. Ampitiye Sumanarathana Thera.

Reporting on the ban showed a positive response from the mainstream Sinhala press that could be analysed through a religious and cultural lens and an anti-colonial lens. Reporting also showed a critical response from the Tamil press and the alternative Sinhala press that could similarly be analysed through an ethno-religious lens and an economic lens.

Reporting on the actions of Ven. Ampitiye Sumanarathana Thera against an official from the Department of Archaeology fell in line with pre-existing trends in the Sinhala and Tamil press. The Tamil press criticised the Thera's actions and the impunity afforded to him, as well as his efforts to further the perceived 'Buddhistisation' of the East through archaeological activity. The Sinhala press carried no reporting on the Thera's aggressive actions, and instead quoted his concerns over the delayed actions of the Department of Archaeology. This fell in line with previous trends of normalisation of violence committed by the clergy and the exceptionalism assigned to them.

RELATED REPORTING

Sinhala Press Reporting

Muslim student in Dhamma School given scholarship (Kalutara Correspondent). At a prize giving held to honour students in Dhamma school in the Kalutara district, a Muslim child was also given a special monetary scholarship. This student scored high marks in all subjects including Pali studies and Buddhism.⁵²

Doragamuwa Temple's accommodation house broken into and Rs. 83,000 stolen (J. A. L. Jayasinghe). Accommodation house of the Doragamuwa temple has been broken into, and Rs. 83,460 has been stolen. The police are looking into the matter.⁵³

Today, the law and truth have been bought for money, political gain and Wahhabism (Muditha Dayananda). A Muslim Mawlawi has told the presidential commission probing the Easter attacks that there is no article of translation available that teaches true Islam to people, and that translators from history put their own spin on the religion. He stated that everyone is influenced by Wahhabism, money and politics. He also said that there are 9 operating organisations spreading extremism and separatism through Wahhabism, and only 2 have been banned.⁵⁴

Islamic priest tells Easter attacks Commission: Hizbullah's university is teaching Wahhabism and must be immediately shut down (Subhashini Senanayake). An Islamic priest has told the commission probing the Easter attacks that former Governor M.L.A.M. Hizbullah's university in Batticaloa is teaching Wahhabism and must immediately be shut down. He says that this school could cause great hindrance to any efforts at unity in the country.⁵⁵

Maithri's decisions after the Easter attacks have led to the spread of extremism, says Muslim priest (Subhashini Senanayake). A Muslim priest told the presidential commission investigating the Easter attacks that former President Maithripala Sirisena took some moronic decisions after the Easter attacks that allowed for the spread of extremism through the rapid expansion and spreading of extremist organisations in the country. He says that Sirisena's decisions have led to a rapid spread of extremism, and that out of 9 organisations, only 2 extremist organisations have been banned in the country.⁵⁶

Two motions requesting witness statements from Presidential Commission probing Easter attacks denied (Ranjan Kotugampola and Thilini de Silva). Two motions filed at the Supreme

⁵² *Dinamina*, September 02, P. 11.

⁵³ *Lankadeepa*, September 03, P. 9.

⁵⁴ *Lankadeepa*, September 03, P. 12.

⁵⁵ *Dinamina*, September 03, Front Page.

⁵⁶ *Dinamina*, September 03, P. 2.

Court requesting witness statements that were given to the presidential commission probing the Easter attacks were denied by the Supreme Court judges.⁵⁷

Rauff Hakeem to meet commission probing Easter attacks today (Muditha Dayananda). Former Minister and current MP Rauff Hakeem is due to meet the presidential commission probing the Easter attacks and give his statement today.⁵⁸

An eleven person has been committee established to look into extremist messages in Islam textbooks (Subhashini Senanayake). Director of Muslim Religious and Cultural Affairs Department, Adam Bawa Mohammad Ashraf, notified the Presidential Commission investigating the Easter attacks that an eleven-member committee has been established to look into the alleged extremism and extremist views that are present in Islam textbooks that are being given to Muslim students in order to learn Islam. There was a question about the appropriateness of a grade 13 textbook asking students to read the teachings of Yusuf-al-Qaldari who is a known extremist Wahhabi leader who has supposedly made remarks and comments about suicide bombing and spoken against Allah - Ashraf replied that such material was not appropriate to be put in a textbook for students.⁵⁹

The Muslim Religious and Cultural Affairs Department has become politicized, and does not work according to any degree of measurement, says Director (Eric Gamini Jinapriya). Director of Muslim Religious and Cultural Affairs Department, Adam Bawa Mohammad Ashraf told the Presidential Commission investigating the Easter attacks that the department has become politicised, and that there are no checks and balances within the department. He stated that as at April 21, 2019, 2,534 Muslim mosques had been registered, and that there is no need to notify the department before making a mosque. 15 of these establishments had registered with the name "Thowheed" and 951 buildings were not registered. He also stated that there is no regulation or observation of sermons and teachings conducted in these mosques. He further stated that while all the teachings of Yusuf-al-Qaldari are not extremist in nature, it is inappropriate for these teachings to be featured in Islam textbooks for students, and that such conflicting statements should be removed from textbooks. He further accepted that the department headed by him has a certain responsibility towards ensuring national unity. In his statement, Ashraf elaborated further on the laws that govern the registering of mosques and the responsibilities that fall on individuals in the event a new mosque is built.⁶⁰

There was a clash in Ahangama over two Buddhist sects (Rekha Nilukshi Herath). A fight broke out between two temples belonging to two Buddhist sects in Ahangama. This situation further

⁵⁷ *Lankadeepa*, September 4, P. 2.

⁵⁸ *Lankadeepa*, September 4, P. 2.

⁵⁹ *Dinamina*, September 4, P. 2.

⁶⁰ *Divaina*, September 4, P. 7.

escalated into an altercation between a monk who was at the police station and a police officer.⁶¹

Have we forgotten the anti-Muslim attacks that happened after the Easter attacks (Lasantha de Silva)? The Easter attacks was a blow that struck the national Buddhist-Muslim relations. While it seemed that the attack was a confirmation of the Jihadist influences that the Bodu Bala Sena claimed were in the country, it also served as fuel to ignite groups of young Buddhists to counterattack. This led to Muslims being targeted and attacked. The mainstream media and social media channels also contributed to the propagation of anti-Muslim agendas, and it seemed that security forces failed to contain the situation. These attacks were not covered by a presidential commission or the government, but they cannot be allowed to fade into history. After the end of the civil war, Muslims were painted as the 'new enemy'. The Easter attacks contributed towards the anti-Muslim rhetoric and fear of Muslims. Mainstream media is to blame for the disunity among Sinhalese and Muslims in Sri Lanka as well. The article explains that Sinhalese and Muslim citizens lived in harmony for a long time until the anti-Muslim ideology made its way to Lanka with the return of Muslim youth who had gone to Saudi Arabia, Qatar etc. for work.⁶²

The problem with the security forces (Lasantha de Silva). With regards to the behaviour of the security forces during the Easter attack, one thing is made clear: that there is no understanding about non-Sinhalese culture. This was seen especially in the treatment of the Muslim woman's clothing preferences. Army personnel did not know Tamil, and Muslims had next to no trust in the forces. The anti-Muslim attacks were somewhat quelled only in the area where the Army General was Muslim.⁶³

Have we forgotten the anti-Muslim attacks that happened after the Easter attacks (Lasantha de Silva)? With the advent of Muslim extremist views, there were strong Sinhalese extremist views being developed. Certain youths were influenced by the likes of the 'Sinhale' movement, the Bodu Bala Sena and Mahason Balakaya, and turned to Buddhist extremism. The media portrayed all Muslims to be extremists. With time and outside influence, there came to be a distinction between 'old' and 'new' Muslims - those who live in harmony with Sinhalese were the 'old', and those with radicalised ideas were the 'new'.⁶⁴

Tamil restaurant (Udan Fernando). The writer elaborates on the "Sinhala Restaurant", "Saivar Kadeh" and "Muslim Kadeh" phenomena, pointing out that while these types of eateries are called by a certain racial group's name, that there is no discrimination with regard to who eats there. He then goes on to comment on the usual menu items that are available in these eateries, and metaphorises the political situation in the North, to a menu of a restaurant. He

⁶¹ *Anidda*, September 6, P. 2.

