



# UNDERSTANDING PRESS COVERAGE ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

**#MINORMATTERS**

PERIOD COVERED : NOVEMBER &  
DECEMBER 2020

## INTRODUCTION

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

This report is the 19<sup>th</sup> in a series of reports prepared by Verité Research (VR) for Minor Matters. These reports examine how the print media reports on religious freedom in Sri Lanka. They aim to analyse the frequency and tonality of coverage in various newspapers in Sinhala and Tamil to provide both quantitative and qualitative insights. Though the series of reports focuses on each month individually for the analysis, the current report combined findings from November and December 2020. The current report combines the analyses of the press coverage in November and December for two reasons: 1) The area of press discussion pertaining to the reports overlapped significantly in November and December 2020; and 2) the issue covered was the primary focus of reporting during both months. As such, this report analyses findings from both November and December 2020.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## METHODOLOGY

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

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

Press reports on religious freedom that appeared during November and December 2020 were monitored. The following ten daily and weekend newspapers in the two 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> <sup>10</sup>
<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

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

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

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

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

<sup>10</sup> Due to COVID-19, *Uthayan*, the Jaffna based paper, was not accessible for the period focused on in the current report.

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.

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 months of November and December were e-versions. However, no e-papers were available for *Uthayan* in November or December, and this month's report excluded it from the analysis.

In these newspapers, articles that **had a bearing on religious freedom** were selected to assess the tonality of the reporting. These articles included:<sup>11</sup>

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

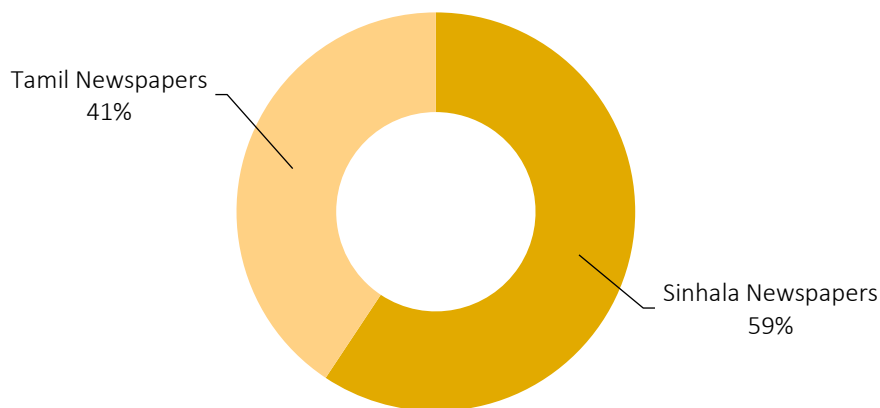
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<sup>11</sup> NB: the aforementioned list is only illustrative and not exhaustive.

## QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

## Overview

## Percentage of Articles by Language

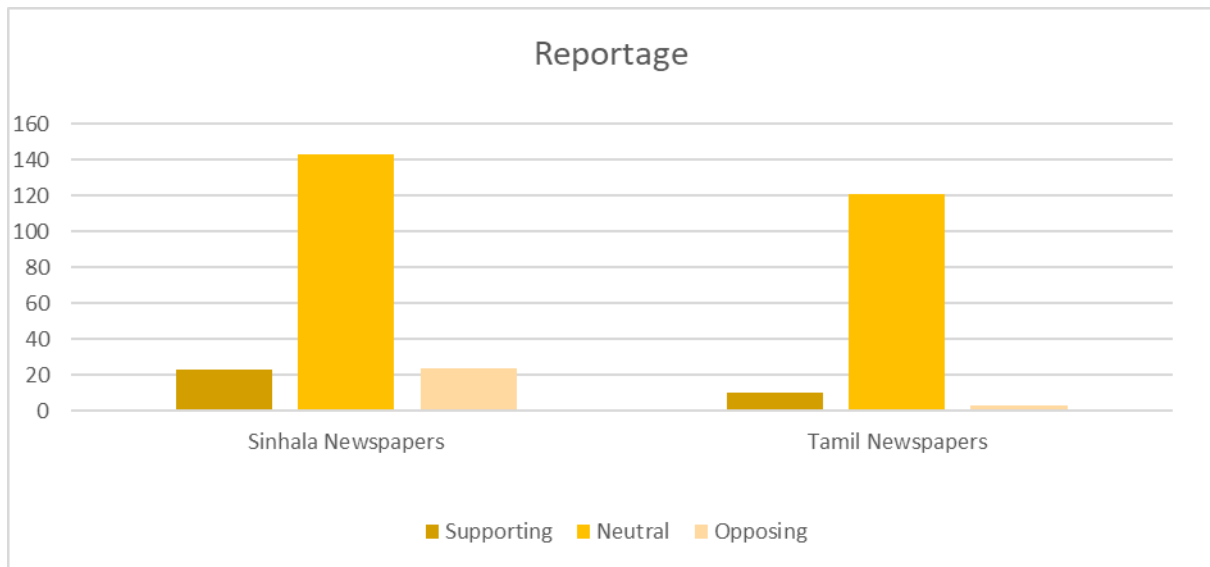
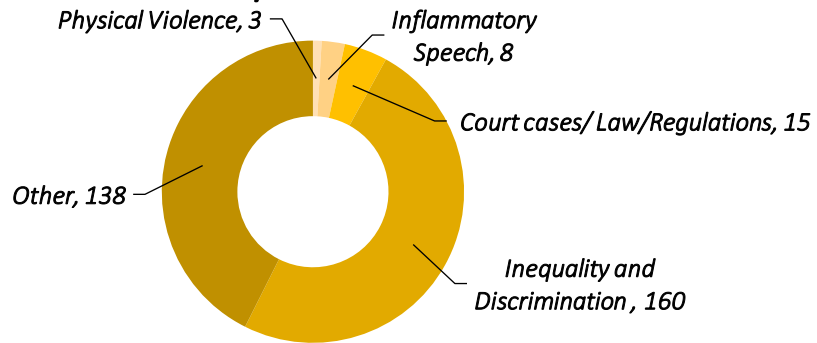