⁶² *Anidda*, September 6, P. 10.

⁶³ *Anidda*, September 6, P. 12.

⁶⁴ *Anidda*, September 6, P. 12.

points out that the TNA, which is usually the prize menu item, has faced a defeat at elections, which means that the serving portion is less. He also points out that the All Ceylon Tamil Congress has become the new party that citizens of the North turn to, perhaps because they are sick of the TNA's antics. He says that C. V. Wigneswaran is like a seasonal treat, that's not seen on the menu every day; he says that Wigneswaran, while having a long history in politics, only shows up close to an election and engages in performative politics. He also says that Douglas Devananda is essential to the political makeup of the country. He finally comments on Angajan Ramanathan, and remarks that it is unusual for someone representing a largely Sinhalese party (SLPP) to get into parliament from the North, and that the country is yet to see what he is capable of.⁶⁵

A new constitution that has identified the country's problems, is needed. The writer remarks that while the 20th Amendment has been approved by parliament and that it effectively repeals the 19th Amendment, there is a need in the country for a whole new constitution, as the law is to a country what a riverbank is to a river. The metaphor subscribes the law to be the essential aspect that keeps the country from running amuck, and therefore, the writer stresses, a new constitution needs to be brought in.⁶⁶

We will give the government some time to show us their work (Priyantha Kodippili). MP Mano Ganesan comments on the current status of governance in the country by saying that the opposition in parliament right now is the best opposition in Sri Lankan history. He further states that Sajith Premadasa is a great opposition leader who listens to reason and is willing to improve from past mistakes. He also said that Ranil Wickremesinghe had the chance to gracefully bow out of politics, but did not do so.⁶⁷

The Mahawamsa is not fiction: a response to Wigneswaran (Dhanu Wijeyeratne). MP C.V. Wigneswaran stated that he cannot trust the records of history when it comes to accuracy and that he is against certain facts that have been presented about the advent of the Tamil language and culture. Professor of History at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Nanda Dharmaratne, counteracts Wigneswaran by stating that history clearly shows how the Aryan clans made their way to Sri Lanka and how the Sinhalese nation was established with the advent of King Vijaya and that Buddhism was brought to the country right after the Buddha attained Nibbana. He states that there is physical evidence to back up these claims. He further says that while the Mahawamsa was written during the time of King Mahasen, it is more accurate when compared to the physical evidence.⁶⁸

Person suspected of publishing photo insulting to Buddhist clergy on social media, remanded (Asela Kuruluwansha). A person, who allegedly published a photo insulting the Buddhist clergy

⁶⁵ *Anidda*, September 6, P. 14.

⁶⁶ *Lankadeepa*, September 6, P. 4.

⁶⁷ *Lankadeepa*, September 6, P. 22.

⁶⁸ *Lankadeepa*, September 6, P. 24.

on social media, was arrested for the offense by police in Kandy. Further investigations are being conducted.⁶⁹

Will pressure the government about the rights of Tamil people, with India's help, says Wigneswaran in Kilinochchi (Dinasena Rathugamage). MP C. V. Wigneswaran stated in Kilinochchi that no matter the government's trajectory and decision making, he will use the help of India and his own energy to pressurise the government into giving Tamil people their rights and ownership of the North and East regions.⁷⁰

Antiques in the North facing inauspicious times. During the war the antiques and archaeological treasures in the North were protected, but after the war ended there came about a difficult and inauspicious time. After the war, sites and land that had historical significance were taken over by Tamils and used to build houses and kovils, which effectively destroyed their archaeological value. Now the situation has worsened, because people operate under the assumption that there is treasure buried at these sites and are therefore digging up these places, and destroying them in the process, in the hopes of finding said treasure. The election situation in the Wannu district was subject to much speculation and distrust, and therefore, the Election Commission says that the people will be adequately compensated in the next election. Further, Wigneswaran discusses his plans to bring in Indian support to pressurise the Lankan government into fulfilling the objectives of the Tamils.⁷¹

While we accepted Zahran's 2015 election proposals, we never signed for them, says Shibli Farooq (Muditha Dayananda). Member of the Muslim Congress Shibli Farooq stated that the National Thawheed Jamath had compiled a list of proposals for the 2015 general election by taking into account all the parties that were presenting themselves for the electoral race from the North during that time. He said that while the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress had accepted some of these proposals, they had never officially signed anything to that effect. He said that discussions were conducted with him and other prominent politicians with regard to these proposals. He also stated that the SLMC was against M.L.A.M. Hizbullah being given the parliamentary membership.⁷²

Future amendments to the Constitution need to be made to facilitate the preservation of the country's identity and historical continuation (Diana Udayanganee). The Archbishop of Colombo, Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, stated that whatever amendments and upgrades that are done to the constitution need to be done so that they preserve the identity of the country and

⁶⁹ *Dinamina*, September 7, P. 14.

⁷⁰ *Divaina*, September 7, P. 2.

⁷¹ *Divaina*, September 8, P. 11.

⁷² *Lankadeepa*, September 8, P. 12.

the history of the country, says Minister Wimal Weerawansa. Weerawansa also noted that the Cardinal is diligently observing the developments with regard to the country's development.⁷³

Zahran and Co. are not affiliated with ISIS; A different force is behind the Easter attacks and it cannot be revealed to the media, says Rauff Hakeem (Muditha Dayananda). Rauff Hakeem stated to the Presidential Commission probing the Easter attacks that Zahran Hashim's National Thawheed Jamath is not affiliated with ISIS and that the real force behind the attack cannot be revealed to the media. He stated that while the ISIS banner was waved during the fiasco, the terrorist organisation is not behind the Easter attacks. He also stated that Muslim leaders are afraid that the Muslim people in the country will take up arms and riot against the injustice they are suffering.⁷⁴

Nandi (1) - () - The Prime Minister informed the parliament that he plans to ban the slaughter of cattle for the purpose of obtaining meat. It could be that those who engage in cattle slaughter are rejoicing at the clause "for the purpose of obtaining meat", because they could use another excuse to justify the slaughter of cattle in the future and carry on. They may argue self-defence and say that the cow or bull was going to impale them with their horns, which is why they killed the animal. It seems that a "Nandi" (popular name for a cow) is held in high regard in India and Nepal as a hindu deity, and is said to be able to fulfil people's wishes. Even countries that ban the killing of cattle do not operate without cattle meat in the country.⁷⁵

Ven. Gnanasara Thera's Statement to the Easter attacks commission recorded by a Mawlawi (Subhashini Senanayake). The head of the commission probing the Easter Sunday attacks has ordered that official steps be taken against the Mawlawi that recorded the witness statement of Galagodaaththe Gnanasara Thera, made when he came to meet the commission. The Mawlawi was arrested while he was recording.⁷⁶

Our country cannot develop as a nation because of our political practices, says Ven. Gnanasara Thera (Subhashini Senanayake). At a meeting with the commission probing the Easter Sunday attack, Ven. Galagodaaththe Gnanasara Thera stated that Sri Lanka cannot develop as a united nation because of its political tradition and practices. He made this statement while being cross examined by the commission, upon the request of a few Muslim organisations that claimed that Gnanasara Thera, in his previous statements to the commission, degraded said organisations. He further remarked that Muslim separatism started in Sri Lanka at the time it was a colony of the British. He also stated that "normal" Muslims have to take the bad reputation that Wahhabists give them. While the cross examination grew tense, it led the

⁷³ *Lankadeepa*, September 9, P. 14.

⁷⁴ *Lankadeepa*, September 9, P. 14.

⁷⁵ *Divaina*, September 10, P. 8.