During November and December 2020, the Sinhala and Tamil newspapers monitored carried a total of 324 articles relating to religious freedom. From these, 59 percent (190 articles) were carried in the Sinhala newspapers. Meanwhile, Tamil newspapers accounted for 41 percent (134 articles) of the coverage relating to religious freedom.

Religious freedom was discussed under the following five themes:

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

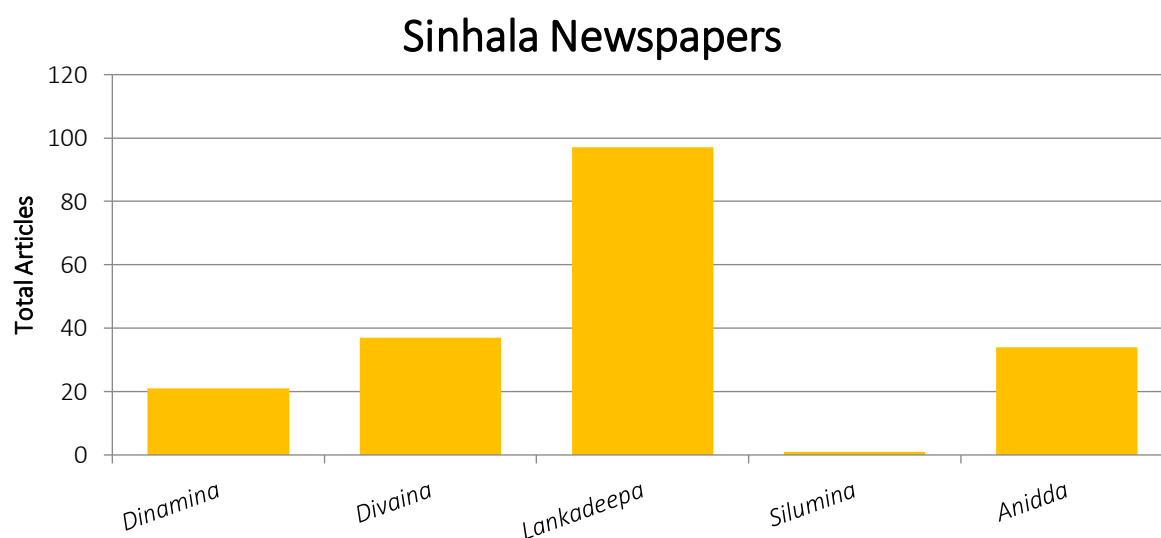
## Number of articles pertaining to religious freedom by theme



- ✦ Of the 190 articles in the Sinhala newspapers, 23 articles supported religious freedom, 143 articles were neutral, and 24 articles opposed religious freedom.
- ✦ Of the 134 articles in the Tamil newspapers, 10 articles supported religious freedom, 121 articles were neutral, and 3 articles opposed religious freedom.

## Coverage in Sinhala newspapers

Sinhala Newspapers	No. of Articles	Reportage		
		Supporting	Neutral	Opposing
<i>Dinamina</i>	21	2	14	5
<i>Divaina</i>	37	0	27	10
<i>Lankadeepa</i>	97	8	81	8
<i>Silumina</i>	1	0	0	1
<i>Anidda</i>	34	13	21	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>24</b>



The Sinhala press featured 190 articles that had a bearing on religious freedom. 23 articles supported religious freedom, 143 articles were neutral, and 24 articles opposed religious freedom.

The **23 articles that supported religious freedom** are as follows:

- ✦ A column refers to the practices that Sri Lankans have inherited from their ancestors in terms of prayer and how prayer-related traditions are there whenever the country is in need. The writer notes that Minister of Health Pavitha Wanniarachchi's recent display of religious beliefs in order to save the country from COVID-19 should not be mocked by the opposition as she was merely acting in accordance with Sri Lankan traditions.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *Dinamina*, November 5, p. 4.

- ✦ An article notes that the public has requested that Sinhalese, Muslim, Hindu and Burgher communities be treated equally, and states that if this does not happen, there will be racial strife in the country.<sup>13</sup>
- ✦ An article reports that the Patriotic Sri Lankan Muslims' organisation has written a letter to the secretary of the Ministry of Health and asked the ministry to reconsider its stance on the cremation of COVID-19 patients who succumb to the virus. The letter states that there is no scientific reasoning that suggests that burials will result in the spread of the virus. It also notes that no authority or globally recognised health body has released any scientific findings that support the theory that burying bodies will spread COVID-19.<sup>14</sup>
- ✦ An article refers to the ban on events aimed at commemorating those who died in the North during the armed conflict. It talks about how the Attorney General's Department is uncharacteristically interested in fending off the arguments made by the people in the North in favour of allowing them to have commemoration ceremonies. The writer further states that the AG and his department have been meddling in affairs too much, and that the main difference between the commemoration ceremonies in the North and South is that the South commemorates Sinhala Buddhists and that the North wants to commemorate Tamil people. He therefore points to the possibility of a 'racist agenda'.<sup>15</sup>
- ✦ An article reports that the Sri Lanka Human Rights Commission wrote a letter to the Ministry of Health stating that it is unconstitutional to mandate that all bodies of those who succumb to COVID-19 be cremated. The letter demands that the ministry put out safety guidelines for burials as soon as possible.<sup>16</sup>
- ✦ An article talks about a possible new constitution. The writer posits that a new constitution should not just be "new" by virtue of being the next constitution. It should instead seek to be fair to all Sri Lankans in its articles and ensure that no religion or race is given prominence over another.<sup>17</sup>
- ✦ An exposé on the alleged news report by Hiru News about there being cattle pens in Thambala in the North Central Province. The writer notes that the Muslim cattle herders have previously been affected by the Bodu Bala Sena shutting down their cattle pens. However, they received notice and permission to carry on from the government, at which point the news story about illegal cattle pens being built made its rounds.<sup>18</sup>
- ✦ An article shows a personal letter from Moulavi Munir Mulafir. In it, he notes that the media is attempting to cover the government's own shortcomings by stating that Muslim people are not submitting to PCR tests,. The article indicates that this is despite 99 percent of those in Thihariya town who volunteered for PCR testing being Muslims..

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<sup>13</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 15, p. 19.

<sup>14</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 19, p. 14; *Anidda*, November 22, p. 8.

<sup>15</sup> *Anidda*, November 29, p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> *Anidda*, November 29, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> *Anidda*, November 29, p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> *Anidda*, December 13, P. 4.



He adds that it was a Muslim mosque that provided support for tests to be carried out. He further stated that a few people are spreading misinformation on WhatsApp and Facebook about Muslims not submitting to tests. He suggests that such people may be wrongly interpreting the loudspeaker announcements that ask people to report for testing. He explains that Muslim people are afraid of a positive result because the current situation suggests that if he dies of COVID-19, his body will be cremated and not buried, as his religion mandates. He notes that the refusal to submit to PCR tests is an indirect result of the government's inhumane cremation policies.<sup>19</sup>

- ✦ An article interviews prominent journalists, lawyers and other people with political opinions and writes about the injustice the Muslims face with burials being not allowed. . The article highlights that we, as a society, are degrading, that there is a campaign taking place against Muslims, that Muslim citizens' fundamental rights are being violated, and flawed logic is behind denying burials.<sup>20</sup>
- ✦ An article reports that Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa stated that the government, while preaching that health guidelines should be followed, is effectively ignoring and walking all over the rights of one of its communities' religious beliefs. It also says that the above is striking a blow towards the religious identity of the Muslim community. He added that he severely condemns the way in which the government is actively ignoring the rights of a community in order to further its political agenda.<sup>21</sup>
- ✦ An article reports that former Speaker Karu Jayasuriya stated that any Sri Lankan has the right to be buried in their home country after their death in the way that they want, and this right needs to be respected and given to the people who are being slighted in the current context. He stated that he is requesting the government to consider the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the UN recommendations on this matter and allow people to fulfil their final religious rites.<sup>22</sup>
- ✦ An article reports that UNP Leader Ranil Wickremesinghe stated that the decision on burying or cremating the bodies of those who died with COVID-19 should be made after discussing it with all religious groups in the country and getting their opinion. He added that the right to bury or cremate is a right that belongs to the specific communities of the country.<sup>23</sup>
- ✦ An article talks about the spirit of Christmas and the percentage of people who celebrate it in Sri Lanka. The writer remarks that the country, which is fed by Buddhist principles, prides itself on coexistence, and wishes for the world to turn over a new leaf in the new year.<sup>24</sup>
- ✦ An article likens the world right now to the plot of a disaster movie. The writer says that in a movie, after the crisis is averted, the world becomes a better version of itself by

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<sup>19</sup> *Anidda*, December 13, P. 10.

<sup>20</sup> *Anidda*, December 20, P. 15.

<sup>21</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 23, P. 10.

<sup>22</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 24, Front Page.

<sup>23</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 24, Front Page.

<sup>24</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 25, P. 4.

fixing the small issues that led to the main crisis. He says that this is not the case, however, with the world right now, and discusses how governments all over the world are dealing with COVID-19 with no insight or foresight whatsoever. He goes on to list a number of injustices that cannot be cured by a simple vaccine. Among the reasons he gives are the unlawful arrest of persons, the ignoring of parliamentary democracy and invalidation of the same, militarisation, destruction of the environment, dirty politics, presidential pardons, violence against women, governmental support for mythical ideas, inequality, intolerance of diversity and so forth.<sup>25</sup>