⁷⁶ *Dinamina*, September 11, Front Page.

chairman of the commission to request Gnanasara Thera to answer questions clearly and him responding that the questions should then be asked directly.⁷⁷

Alert the court about Ven. Gnanasara Thera's statement being recorded, orders Chairman of Easter attacks Commission (Eric Gamini Jinapriya). The chairman of the commission probing the Easter Sunday attacks has requested the secretary of the commission to draw the attention of the court of appeal to the incident where a person was given a cellular phone by a lawyer in order to record Galagodaaththe Gnanasara Thera's statement to the commission, and file it as an offence against the commission.⁷⁸

Woman dressed in saree adorned with patterns of the Buddha, brought to court (Pradeep Prasanna Samarakoon). Narahenpita Police have reported that a woman who went out in public to a hospital to receive medication while wearing a saree that was adorned with the likeness of the Buddha, was taken into police custody. While the woman claims that the saree was a gift she received, the Narahenpita police stresses that anyone caught disrespecting any religion through their clothing in public will be arrested.⁷⁹

Monk who posed as layman for drug deals arrested (Sujeewa Thathsara). A 21 year old monk who posed as a lay person and engaged in drug deals involving heroin was arrested by the Wariyapola police. He has been placed in protective custody until the 24th.⁸⁰

Suspected videographer of St. Peter's Church in Fort, arrested. Police has stated that a youth who was capturing a video of St. Peter's Church, Fort, without obtaining prior permission, was taken into custody by the police. The police has confirmed that the suspect is a Muslim man from Colpetty.⁸¹

Woman who wore a saree with Buddha's head printed on it, arrested (Indika Ramanayake, Bimal Shyaman). Narahenpita Police have reported that a woman who went out in public to a private hospital to receive medication who was wearing a saree decorated with the Buddha's head as 'fashion', was arrested for it.⁸²

Attorney General granted permission to present Former Inspector General's retirement papers to court (Ranjan Katugampola). The Attorney General was given the all-clear to present the documents pertaining to the retirement of former Inspector General of Police Pujith Jayasundara, by the courts. This permission was given after considering a human rights petition

⁷⁷ *Dinamina*, September 11, P. 21.

⁷⁸ *Divaina*, September 11, p. 4.

⁷⁹ *Divaina*, September 11, p. 6.

⁸⁰ *Divaina*, September 11, p. 7.

⁸¹ *Lankadeepa*, September 11, P. 2.

⁸² *Lankadeepa*, September 11, P. 8.

that was filed by said former IGP, claiming that his being sent on compulsory leave violates his human rights.⁸³

Wahhabi power was established, says Ven. Galagodaaththe Gnanasara Thera (Subhashini Senanayake). Galagodaaththe Gnanasara Thera stated to the commission probing the Easter Sunday attacks that, with the establishment of the Saudi embassy in Sri Lanka, Wahhabism was also established in the country. He stated that when Wahhabists gained control of the All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama, Muslim extremism started to spread in society. He made this statement while being cross examined by the commission, upon the request of a few Muslim organisations that claimed that Gnanasara Thera, in his previous statements to the commission, degraded said organisations. He also presented his ideas on the issues regarding the "halal" concept, and said that while it is a right of Muslims to have halal products available for use, the process of making something halal is what is problematic. He also accused the Tablighi Jamath organisation of destroying several Buddhist statues and also claimed that the Kingsbury Hotel bomber was a member of the organisation, while his questioner stated that the organisation is one of peace.⁸⁴

The Defence Secretary is the one who should tell the president about important information regarding national security, not me, says former Intelligence Officer Sisira Mendis (Muditha Dayananda). Former intelligence officer Sisira Mendis stated to the commission probing the Easter attacks that while he was told by the defence secretary that important news concerning national security had to be told to the presidential secretariat, it was the defence secretary's duty to inform the president of any national security related information, and not his own. He also stated that some information regarding the conspirators behind the Easter attacks had reached his office before the attack but that he had seen it only after the attack.⁸⁵

Popular worship rituals that stray from Buddha's path (Thilak Senasinghe). The writer points out fallacies in some rituals that are conducted in order to honour Lord Buddha in places of ancient significance such as Anuradhapura, and notes that these are done with extravagance, which is a clearly different path from the path that Lord Buddha preached was the right way.⁸⁶

"Panshu" and memories of "Bakki Ella" (Udan Fernando). This is a review of a recent movie released in Sinhalese cinema named "Panshu". The writer explains that this movie is a good one and that due to the mafia of critics that exist in this country, some movies are ignored and not commented upon due to some problems that the mafia has with directors of those movies.⁸⁷

⁸³ *Lankadeepa*, September 12, P. 7.

⁸⁴ *Dinamina*, September 12, p. 11.

⁸⁵ *Lankadeepa*, September 12, P. 9.

⁸⁶ *Anidda*, September 13, P. 21.

⁸⁷ *Anidda*, September 13, P. 14.

Family, nation and patriotism (in that order). The writer confesses that the country is moving too fast, in terms of politics, for editors and writers to write and publish articles explaining new developments. He points out how the newly introduced 20th Amendment works in favour of every Rajapaksa brother and questions if the amendment was merely brought in to favour them, as opposed to favouring the country and the public mandate. The issue with Basil Rajapaksa's dual citizenship is discussed extensively.⁸⁸

Woman wearing Buddha's face arrested (Rekha Nilukshi Herath). A woman was arrested by Narahenpita for wearing indecent attire, which was a saree that was decorated with drawings of the Buddha's face.⁸⁹

"Easter..." (Continued). Former Minister Rauff Hakeem stated that the country does not know who the real force behind the Easter attacks is. This is important because the Cardinal implored that the real perpetrators of this crime be revealed, and also because the wife of the Katuwapitiya church bomber is currently missing and is suspected of living in hiding in India.⁹⁰

Atalugama. This article speaks of a town in Bandaragama known as Atalugama, and narrates an incident where a drug dealer was caught by the police, but was saved by the women in his town (who are identified as Muslim women clad in Burkas) and uses that as a narrative point to criticise the uniforms of female police officers for being impractical and useless in the face of fighting off attackers. He also says that the town in question is religious and points that a Muslim woman who married a Buddhist man was never asked to convert to Buddhism, but he was pressured to convert to Islam. When he refused, the village folk beat up the wife. The wife's complaint to the police was not heeded at all. The writer also points out that while this town is religious, some people give it a bad name. These incidents created ripples in society, and the writer is of the opinion that the police should have stepped up.⁹¹

The pastor who preached the wrong direction through drugs instead of preaching the Lord's word (Mithra Sri Karunanayake). A pastor in Negombo has been caught in possession of 35 grams of heroin. The writer states that this pastor visits many rehabilitation centers and preaches the word of God there. He also expresses that while many a wayward youth that the pastor has helped rehabilitate have made full recoveries and live well, all of that is to be nullified because the pastor was apprehended with heroin in his possession.⁹²

The reconstruction of the North and East begins...Living proof ready to be presented to Wigneswaran (Tharanga Ratnaweera). The article is about how Buddhist relics in the North and East are being reconstructed after extremists destroyed them, by the archaeological

⁸⁸ *Anidda*, September 13, P. 4.

⁸⁹ *Anidda*, September 13, P. 2.

⁹⁰ *Anidda*, September 13, P. 2.

⁹¹ *Divaina*, September 13, p. 8.