- ✦ An article talks about the current status of the government. The writer talks about certain supporters using their platform to spread racial hate and inculcate a narrative about Islamic extremism as a ploy to get the public to vote for Rajapaksa. She extensively analyses how Muslim people have been made out to be the sole enemy of the state and remarks that politics has become a place where devils are created for the sole purpose of hate. The writer forewarns the Sri Lankan public that they have a choice to think critically and not fall for the racial trap that the Rajapaksas are setting up to pave their own way.<sup>26</sup>
- ✦ An article talks about the current government and how it has duped the general public with false promises. The writer talks about the issue surrounding the burial of bodies of Muslims who died of COVID-19 and its baseless ban in the country. He states that most medical professionals in this country are taking decisions about this issue by giving prominence to something other than science: Islamophobia. He states that the fear of Muslims is the downfall of our society and pluralistic mentality.<sup>27</sup>
- ✦ An article claims that the idea of Sharia Law that is going around today is a misconception that was placed by the Western media as anti-Muslim rhetoric and has now made its way to Sri Lanka. The writer talks about the origins of the concept and how other countries have butchered it for their own gain. He states that in Islam, there is no place for cruel acts and hopes that the world can live in harmony.<sup>28</sup>
- ✦ An interview with MP Thalatha Athukorale discusses the issue of COVID-19 and the burial of Muslims. She states that there is a heavily politicised reason behind the banning of burials.<sup>29</sup>
- ✦ An article reports that MP Abdul Haleem stated that there is no basis whatsoever for the COVID-19 prevention commission to restrict the burial of bodies of those who have died of the virus and that doing so is unjust to Muslim people, as their religion prohibits cremation.<sup>30</sup>
- ✦ An article talks about the recent incident where the Maldivian government tweeted its support of Muslims in Sri Lanka and offered one of their islands for burials and

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<sup>25</sup> *Anidda*, December 27, P. 16.

<sup>26</sup> *Anidda*, December 27, P. 13.

<sup>27</sup> *Anidda*, December 27, P. 6.

<sup>28</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 28, P. 2.

<sup>29</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 28, P. 4.

<sup>30</sup> *Dinamina*, December 10, P. 6.

questions the integrity of our president and the humiliation that this whole situation has brought him. The writer says that it is obvious that the president has not yet discussed this with his cabinet and asks why and who he is afraid of, and what is keeping him from doing so.<sup>31</sup>

- ✦ An article reports that The Hindu news organisation reported that the 20-day old infant's cremation (after he tested positive for COVID-19 and the government forced his parents to concede to cremation) was a racist crime.<sup>32</sup>
- ✦ An article critiques the state of the country as it is now and states that the government's insensitivity to the plight of most of its citizens has caused many issues and that the government is not even trying to help out. He questions what the government has actually done for its citizens and lands on the answer "blind faith, racism, fake patriotism and idolisation of politicians".<sup>33</sup>
- ✦ An article notes that Christ preaches the acceptance of all people and the need to work towards the betterment of the community. The writer says that these teachings can be used to help everyone get back on their feet after COVID-19.<sup>34</sup>

Meanwhile, the **24 articles that opposed religious freedom** are as follows:

- ✦ An article reports a few opinions on how certain Muslim parties in parliament voted for both the 20<sup>th</sup> Amendment and a government that swore that it would not seek the help of 'extremist [minority] parties'. It states that the general consensus is that Muslim parties should not be allowed to 'go beyond the powers of the government'. It adds that the government has forgotten its roots and that the Sinhala Buddhist clergy is willing to help the government.<sup>35</sup>
- ✦ An article reports that Ven. Gnanasara Thera has stated that all people, when carrying out their religious activities, should take great care and responsibility in terms of COVID-19. He added that if Muslim extremism is allowed to rise again, another group of Zahran Hashims will be created. Thus, he claimed that everyone should be careful about their religious practices at this time. He further claimed that the government must control the rise of Muslim extremism in the country and protect 'traditional Muslims' from it.<sup>36</sup>
- ✦ An article reports that General Secretary of the Bodu Bala Sena Ven. Gnanasara Thera has demanded the president and prime minister to immediately inform the country whether or not the government gave permission for the bodies of Muslims who succumbed to COVID-19 to be buried instead of cremated. He added that if that is not the case, then General Secretary of the Ceylon Thowheed Jamath Abdul Razik should

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<sup>31</sup> *Anidda*, December 20, Front Page.

<sup>32</sup> *Anidda*, December 20, P. 2.

<sup>33</sup> *Anidda*, December 20, P. 7.

<sup>34</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 25, Front Page.

<sup>35</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 1, p. 18.

<sup>36</sup> *Dinamina*, November 11, p. 11.

- be arrested and legal action should be taken against him for spreading false narratives.<sup>37</sup>
- ✦ An article reports that Ven. Gnanasara Thera stated that the cremation of patients who succumbed to COVID-19 needs to be done in accordance with the health guidelines issued by specialists, and not based on the demands of certain “extremist groups”. He also said that if the government is willing to “dance to the tune of these groups”, then Muslim extremism in the country will only continue to grow.<sup>38</sup>
  - ✦ An article notes that Ven. Narangpanawe Ananda Thera stated that the decision on whether to cremate or bury patients who succumb to COVID-19 should not be taken according to religious inclinations but according to the guidelines and recommendations issued by the Ministry of Health. He added that if there are health risks resulting from burials, then irrespective of religion, the cremation should be maintained.<sup>39</sup>
  - ✦ An editorial discusses the issue of burying the bodies of Muslims who succumb to COVID-19 and notes that Muslims seemed to be forcing the government to permit burials. The author also claims that “extremist Muslim politicians” are trying to influence the government and are “not acting in a way conducive to handling a pandemic”.<sup>40</sup>
  - ✦ An editorial states that the current situation with regard to the debate on cremation and burials is becoming more dangerous than the virus itself. The writer notes that while certain Muslims are concerned about burials, Muslim politicians are giving these concerns a voice and have placed their political goals atop their list of reasons for “criticising” the act of cremation. The writer says that these politicians are not looking to get justice for the people but to advance their agenda.<sup>41</sup>
  - ✦ An article notes that Ven. Keppitiyagoda Siriwimala Thera stated that the government should not make decisions by listening to the complaints of “extremist groups”, but by putting together a panel of experts to decide on the matter.<sup>42</sup>
  - ✦ In an opinion, the writer erroneously says that guidelines issued by the WHO state that the body of a person who succumbs to COVID-19 should be cremated to avoid the virus being spread from the body. He adds that the entire country's public should follow this guideline irrespective of religion.<sup>43</sup> Another opinion notes that Ven. Akmeemana Dayaratne Thera also stated the same.<sup>44</sup>
  - ✦ An article reports that former President Maithripala Sirisena accepted that it is unfair to only blame the former Defence Secretary Hemasiri Fernando and former Police Chief

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<sup>37</sup> *Divaina*, November 11, Front Page.

<sup>38</sup> *Divaina*, November 11, p. 7.

<sup>39</sup> *Dinamina*, November 13, p. 6.

<sup>40</sup> *Divaina*, November 15, p. 6.

<sup>41</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 15, p. 4.

<sup>42</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 15, p. 12.

<sup>43</sup> *Divaina*, November 16, p. 5.

<sup>44</sup> *Divaina*, November 16, p. 11.

Pujith Jayasundara for not preventing the Easter attacks. He also stated that foreign countries and Muslim politicians were the sources that backed Muslim extremists in the country. He blamed the creation of political parties based on race, ethnicity and religion for being the “hotbeds for extremist thought”.<sup>45</sup>

- ✦ An article about Atalugama, constructs the history of an incident involving a reporter who travelled to the area in order to obtain a statement from an Islamic leader about the government’s prohibition on large gatherings for religious activities. The article states that as the reporter pulled up in front of the mosque, he was “thrashed by unknown assailants for no reason at all”.<sup>46</sup>
- ✦ An article reports that President of the Jamiyyathul Ulama Rizwi Mufthi, upon arriving at the presidential commission probing the Easter attack, was seen bringing in parcels of Watalappan into the meeting. The writer of the article states that it is problematic for the leader of the organisation of Islamic religious leaders of the country to bring greetings with traditional desserts in tow to an official appointment, such as that of giving a statement to the presidential commission probing the Easter attack, which was caused by Islamic terrorists.<sup>47</sup>
- ✦ An article reports that Ven. Omalpe Sobhitha Thera stated that there should not be a debate on whether dead bodies should be cremated or buried and that it is completely unnecessary. The Thera posited that the severity of this issue has been built up in order to 'distract the citizens of the country' from other, more dire situations that are taking place.<sup>48</sup>
- ✦ An article reports that M.H.A. Haleem, former minister for Muslim affairs, stated to the presidential commission probing the Easter attack, that there are enough Muslim mosques in the country right now and that there is no need for any more of them to be built. He also stated that steps must be taken to halt the construction of any more mosques, immediately.<sup>49</sup>
- ✦ An article notes that senior lawyer Charitha Siriwardena stated to the Supreme Court that the WHO has said that the virus is not inactive in a dead body and that the virus can spread through a dead body. It notes that he praised the government's decision to cremate bodies and stated that if these buried bodies were to be dug up by 'extremists', they could be used in nefarious ways. He also added that, as a country that was recently subject to a horrifying attack by extremists, we need to remain overly cautious.<sup>50</sup>
- ✦ An article notes that Ven. Gnanasara Thera stated that it is the duty of Buddhist monks to look out for Buddhism in this country and identify the problems and deal with them.

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<sup>45</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 27, p. 8.

<sup>46</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 29, p. 3.

<sup>47</sup> *Dinamina*, December 11, P. 4.

<sup>48</sup> *Divaina*, December 12, P. 7.

<sup>49</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 15, P. 8.

<sup>50</sup> *Divaina*, December 24, Front Page.

He questions who is 'keeping an eye on Muslim extremism', and said that it is too early to criticise the current government on that front.<sup>51</sup>

- ✦ An article reports that academic Gunadasa Amarasekara stated to the president that the government and opposition are vying for the attention of 'Islamic extremists' and are competing with each other to please them through their actions. He stated that in the past, Gotabaya Rajapaksa won by not listening to the voices of extremists and that the public had clearly understood the danger they were in. It notes that he added that now, the opposition and government should work diligently with regard to the sensitive issues that are circling them in a way that extremists do not get to win in any case.<sup>52</sup>
- ✦ An article talks extensively about the situation related to burials vs. cremations of those who died of COVID-19 and were Muslim. The writer criticises Muslim politicians for the way they are handling the situation. The article refers to Ali Sabry as someone who got the role of Minister of Justice without any qualification for it and that he stands for 'extremist' requests unconditionally. He speaks about leftist parties and their support of Muslim religious freedoms and questions why they have never spoken about the religious freedoms of Buddhist people before. While the people of the country have kept aside their religious beliefs for COVID-19, the writer says, the likes of Ali Sabry stand firm on 'extremist views' and getting those views legalised. The writer says that those who stand for the rights of Muslims these days are not doing so for the love of the people but because they want to cause an upset to the Sinhala Buddhist culture of the country.<sup>53</sup>
- ✦ An article reports that Professor Gunadasa Amarasekara has requested the president and all other political leaders to stay away from falling prey to the 'extremist views' of those who claim to be moderate.<sup>54</sup>
- ✦ An article reports that many monks engaged in a protest in front of the president's office, demanding that the bodies of all those who have died from COVID-19 be cremated.<sup>55</sup>
- ✦ An article reports that Thebuwana Piyananda Thera said at a protest in Mathugama that no matter what the religious affiliation or race of someone who died, if the death was caused by COVID-19, that body will be cremated. He stated that it does not matter which race anyone belongs to, and that their only request is that anybody who died of the virus should be buried under any circumstances.<sup>56</sup>
- ✦ An article reports that Sabaragamuwa Governor Tikiri Kobbekaduwa stated to the deputy chief prelate of the Asgiriya Chapter that lands that belong to the historically

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<sup>51</sup> *Dinamina*, December 26, P. 8.