⁹² *Divaina*, September 13, p. 12.

department. 10 temples in the North are being constructed as a first step. A request is made to the people in the country and abroad not to waste their energy on the likes of Wigneswaran and instead focus it on supporting these reconstruction efforts.⁹³

"We cannot get away from the responsibility we have been given", says former MP from JVP, Nalinda Jayatissa. Dr. Jayatissa states that the JVP did not get enough votes because the public wanted to give Rajapaksa a majority and because this country's politics runs on people and not policies. He also noted that nobody at the time said anything against Wigneswaran's controversial statement in parliament. He also claims that he will keep working in politics until President Rajapaksa eradicates poverty and takes Sri Lanka away from the status of Indian or Chinese colony.⁹⁴

Everyone's approval needed for banning slaughter of cattle. The writer shares the history of cattle slaughter in Sri Lanka, and claims that the ban on cattle slaughter is one of the greatest things that Mahinda Rajapaksa has done for this country. He states that although this is the case, the entirety of the country needs to approve of this ban and support it in order for its intended results to be received.⁹⁵

Who is the person who puppeteered Zahran? (Muditha Dayananda). Former Minister Rauff Hakeem stated that ISIS was not the real force behind Zahran Hashim's attacks on the country, and that there is another separate force behind him. The article explores the history of the Easter attacks and ISIS' claims that Sri Lanka would be an ISIS territory in 2020. Those that were affiliated with Zahran are said to have used social media to share ISIS friendly messages. The writer expresses that it is frustrating that even one and a half years after the attack, no proper answers have been given.⁹⁶

Buddhist clergy without the right to vote (Kanchana Kumara Ariyadasa). A few of the Buddhist clergy of the country talk about the hardships that they face in society, with little facilities and administrative issues such as the lack of registration of temples. They issue a request to be given the means to register temples, dhamma schools and receive identification cards. Due to the halting of identity card issuance, all manner of rights have been excluded.⁹⁷

20th Amendment paves the way to dictatorship (Bigun Menaka Gamage). Member of Parliament S.M. Marikkar shares his thoughts. He believes that the newly introduced 20th Amendment is a gateway to dictatorship. He also speaks about party politics and why the

⁹³ *Divaina*, September 13, p. 19.

⁹⁴ *Silumina*, September 13, P. 9.

⁹⁵ *Lankadeepa*, September 13, P. 4.

⁹⁶ *Lankadeepa*, September 13, P. 24.

⁹⁷ *Lankadeepa*, September 13, P. 30.

opposition is weak in parliament, and attributes it to the mistakes that the previous government makes, among other things. He also talks about the environment.⁹⁸

Previous government lacked backbone to oppose extremism and was afraid of Arab countries (Muditha Dayananda). Former secretary of the Ministry of Law and Order stated that the previous government did not have the backbone to face the extremist ideologies and views that were being propagated and that it was also afraid of upsetting the Arab community and the international community. He also stated that he understood then that these decisions had a lot of influence from Muslim ministers.⁹⁹

An extremist group headed by Rishad, Hizbullah and Athaullah was there from war time (Muditha Dayananda). Former senior deputy police chief of the Northern district stated to the commission probing the Easter attacks that the likes of Rishad Bathiudeen, M.L.A.M. Hizbullah and Athaulla were working with Muslim extremist groups such as Al-Qaeda and Jihadist groups under the guise of helping the armed war effort.¹⁰⁰

2 drug addicts who stole from temples and churches put in jail (Thilakaratne Dissanayake). 2 people suspected of looting a few Buddhist temples, Catholic churches and Hindu kovils have been apprehended by the Gampaha Police.¹⁰¹

A fear of plastic eggs in the North (Dinasena Rathugamage). The citizens of the North have had to undergo yet another coronavirus scare, due to the fact that the Mannar railway station was shut down for 14 days by security and health personnel. Further, Mannar faces more trouble with the discovery of plastic fragments in an egg-roll that was being eaten.¹⁰²

President of court of appeal removes himself from petition hearing against Ven. Gnanasara Thera (A. J. A. Abeynayake). President of the Court of Appeal A.H. M. D. Nawas has decided to take himself out of the petition hearing against the Bodu Bala Sena, regarding the cremation of the Gurukanda Temple's former leader's body being an insult to the court. He stated that he had personal reasons for removing himself from the hearing.¹⁰³

Harin's controversial statement to the commission probing the Easter attacks (Eric Gamini Jinapriya). Former Sports Minister Harin Fernando made a controversial statement while giving a witness statement to the commission probing the Easter attacks. He stated that he did not

⁹⁸ *Lankadeepa*, September 14, P. 4.

⁹⁹ *Lankadeepa*, September 14, P. 10.

¹⁰⁰ *Lankadeepa*, September 14, P. 12.

¹⁰¹ *Lankadeepa*, September 14, P. 17.

¹⁰² *Divaina*, September 15, p. 11.

¹⁰³ *Divaina*, September 17, Front Page.

believe that the churches were unaware of the imminent bombing, because many parties were pre-warned of it.¹⁰⁴

Investigate why morning service was not held during Easter Sunday in 2019, says Harin Fernando (Subhashini Senanayake). Former Sports Minister Harin Fernando, while giving a statement to the commission probing the Easter attacks, stated that there needs to be investigation as to why the morning service that is usually held on Easter Sunday was not held on the April 21, 2019. He seems to be claiming that the Cardinal could have known that something was about to happen, which is why morning service was not held.¹⁰⁵

President of court of appeal removes himself from petition hearing against Ven. Gnanasara Thera (Nelka Medagedara). President of the Court of Appeal A.H.M.D. Nawas has decided to take himself out of the petition hearing against the Bodu Bala Sena, regarding the cremation of the body of the Gurukanda Temple's former leader being an insult to the court. He stated that he had personal reasons for removing himself from the hearing.¹⁰⁶

I did not abandon duty, says former National Intelligence Chief (Muditha Dayananda). Retired Former Senior Deputy Police Chief Sisira Mendis stated to the commission investigating the Easter attacks that he did not in any way abandon his responsibility and duty, and that the reason why the Easter attacks could not be prevented was because the police did not execute their job properly. He stated that if the police, Criminal Investigation Department and Terrorism Investigation Department worked to arrest Zahran Hashim earlier, the attack would not have occurred at all.¹⁰⁷

President of court of appeal removes himself from petition hearing against Ven. Gnanasara Thera, states personal reasons (Thilini de Silva and Ranjan Katugampola). President of the Court of Appeal A.H. M. D. Nawas has decided to take himself out of petition hearing against the Bodu Bala Sena, regarding the cremation of the body of the Gurukanda Temple's former leader being an insult to the court. He stated that he had personal reasons for removing himself from the hearing. The petitioner has requested for adequate investigation to be made into the claim and for justice to be served. The petitioner is being represented by M. A. Sumanthiran.¹⁰⁸

I cannot believe that the Catholic community did not know that the Easter attacks was going to happen, says former Minister Harin to the Commission (Muditha Dayananda). Former Minister Harin Fernando while giving a statement to the commission probing the Easter attacks, stated that he cannot believe that the Catholic community leaders did not know about the imminent Easter attack, because many parties were warned about it before. He stated that

¹⁰⁴ *Divaina*, September 17, Front Page.

¹⁰⁵ *Dinamina*, September 17, Front Page.

¹⁰⁶ *Dinamina*, September 17, P. 10.

¹⁰⁷ *Lankadeepa*, September 17, P. 6.