<sup>52</sup> *Divaina*, December 27, P. 3.

<sup>53</sup> *Divaina*, December 27, P. 19.

<sup>54</sup> *Divaina*, December 28, P. 7.

<sup>55</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 29, P. 10.

<sup>56</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 29, P. 2.

potent Devanagala area are being 'invaded' and 'poached' by those with fake deeds and fake property rights.<sup>57</sup>

- ✦ An article explains the historical and legendary significance of the Vijithapura Fortress and explains the current situation where the land and the attached Jumma Muslim Mosque are separated by a wall. The writer states that the building of this wall significantly damaged the Vijithapura Fortress, and after complaints were made to the police, a suspect was arrested.<sup>58</sup>

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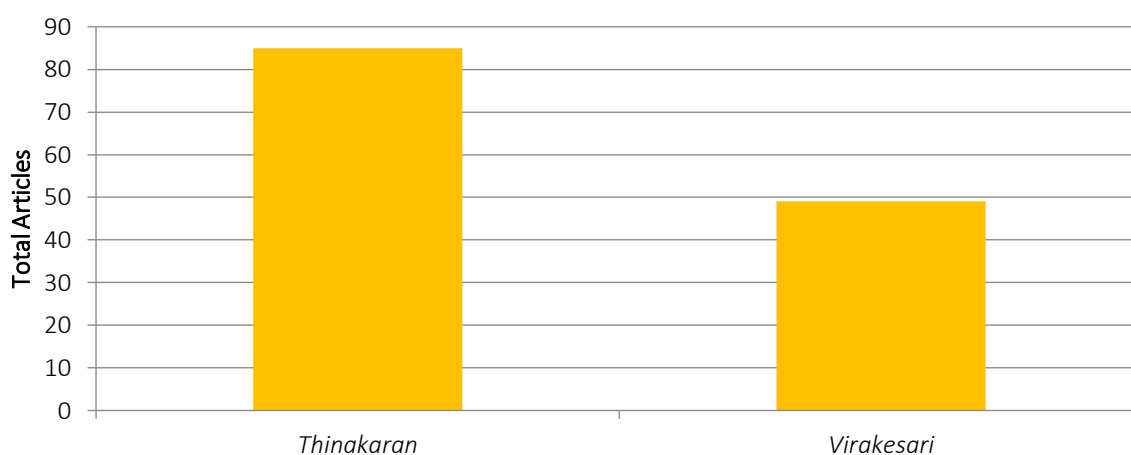
<sup>57</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 25, P. 6.

<sup>58</sup> *Silumina*, December 20, P. 11.

Coverage in Tamil newspapers

Tamil Newspapers	No. of Articles	Reportage		
		Supporting	Neutral	Opposing
<i>Thinakaran</i>	85	7	77	1
<i>Virakesari</i>	49	3	44	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>3</b>

Tamil Newspapers



The Tamil press featured 134 articles that had a bearing on religious freedom. 10 articles supported religious freedom, 121 articles were neutral, and 3 articles opposed religious freedom.

The 10 articles that supported religious freedom are as follows:

- ✦ An article reports that lawyers, including Tamil National Alliance (TNA) MP M.A. Sumanthiran, argued at the Supreme Court to request the court to issue an interim order to prevent forced cremation of COVID-19 patients. It notes that, however, government lawyers attempted to justify the decision of the government to continue cremations.<sup>59</sup>
- ✦ An article reports that Leader of the Opposition Sajith Premadasa made a request to the government to allow Muslim patients who succumbed to COVID-19 to be buried.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>59</sup> *Virakesari*, December 1, front page.

<sup>60</sup> *Virakesari*, December 1, p. 2.



- ✦ An article reports that TNA MP Shanakiyan Rajaputhiran Rasamanickam told Sri Lanka's parliament that "Tamils are going to courts to remember their dead, Muslims are going to court to bury their dead." It notes that he added, "You all should be ashamed," speaking on the refusal of the Sri Lankan government to bury Muslim COVID-19 patients.<sup>61</sup>
- ✦ An article reports that SJB MP Ali Zahir Moulana tweeted, "What was the sin committed by this innocent 20-day old newborn baby for his body to be forcibly cremated?! I am beyond disgusted and heartbroken! How much more cruelty and barbarity must we endure?!"<sup>62</sup>
- ✦ An article reports that SJB MP Mujibur Rahuman alleged that the cremation of the 20-day infant of the Muslim community escalated the question of whether Sri Lankan Muslims are treated like second class citizens in this country. He added that Muslim COVID-19 victims are buried in countries like India and Thailand.<sup>63</sup>
- ✦ An article reports that MP M.A. Sumanthiran stated that the government has agreed to build the Kinniya Hot Well Pillayar temple. He added that they had promised that they will not build a Buddhist temple at the location.<sup>64</sup>
- ✦ An article reports that the Muslim Council of Britain responded to forced cremations of Muslims who died of COVID-19 in Sri Lanka stating, "News of the Sri Lankan government mandating the cremation of all those who have died of COVID-19 is deeply concerning. The policy contravenes upon the rights and religious beliefs of Muslims in Sri Lanka and is contrary to prevailing scientific opinion on the matter. Robust protocols, allowing for the safe, swift and Shari'ah compliant burial of Muslims have been developed and implemented by Muslim communities burying their dead the world over."<sup>65</sup>
- ✦ An article reports that Leader of Sri Lanka Muslim Congress Rauff Hakeem has written to the Maldivian Government. He expressed grave concern over the ongoing discussion on their government's request to arrange burials for Muslims that succumb to COVID-19 in the Maldives. The writer notes that the email, sent by Hakeem to Maldives' Ambassador to Sri Lanka Umar Razzaq, outlines the stance of the country's Muslim community, which seeks to bring an end to discriminatory policies. He adds that meanwhile, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief Ahmed Shaheed responded noting that the move could serve to further marginalise the Muslim population of Sri Lanka.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 7, front page.