¹⁰⁸ *Lankadeepa*, September 17, P. 10.

this suspicion came to light when he found out that the usually scheduled morning service by the Cardinal was held the night before.¹⁰⁹

Defence secretary had the responsibility to ask me later, even if I didn't tell him about the Zahran threat, says former Intelligence Leader Nilantha Jayawardena (Muditha Dayananda). Former Intelligence Officer Nilantha Jayawardena stated that it was the duty of the defence secretary to come and ask him about the Zahran threat after any meeting, if he felt that there was more to know. He stated that it is the job of the superior to direct his subordinate, and not vice versa. He stated that any accusation that he strayed from his duty, is unfounded, because everyone knew that the Zahran issue was a high profile and sensitive topic and was a hot topic as well.¹¹⁰

Secret information about Easter attacks to Harin's Commission (Muditha Dayananda). Former Minister Harin Fernando stated that his father had also informed his sister not to go to church for Easter Sunday celebrations, while speaking to the presidential commission investigating the Easter attacks. He stated that his father, Nihal Fernando, had received a six-minute phone call the night before the attack from the higher-ups in the CID, and that he suspects that his father was warned of a potential attack in this phone call. He further stated that when he spoke to then PM Ranil Wickremesinghe about this, he stated that he had received a letter warning of a possible attack on churches; Fernando further testified that he believes that many officers in the police force were aware of this threat.¹¹¹

Before the Easter Sunday attacks my phone was on silent mode under the seat of my vehicle - Former Intelligence Leader Sisira Mendis (Muditha Dayananda). Former national intelligence chief, retired senior deputy chief of police Sisira Mendis stated that he had put his phone on silent mode the night before the Easter attacks because he went to church, and that he only noticed that he had missed calls after he took his phone out after the Easter attacks was carried out. He stated this while being cross examined at the presidential commission probing into the Easter attacks. He stated further that he felt no shame in not knowing about this attack before it happened, because, he claims, nobody in his office had informed him of it. He also rejected the notion that he had failed in his duties.¹¹²

Easter Attack: the five people who obtained suicide bomber Ibrahim's land by fraud, remanded (Nimanthi Ranasinghe). Colombo additional magistrate has ordered for the five people involved in fraudulently obtaining ownership of a house worth Rs. 18 million, to be held in protective

¹⁰⁹ *Lankadeepa*, September 17, P. 10.

¹¹⁰ *Lankadeepa*, September 17, P. 16.

¹¹¹ *Lankadeepa*, September 18, P. 6.

¹¹² *Lankadeepa*, September 18, P. 12.

custody. The house in question belonged to Mohammed Ibrahim Insaf Ahmed, the suicide bomber in the Easter attacks. The suspects include a lawyer and a millionaire businessman.¹¹³

Although I found out that Sri Lanka was named a part of the Islamic State, the Security Council had not been told, says former Secretary of Defence Karunasena Hettiarachchi (Subhashini Senanayake). Former Secretary of Defence Hettiarachchi stated that he got to know that ISIS had declared Sri Lanka to be part of the Islamic State towards the latter part of 2016. He also stated that the security council, however, had not been informed of this. He did not seem to recall someone else informing the council of this development. He was given this knowledge via official letters and documents forwarded to his office. He made this statement while providing evidence to the presidential commission looking into the Easter attacks of 2019.¹¹⁴

Judge Nawas' removal. President of the court of appeal, Judge A.H.M.D. Nawas, stated that he is withdrawing himself from filing the case against Ven. Galagodaaththe Gnanasara Thera. He cited personal reasons with regards to why he was removing himself.¹¹⁵

Features of a lazy society (Professor Sarath Wijesuriya). The writer claims that owing to the increase in laziness and moral ambiguity in society, soon the entire country will have to pay dearly. He comments on the direction that the government is going, and the Easter attacks and other societal issues that are plaguing this country.¹¹⁶

Regional MPs do not know their scope of work yet (Priyanjith Alokabandara). The writer interviews a member of a non-governmental organisation that is associated with Kandy, and he talks about his organisation's involvement in community relations in the area.¹¹⁷

President did not care about information received before the attack; I fulfilled my duty and gave all information to the IGP, says former Defence Secretary (Muditha Dayananda). Former Defence Secretary says that he will not accept the charges that he did not fulfil his duty with regards to the Easter attacks. He says that he fulfilled his duty properly by giving all information to the IGP. He also said, while giving evidence to the presidential commission probing the Easter attacks, that the president did not care about this information, and also that he was busy with other work in his department at the time.¹¹⁸

It is our duty to honour Tamil fighters: remove the ban immediately (Lakshmi Jaykody). The TNA and other Tamil political parties have written a letter to the president asking for the ban

¹¹³ *Lankadeepa*, September 18, P. 16.

¹¹⁴ *Dinamina*, September 18, P. 6.

¹¹⁵ *Anidda*, September 20, P. 5.

¹¹⁶ *Anidda*, September 20, P. 9.

¹¹⁷ *Anidda*, September 20, P. 13.

¹¹⁸ *Lankadeepa*, September 21, P. 12.

on celebrating the LTTE to be lifted, citing that it is their right and duty to honour the fallen soldiers who fought for the independence of the Tamil people of this country.¹¹⁹

Harin's statement about the Archbishop was unfounded and untrue, says assistant bishops of Colombo. The Association of Colombo Bishops has stated their dissent and disapproval of former minister Harin Fernando and his statements regarding the Archbishop of Colombo, claiming that his statements are unfounded, baseless and completely untrue.

Before we talk about reconciliation, we need to discuss Buddhist heritage and understand it, says state minister Prof. Sarath Weerasekara (Mahinda Aluthgedara). Prof. Weerasekara states that this country has been protected and preserved as a Buddhist nation largely because of the preservation of the Buddha Sasana. He further stated that when one is to consider steps of reconciliation within this country, it is important to remember and understand that the country is first and foremost a Sinhala Buddhist country, and the heritage and significance that comes with it. He stated that if the Buddha Sasana is destroyed, Buddhism also stands to be destroyed and that both need to be protected moving forward.¹²⁰

Power Dynamics after the 20th Amendment (Professor Jayatissa de Costa, PC). The writer says that there needs to be attention paid toward the 20th Amendment and what it is trying to achieve, and also says that due diligence must be done with regard to those who criticise the amendment. He says that the situation surrounding this amendment is heated at the moment, and that needs to be dealt with. He speaks about the immunity of the president, the potential to change the electoral system in the country and how state services can be improved in terms of quality.¹²¹

It wasn't because of me that we were not able to prevent the Easter attack, says former defence secretary Hemasiri Fernando (Muditha Dayananda). Former Secretary of Defence Hemasiri Fernando said that while it was not his fault that the country's security forces were unable to prevent the Easter attack, the entirety of the intelligence and security forces community in the country needs to take collective responsibility. He mentioned that he thought former intelligence leader Nilantha Jayawardena has to take the blame because he possessed information that he did not distribute properly to the relevant people.¹²²

A Buddha Statue of Sri Sudharshanarama Temple Removed. Borella police state that a Buddha statue that belongs to Sri Sudharshanarama Temple had been removed by a group of people on the September 14.¹²³

¹¹⁹ *Lankadeepa*, September 21, P. 12.

¹²⁰ *Dinamina*, September 21, P. 12.

¹²¹ *Lankadeepa*, September 22, P. 4.

¹²² *Lankadeepa*, September 22, P. 14.

¹²³ *Lankadeepa*, September 22, P. 17.

Lord Shiva Taking Lord Buddha's Place. The writer says that it seems that the archeological officers in Colombo have failed to protect a land in Jaffna which contained Buddhist artefacts of historical significance, and that people of the Hindu faith have obtained a warrant from the Jaffna Magistrate to take the land as a site for a new Kovil. The Hindu people have decorated the land and held a Pongal celebration there.¹²⁴

State Minister Sarath Weerasekara: Wigneswaran got 27 proposals against the Sinhalese approved (Diana Udayanganee). Speaking at a public gathering, state minister Sarath Weerasekara said that C.V. Wigneswaran made arrangements for a suitable backdrop to be created for the advent of Eelam while he was chief minister of the North. He said that Wigneswaran used his 27 proposals in a cunning manner, and also noted that in signing approval for these proposals, the Yahapalana government did not disagree with one proposal that stated that Sinhalese politicians systematically made Tamil women barren so that they could not procreate. He further stated that the UNO has few conditions that need to be fulfilled if a certain group of people want a separate state, and that Wigneswaran believed that these conditions would be fulfilled because Tamils were apparently being made barren and mass executed. He says that once Wigneswaran became chief minister, he banned Sinhalese people from living in the North and banned Buddha statues from being erected in the area as well.¹²⁵

Former Chief of Police Pujith Jayasundara states that former President instructed him not to conduct an open investigation into Zahran and other extremists (Muditha Dayananda). Former IGP Pujith Jayasundara stated that former President Maithripala Sirisena instructed him not to look into Zahran Hashim and other extremists active in the country and that the intelligence forces would monitor such situations. He claimed that it was difficult for him to maintain balance in duty because the often-quarrelling president and prime minister would instruct him to do different things at the same time, but that in this instance, he chose to follow the instructions of the president at the time.¹²⁶

Tamil Press Reporting

Crisis over a new kovil resolved by Thondaman - Former Provincial Council Member Senthil Thondaman has resolved a crisis that emerged over the initiation of building a Hindu kovil on land of the plantation company. The majority community opposed the process and the crisis escalated between the two communities. Thondaman negotiated and arranged another place for building the kovil.¹²⁷

“Does Wigneswaran want another bloody conflict?” – Medhananda Thera Member of the Presidential Task Forces (PTFs) on archaeological Heritage Management in the Eastern

¹²⁴ *Divaina*, September 22, P. 11.

¹²⁵ *Lankadeepa*, September 24, P. 1.

¹²⁶ *Lankadeepa*, September 24, P. 14.

¹²⁷ *Thinakaran*, September 02, p.10

Province Ven. Ellawala Medhananda Thera stated that Tamil Makkal Thesiya Kuttani (TMTK) MP C.V. Wigneswaran's speech contradicts the constitution. He added that it could lead to more bloodshed in the country.¹²⁸

“Buddha was born as Hindu; what is wrong in saying that?” – Wigneswaran Tamil Makkal Thesiya Kuttani (TMTK) MP C.V. Wigneswaran stated that he was proud of his ethnicity and mother tongue. He asked what was wrong in stating the historical truth of Lord Buddha's original religion – Hinduism.¹²⁹

Trust fund for renovation of Deegavapi Temple Secretary of Defence, ret'd. Major General Kamal Gunaratne stated that a trust fund would be established to renovate the Deegavapi Temple in Ampara. He added that state funds would not be spent on it.¹³⁰

Attack on Buddhist monks at police station Sinhala media reported that police personnel had attacked Buddhist monks at a police station in Galle. They were attacked while they were video recording when another monk was talking to police.¹³¹

“Threatening Wigneswaran in parliament is for all the Tamils” – Premachandran Spokesperson of the Tamil Makkal Thesiya Kuttani (TMTK) Suresh Premachandran stated that the threatening, warning and condemnation for Leader of the TMTK C.V. Wigneswaran's parliament speech by the Sinhala Buddhist racists should be considered a threat for all Tamils.¹³²

Complaint against Wigneswaran on ethnic and religious hate speech Attorney-at-Law Dharshana Weraduwege has lodged a police complaint urging to take legal action against Leader of Tamil Makkal Thesiya Kuttani (TMTK) MP C.V. Wigneswaran for making statements to the media in a manner that could incite racial or religious hatred among ethnic communities.¹³³

“There was no connection between Zahran and I” – Hakeem Leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) former Minister Rauff Hakeem told the presidential commission investigating the Easter attacks that he had no connection whatsoever with Zahran Hashim, the mastermind behind the Easter Sunday attacks.¹³⁴

The credibility of the Presidential Task Forces (PTFs) on Archaeological Heritage Management is... The editorial analyses the credibility of the Presidential Task Forces (PTFs) on Archaeological

¹²⁸ *Uthayan*, September 02, frontpage.

¹²⁹ *Uthayan*, September 02, frontpage.

¹³⁰ *Uthayan*, September 02, p. 12.

¹³¹ *Uthayan*, September 02, p. 14.

¹³² *Uthayan*, September 03, p. 4.

¹³³ *Uthayan*, September 04, p. 12.

¹³⁴ *Uthayan*, September 05, p. 2.

Heritage Management in the Eastern Province. Member of the Presidential Task Forces (PTFs) on archaeological Heritage Management in the Eastern Province Ellawala Medhananda Thera had stated that the Tamils are living in a rented house – Sri Lanka and there was no evidence to prove that the Tamils belong to Sri Lanka. Such racist statements of Buddhist monks have changed the fate of the island many times. In such situation, how could we expect the PTF to be credible?¹³⁵

Court permits worshipping at the kovil that was demolished. The Jaffna Magistrate’s Court has permitted worship at a Hindu kovil in Moolai in Jaffna that was demolished by an individual who declared him as the owner of the land where the kovil is situated. The worshipers filed a case and got permission to carry out religious practices.¹³⁶

“I closely monitor the investigation on the Easter attacks” – Cardinal Minister Wimal Weerawansa stated that Archbishop of Colombo Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith had told him that he had been closely monitor the ongoing investigation over the Easter Sunday attacks.¹³⁷

“Wigneswaran has no power to say that Buddha’s statues cannot be placed in the North” – Gamage (Lawrence Selvanayagam) Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) MP Diana Gamage stated that Thamil Makkal Thesiya Kuttani (TMTK) MP C.V Wigneswaran has no power to say that Buddha’s statues cannot be placed in the North. She added that Buddha’s statues can be placed at every corner of the country as it is a Buddhist country.¹³⁸

Attorney-at-Law Sugas files a petition seeking order preventing building of a Buddhist temple. Attorney-at-Law Sugas has filed a petition seeking a prevention order to commence building of a Buddhist temple at the Kurunthumalai in Mullaitivu. Sugas stated that they had received information that the building process would commence at the place where a Soolam (Trishul) of a Hindu god had been placed.¹³⁹

Buddhist monk makes trouble with farmers”- Sampanthan writes to president Leader of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) R. Sampanthan has written a letter to President Gotabaya Rajapaksa bringing his issue of a Buddhist monk who prevents Tamil farmers from farming in the 1,000 acres of their permitted and private lands in Trincomalee. The monk is a member of the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on Archaeological Heritage Management in the Eastern Province.¹⁴⁰

Number of religious worship places increased in Jaffna According to statistics, the number of places of worship has increased in 2019. Accordingly, 2,352 Hindu kovils, 221 Roman Catholic

¹³⁵ *Uthayan*, September 06, p. 5.

¹³⁶ *Thinakaran*, September 08, p. 9.

¹³⁷ *Thinakaran*, September 09, p. 3.

¹³⁸ *Thinakaran*, September 10, p. 13.

¹³⁹ *Uthayan*, September 10, frontpage.

¹⁴⁰ *Uthayan*, September 10, p. 3.

churches, and 80 other Christian churches have been built. Meanwhile, there was no change in the number of mosques and Buddhist temples. In 2018, there were 2,301 Hindu temples, 201 Roman Catholic churches and 76 other Christian churches.¹⁴¹

Cows and humans Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa has made a proposal to ban cow slaughter. This proposal was welcomed by all MPs. Two opinions have emerged. One, it has pleased the hardline Buddhists and Hindus who had been calling for banning killing of cows. On the other hand, it will severely affect Muslims, as many of the beef stalls are run by Muslims across the country. Cows are considered sacred animals by the Hindus. But another question has emerged. Cows are not killed for beef but bulls are killed. If this is banned, what will we do with the bulls in the country? Exporting bulls for cheap prices and importing of beef at a high price is a stupid idea of the government.¹⁴²

Foundation stone laid at Navatkuli Buddhist temple. A foundation stone was laid to build an auditorium to conduct Buddhist events at the premises of the Navatkuli Buddhist Temple in Jaffna. There were many Buddhist monks present at the event, amidst high security provided by the military.¹⁴³

Building of places of worship banned by court. The Mullaitivu Magistrate's Court has banned building any new places of worship at the Kurunthormalai in Mullaitivu. Earlier in 2018, some Buddhist monks initiated placing a Buddha statue in the area where a Hindu kovil had been for decades. The court allowed the devotees to carry out worshipping at the kovil.¹⁴⁴

"Requests were made to ban six Muslim organisations"- Mendis (M.F.M Baseer) At the Presidential Commission of Inquiry appointed to probe the Easter Sunday attacks, it was revealed that after the attacks, state and military intelligence had asked then Secretary of Defense Hemasiri Fernando to ban six extremist Muslim organizations, but only three of them have been banned so far. Former Head of the National Intelligence Service Retd. DIG Sisira Mendis appeared before the commission yesterday to give evidence for the fourth day in a row. He told the commission that steps had been taken to ban the National Thowheed Jamath, Jamath-e-Millat Ibrahim and Vilayat At-Saylani.