<sup>62</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 12, front page.

<sup>63</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 12, p. 7.

<sup>64</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 13, front page.

<sup>65</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 15, front page; *Virakesari*, December 15, front page.

<sup>66</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 18, front page.

- ✦ An article reports that the TNA has requested the government to allow Muslims who succumbed to COVID-19 in Sri Lanka to be buried according to the Islamic practice. They added that preventing them from being buried is a human rights violation.<sup>67</sup>

The **3 articles that opposed religious freedom** are as follows:

- ✦ An article reported that General Secretary of the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) Ven. Gnanasara Thera said that Minister of Justice Ali Sabry should not politicise the matter of cremation of patients who succumb to COVID-19. He added that it was unfortunate that Muslims are seeking rights to bury the dead bodies.<sup>68</sup>
- ✦ An article reported that the Supreme Court, with the consent of a majority of the judges, has ruled in favor of dismissing 11 fundamental rights petitions filed seeking an order nullifying the gazette notification on the cremation of bodies of people who died due to COVID-19.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 21, front page.

<sup>68</sup> *Virakesari*, November 23, p. 8.

<sup>69</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 2, front page; *Virakesari*, December 2, front page



**QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS**

The 324 articles monitored during the months of November and December 2020 can be categorised under four overarching themes pertaining to religious freedom. These themes are *physical violence towards people and/or property; court cases, laws and regulations pertaining to religious freedom; religious inequality and discrimination; and other related reporting.*

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

One key issue was selected for the months of November and December: the mandatory cremation of the bodies of those who contracted or were suspected have contracted COVID-19.

The majority of reportage on this issue falls under the theme of *religious inequality and discrimination.*

Overarching themes	Events/ Issues
Religious inequality and discrimination	Mandatory cremation of the bodies of those who contracted or were suspected have contracted COVID-19

## Religious inequality and discrimination

### Mandatory cremation of the bodies of those who contracted or were suspected have contracted COVID-19

The above issue accounts for all reportage related to religious inequality and discrimination. In the monitoring period, reporting on the mandatory cremation of deceased COVID-19 patients fell under this theme and accounted for a significant percentage of reportage.

In April 2020, the government issued an official gazette mandating cremation for COVID-19 related deaths, following the recommendations of a committee of experts appointed by the Ministry of Health.<sup>70</sup> However, several global guidelines on the disposal of bodies of potential or confirmed COVID-19 patients, including that of the World Health Organisation (WHO), specifically state that those who succumb to the virus do not need to be cremated.<sup>71</sup> After the regulation was enacted in Sri Lanka, it has received frequent criticisms for its disproportionate impact on certain religious minorities, particularly the Muslim community.<sup>72</sup> Along with the sharp increase in COVID-19 related deaths starting in October, the criticisms and protests against mandatory cremations also increased. Eleven fundamental rights petitions were filed against the regulation between April and November. However, on 1 December, the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka dismissed all fundamental rights petitions before it.<sup>73</sup>

Press reporting on this issue was debated primarily on religious grounds, though evidence from non-religious sources was provided to support the various stances. This report aims to unpack the debate on this issue through an ethno-religious lens. Reporting on this topic in November reflected two opposing views: 1) supporting mandatory cremations and 2) supporting burials. Reporting in the mainstream Sinhala press largely supported mandatory cremations. Reporting in the alternative Sinhala press and the Tamil press largely supported allowing burials. Reporting on this issue surfaced a deeper level of polarised thinking in Sri Lankan society on religious freedom in general, going beyond this issue. Proponents of each stance drew from two opposing ethno-religious historical narratives to justify their position. The stance taken on this issue largely depended on which of the two historical narratives the proponent bought into—a narrative of 'extremism' or a narrative of 'racism'. The historical narrative of extremism racism Within the context of their chosen narrative, proponents of each of these stances i) attributed ethno-religious motives to opposing voices, and ii) provided 'evidence' to support their stance.

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<sup>70</sup> For the gazette, please see: [http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2020/4/2170-08\\_E.pdf](http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2020/4/2170-08_E.pdf).

<sup>71</sup> For more details, please see: <http://factcheck.lk/claim/community-physicians>.

<sup>72</sup> *Virakesari* November 04, frontpage; *Anidda*, December 20, p. 2; *Virakesari*, December 17, p.10; *Lankadeepa*, December 23, p. 10.

<sup>73</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 2, frontpage; *Virakesari*, December 2, p. frontpage.