Beef politics. (R.M. Sahabdeen) Even though there are 20 Muslim MPs in parliament, their politics have been weakened. Muslim leaders and their political parties are the reason for such weakness. Now, the Buddhist racist organisations are the decision makers of the government. There is a situation in the country where anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic campaigns had been carried out by the Buddhist racists and because of that, they received a two-thirds majority

¹⁴¹ *Uthayan*, September 10, p. 4.

¹⁴² *Uthayan*, September 10, p. 5.

¹⁴³ *Uthayan*, September 10, p.8.

¹⁴⁴ *Uthayan*, September 11, frontpage

with the votes of Buddhists. Racist Buddhist monks have been against cow slaughter in the country. Muslims should not be trapped in the plan implemented by the racist Buddhists.¹⁴⁵

Does the proposal of the PM become reality? (S. Sivakumaran) Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa has made a proposal to ban cow slaughter. This proposal was welcomed by all MPs of the ruling party. Animals Act No.29 of 1958 bans killing of calves and cows in Sri Lanka. However, it allows cows older than 12 years and not been used for farming purposes to be killed. However, the current government's step to ban slaughter for beef is targeting the Muslims. Earlier, a Buddhist monk self-immolated against the killing of cows. But none have spoken of killing of pigs and goats in the country. On the other hands, Sri Lanka seems to be aligned with the Indian ruling BJP party who also has a policy against cow slaughter for beef. But India is the number one country that exports bulls.¹⁴⁶

Judge Nawaz steps down from Gnanasara case (M.F.M. Baseer) Chairperson of the Court of Appeal A.H.M.D Nawaz has withdrawn from the examination of the case into Ven. Galagodaththe Gnansara Thera and two others, on the charge of Contempt of Court. The chairman informed the court, when the complaint was taken up for hearing, that he is withdrawing himself owing to a personal reasons.¹⁴⁷

Court rejects petition filed against Vedukunari Kovil feast The Vavuniya Magistrate's Court has rejected a petition filed by Nedunkeni Police seeking ban on holding annual feast of a Hindu kovil, Vedukunari Aathilingeswaran Kovil, in Vavuniya.¹⁴⁸

The reasons behind the steps taken by the SLPP to review the 20A (P.K. Balachandran) The Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) has taken steps to review the proposed 20th Amendment to the Constitution after concerns escalated among the SLPP and the constituent parties of the SLPP. A prominent Tamil politician said that the Maha Sangha might be afraid that Buddhist monks may have to bow before military leaders if Sinhala Buddhist Nationalism is dominated by them. That is why certain Buddhist monks have expressed concerns over 20A. The Sinhala Buddhist nationalists might wish that the rights of the Tamils and the Muslims be rejected. Therefore, they have committed themselves to ensure democracy for the Sinhala Buddhist majority.¹⁴⁹

Chelvanayagam approved the rights of the Muslims in 1949 Secretary of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) A.L. Abdul Majeed stated that Tamil Leader Chelvanayagam approved the

¹⁴⁵ *Virakesari*, September 13, p.1.

¹⁴⁶ *Virakesari*, September 13, p. 8.

¹⁴⁷ *Virakesari*, September 17, p. 3.

¹⁴⁸ *Virakesari*, September 17, p. 14.

¹⁴⁹ *Virakesari*, September 18, p. 4.

sovereignty of the Muslim community in 1949. He added that Chelvanayagam had recognized the Kalmunai division as an area for Muslims.¹⁵⁰

Buddhist Advisory Council commends president. The Buddhist Advisory Council commended President Gotabaya Rajapaksa for following advice and implementing the suggestions of the Maha Sangha. Member Theras of the Council are confident that the policies being followed by the president will be instrumental in building a fair and virtuous society.¹⁵¹

All religious demonstration on religious harmony. An all-religious demonstration was held in in Addalaichenai on building harmony among religions to mark the Day of International Peace.¹⁵²

“Ready to discuss the aspirations of the Muslims with the government”- Naseer Ahamed. (R. Ram) Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) MP Naseer Ahamed stated that the SLMC was prepared to hold discussions with the ruling Rajapaksa government on the aspirations of the Muslim community.¹⁵³

The urgency of the government. (N. Kanan) There have been various debates going on since the 20th Amendment to the Constitution was proposed. Opposition that arose from Sinhala Nationalists has confused the government. At the same time, Sinhala Buddhist chauvinists also oppose 20A.¹⁵⁴

Promises flying in the air (Sahapdeen) Muslim people have continuously been making mistakes when electing their leaders. They come to power through false promises and forget their promises once they win the election. Muslim leaders said that they align with the government on an agreement, but they never disclosed what they agreed on. Violence against Muslims continued. The attacks and harassment against Muslims by Buddhist hardliners increased. The violent acts against Muslims at various times including the Digana, Beruwala, Hambantota, Kandy, Kurunegala violence took place when Muslim parties and MPs were in the government.¹⁵⁵

"Ban on cattle slaughter will affect the economy" – Nanthakumar Veterinary specialist A. Nanthakumar said that the ban on cattle slaughter in Sri Lanka will affect the country's economy. He pointed out that there is a misbelief among the majority population that the majority of beef consumers are Muslims. He added that 40% of Buddhists eat beef. Muslims

¹⁵⁰ *Virakesari*, September 18, p. 15.

¹⁵¹ *Thinakaran*, September 20, frontpage.

¹⁵² *Virakesari*, September 20, p. 6.

¹⁵³ *Virakesari*, September 20, p. 1.

¹⁵⁴ *Virakesari*, September 20, p. 1.

¹⁵⁵ *Virakesari*, September 20, p. 2.

do this slaughter as a business. Muslims are just 7% of the population. The Buddhist clergy called for banning cattle slaughter as it has been a business of the Muslim community.¹⁵⁶

Conspiracy to divide the minority (Sathriyan) The government has planned to form just three provinces and bring all the existing provinces into that, so that the minority communities will always be minorities and there will not be any chance for demanding a nation for them. The government is now taking steps spontaneously with the two-thirds majority. The Sinhala Buddhist chauvinists attempt to implement their plan to destroy minority symbols and uniqueness subtly. Now, various plans have been implemented by the Sinhala Buddhists government to oppress the Tamil and the Muslim communities.¹⁵⁷

A historic turn in the Muslim politics (Dr. Ameer Ali) For the first time in Sri Lanka during the last 72 years, the majority of Muslim MPs are sitting in the opposition in the Sri Lankan Parliament. This is a good opportunity for the Muslims as many of the MPs of the community on the opposition work for the future of the community. Both Tamil and Muslim MPs should realise the fact that there has been false propaganda widely spread among the majority of people by the Sinhala Buddhist chauvinists saying that the minority communities do not belong on the island. When a lie is repeated again and again, it might be believed as true. The current president and the prime minister who had come to power as a result of such poison (lies) are unable to swallow or spit it out. The president appointed the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on Archaeological Heritage Management in the Eastern Province only with Sinhala Buddhist members – many of them have minimum knowledge of archaeology. The president again appointed four additional Buddhist monks to the task force but neglected Tamils and Muslims – this has brought about a question, why? It means the PTF is not to preserve sites but to grab private lands under the guise of archaeology and settle Sinhala Buddhists in the region.¹⁵⁸

Colombo Archdiocese condemns Harin's statement at PCol (Lawrence Selvanayagam) The Colombo Archdiocese, while rejecting the statement made by SJB MP Harin Fernando before the Presidential Commission probing the Easter Sunday attacks yesterday, stressed that the bishops and the Catholic clergy were in no way made aware of impending attacks on churches by anyone.¹⁵⁹

All-religious demonstration on religious on peace. Local inter-religious communities – Addalaichenai in the Ampara District had organized an all-religious demonstration to mark World Peace Day. The demonstration was organized to emphasize peace, coexistence and

¹⁵⁶ *Virakesari*, September 20, p. 2.

¹⁵⁷ *Virakesari*, September 20, p. 4.

¹⁵⁸ *Virakesari*, September 20, p. 7.

¹⁵⁹ *Thinakaran*, September 21, frontpage.

reconciliation among the religious communities. Religious leaders and people took part in the demonstration. ¹⁶⁰

"All Ulemas should be tri-lingual" – Ismail. President of the Gampaha Progressive Society and Malwana People's Forum M.M.A. Ismail said that all Ulemas - the body of Mullahs (Muslim scholars trained in Islam and Islamic law) should be tri-lingual, which is the need of the time. He added that Muslim students who study in English and Sinhala medium should be able to understand the preaching delivered at mosques. ¹⁶¹

SLMC to consider supporting 20A Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) MP H.M.M. Harees stated that his party would consider supporting the proposed 20th Amendment to the Constitution if it is beneficial to the Muslim community. ¹⁶²

Religious demonstration on religious harmony local inter religious communities – Addalaichenai in the Ampara District organised an all-religious demonstration to mark World Peace Day. The demonstration was organized to emphasize peace, coexistence and reconciliation among the religious communities. Religious leaders and people took part in the demonstration. ¹⁶³

"Sirisena told Jayasundara not to investigate on Zahran" - Fernando (M.F.M. Baseer) Testifying before the Presidential Commission of Inquiry (PCoI) into the Easter Sunday attacks, former Secretary of Defence Hemasiri Fernando said that former President Maithripala Sirisena had asked IGP Pujith Jayasundara to stop the investigation on Leader of the National Thowheed Jamath (NTJ) Zahran Hashim. ¹⁶⁴

"People will not tolerate dwdiness of the monk in Batticaloa" - Karunakaram. (R. Yasi) Illankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi (ITAK) MP Govindan Karunakaram told parliament that the people will not tolerate the dwdiness of Ven. Ampitiye Sumanarathana Thera of the Batticaloa's Mangalaramaya. He added that the monk had attacked officials of the archaeology department. ¹⁶⁵

Protest against attack on the officials of the archaeology department A protest was held in Batticaloa against the attack on officials of the archaeology department by Ven. Ampitiye Sumanarathana Thera of the Batticaloa's Mangalaramaya. The protesters stated that measures are being taken to grab private lands under the guise of archaeology. ¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁰ *Thinakaran*, September 21, p. 11.

¹⁶¹ *Thinakaran*, September 21, p. 14.

¹⁶² *Virakesari*, September 22, p. 2

¹⁶³ *Virakesari*, September 22, p. 15

¹⁶⁴ *Virakesari*, September 22, frontpage

¹⁶⁵ *Virakesari*, September 23, p. 2

¹⁶⁶ *Virakesari*, September 23, p. 13

“Action should be taken against the monk attacked the officials”- R. Thurairatnam writes to President Former Member of the Eastern Provincial Council R. Thurairatnam has written a letter to President Gotabaya Rajapaksa urging him to take action against Ven. Ampitiye Sumanarathana Thera of the Batticaloa's Mangalaramaya for attacking the officials of the archaeology department.¹⁶⁷

Investigation on Easter Sunday attacks is over - CID informs court The Criminal Investigation Department informed the Fort Magistrate’s Court that the investigations conducted on the Easter Sunday attacks were over.¹⁶⁸

Court issues notice on monk for attacking on Govt Officials The Batticaloa Magistrate’s Court issued a notice to Ven. Ampitiye Sumanarathana Thera to appear before court for obstructing government officials from carrying out their duties in Batticaloa. Police Spokesman SSP Jaliya Senaratne said after presenting facts to the court, an order was issued requesting the Thera to appear before the court and to record a statement with the Police.¹⁶⁹

Condemn the aggressiveness of the monk of the Batticaloa's Mangalaramaya Various stakeholders have condemned the aggressiveness and dowliness of Ven. Ampitiye Sumanarathana Thera of the Batticaloa's Mangalaramaya over the attack on the officials of the archaeology department. Addressing parliament TNA MP Shanakiyan Rajaputhiran Rasamanickam stated that the Mahanayake Theras should rehabilitate the monk. The monk had attacked and intimidated the minority community on various instances. His actions have been to establish Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism in the east.¹⁷⁰

"Sumanarathana Thera should undergo rehabilitation"- Shanakiyan Addressing parliament TNA MP Shanakiyan Rajaputhiran Rasamanickam stated that the Mahanayake Theras should rehabilitate Ampitiye Sumanarathana Thera of the Batticaloa's Mangalaramaya.¹⁷¹

Funds for development of kovils Co-ordinating Secretary of the Prime Minister for Upcountry Senthil Thondaman provided funds for the construction of various kovils for development.¹⁷²

“Sirisena should be accountable for the Easter attacks” – Jayasundara (M.F.M. Baseer) Testifying before the Presidential Commission of Inquiry on the Easter Sunday attacks, Inspector General of Police (IGP) Pujith Jayasundara stated that former President Maithripala Sirisena should be held accountable for the Easter Sunday bombings.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁷ *Virakesari*, September 23, p. 13

¹⁶⁸ *Thinakaran*, September 24, frontpage

¹⁶⁹ *Thinakaran*, September 24, p. 3.

¹⁷⁰ *Virakesari*, September 24, p. 4.

¹⁷¹ *Virakesari*, September 24, p. 11.

¹⁷² *Thinakaran*, September 25, p. 17.

¹⁷³ *Virakesari*, September 25, p. frontpage.

“Sirisena issued instruction not to carry out transparent investigation into Islamist extremist organisations”- Jayasundara (M.F.M. Baseer) Testifying before the Presidential Commission of Inquiry on the Easter Sunday attacks, Inspector General of Police (IGP) Pujith Jayasundara stated that former President Maithripala Sirisena had instructed him not to carry out a transparent investigation on Islamist extremist organisations. ¹⁷⁴

“Government should disclose the status of Sumanarathana Thera’s actions” – Ariyanendran Former Tamil National Alliance (TNA) MP P. Ariyanendran stated that the government should disclose the status of Ven. Ampitiye Sumanarathana Thera of the Batticaloa's Mangalaramaya and whether he is an army commander or a person who should undergo medical treatment. He added that the monk had been engaging in violence since 2013 but the law enforcing police had never taken actions him. ¹⁷⁵

“Traditions and identities of the Tamils should be protected” – Art Union of University of Jaffna The Art Union of the University of Jaffna said that the traditions and identities of Tamils should be protected. The Union said that the Tamil people can protect the Aathy Iyanar Temple in Vedukkunaari Malai, Nedunkeni-Olumadu in the Vavuniya District by visiting daily. The Archaeology Department had failed a case and blocked the devotees. The court later allowed the devotees to carry out their traditional practices. ¹⁷⁶

“Land grabbing shows that it is the agenda of the government to show that the country belongs to Sinhala Buddhists” – Shivajilingam Former MP M.K. Shivajilingam alleged that the land grabbing shows that it was the government's agenda to prove that the country belongs to the Sinhala Buddhists. He added that the actions of Ven. Ampitiye Sumanarathana Thera of Batticaloa's Mangalaramaya also lines up with the agenda. He said that the actions of certain monks deteriorate the good name and respect for all Buddhist monks. ¹⁷⁷

Annual festival at Vedukkunaari Malai Kovil The annual festival of the Aathy Iyanar Temple in Vedukkunaari Malai, Nedunkeni-Olumadu in the Vavuniya District was held under tight surveillance of the military and intelligence officials and the presence of police personnel. The devotees were allowed to enter the kovil area after registering with security personnel. ¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁴ *Virakesari*, September 25, p. 11.

¹⁷⁵ *Virakesari*, September 25, p. 15.

¹⁷⁶ *Thinakaran*, September 26, p. 8.

¹⁷⁷ *Virakesari*, September 26, p. 14.

¹⁷⁸ *Virakesari*, September 28, p. 12.