## Supporting mandatory cremations

The mainstream Sinhala media primarily featured the voices of some Buddhist religious leaders and Sinhalese politicians who supported mandatory cremations. Very limited coverage was given to Muslim or other minority voices. Reporting on this stance bought into a narrative of 'extremism'. This narrative emerged as a result of the rising fear of Islamic extremism in Sri Lanka, following the Easter attacks in April 2019. This fear appears to have contributed to negative framings of Muslims in general as responsible for and complicit in the Easter attacks.<sup>74</sup> The fear has become a pervasive narrative among some factions of the Sinhala-Buddhist community. On several occasions, Muslim individuals have been delegitimised by being framed as extremists. For example, the false accusation against Dr. Mohammad Shafi, that he sterilised 4,000 Sinhala-Buddhist women, was strengthened by connecting him to an organisation associated with Zahran Hashim, the alleged leader of the Easter attacks.<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, many political and public events have been interpreted through the lens of rising extremism. For example, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's election win following the attacks was framed as a victory against extremism.<sup>76</sup>

### *i) Ethno-religious motives*

Within the context of the narrative of extremism, proponents of mandatory cremations framed those who supported burials—particularly Muslims—as 'extremists.'<sup>77</sup> This framing likely draws from a pre-existing narratives among some sections of the Sinhala Buddhist majority about Muslims in Sri Lanka—the belief that Muslims want to have their own rules and do not comply with the law of the land, to the detriment of others<sup>78</sup> Some proponents framed the opposition to mandatory cremations as calling for special treatment for a particular group, to the detriment of the country's safety. Reporting of this nature may reinforce existing fears among some sections of the Sinhala Buddhist community regarding the degree of Islamist extremism in Sri Lanka. This in turn, may strengthen the narrative on extremism, further bolstering the growing polarisation.

Even in the past, the government's attempts to control COVID-19 have often been viewed through an ethno-religious lens. From the outset, the press racially profiled certain minority groups, particularly Muslims, attributing direct blame to them for the spread of COVID-19.<sup>79</sup> The criticisms in the press towards the Muslim community for protesting mandatory cremations has been framed in a similar manner. For example, one report claimed that

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<sup>74</sup> See *The Media Analysis*, Vol. 9, #17

<sup>75</sup> See *The Media Analysis*, Vol. 9, #20

<sup>76</sup> Please see Verité Research, *Report on Understanding press coverage on religious freedom for the months of October & November 2019* at <http://www.minormatters.org/en/media-pdfs> [last accessed 26 January 2020].

<sup>77</sup> *Dinamina*, November 11, p. 11; *Divaina*, November 11, p. 7; *Divaina*, November 15, p. 6; *Lankadeepa*, November 15, p. 12; *Divaina*, December 24, Front Page; *Divaina*, December 27, p. 3; *Divaina*, December 27, p. 19; *Divaina*, December 28, p. 7.

<sup>78</sup> *Mawbima*, June 13, 2019, p. 12

<sup>79</sup> See *The Media Analysis*, Vol. 10, #13, #14

“Muslims seemed to be forcing the government to allow burials” in a way that is not “conducive to handling a pandemic”.<sup>80</sup> Reporting of this nature implicitly places blame on the 'extremist' Muslim community for the challenges faced in controlling COVID-19.

Under the debate of burial vs mandatory cremation, the government faced criticism from Buddhist religious leaders for not immediately rejecting the requests to allow burials and “dancing to the tune of extremist groups”.<sup>81</sup> For example, one report noted that “the people who voted the current government in did not do so with the hope that they would treat different religious groups differently and enact different laws for different religions”.<sup>82</sup> This line of reporting may be a reference to the current government’s electoral campaign slogan of 'one country, one law'. Framing the request to bury the dead in the context of a deeper narrative of extremism provided grounds to call for government action to sustain mandatory cremations. This allowed these Buddhist leaders to justify their criticism of the government's response.<sup>83</sup>

### ii) Supporting evidence

In order to justify the anti-burial stance, proponents of this stance and the mainstream Sinhala media sought to highlight supporting ‘evidence’. Several reports and Buddhist leaders noted that action should be taken according to the guidelines and recommendations issued by the health ministry and not religious inclinations.<sup>84</sup> Some reports even erroneously claimed that the WHO had mandated cremation.<sup>85</sup> Limited coverage was afforded to those who noted that global guidelines contradicted the recommendations from the first expert committee appointed by the government.

The trust placed in the report of the first expert committee, despite its divergence from international guidelines, may be a result of the ideological belief that local opinions/expertise are more credible than international expertise. For example, this ideological belief may have factored into the credibility afforded to other local initiatives in the press such as the ‘Dhammika *Paniya*’, which was an ayurvedic remedy popularised by some government actors as an ‘anti-COVID-19 potion’.<sup>86</sup> However, the application of this ideological belief appears to be selective and reflects a majoritarian conception of 'local'.<sup>87</sup> Another committee of experts was reportedly appointed by the Ministry of Health in late December. This committee recommended that both cremations and burials were possible provided that safety guidelines

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<sup>80</sup> *Divaina*, November 15, p. 6.

<sup>81</sup> *Divaina*, November 11, p. 7.

<sup>82</sup> *Divaina*, November 12, p. 10.

<sup>83</sup> *Dinamina*, November 11, p. 11; *Divaina*, November 11, p. 7; *Divaina*, November 12, p. 10; *Divaina*, November 12, p. 10.

<sup>84</sup> *Divaina*, November 11, p. 7; *Divaina*, November 12, p. 10; *Dinamina*, November 13, p. 6; *Divaina*, November 14, p. 14; *Lankadeepa*, November 15, p. 6; *Divaina*, November 16, p. 5.

<sup>85</sup> *Divaina*, November 16, p. 5; *Divaina*, November 16, p. 11.

<sup>86</sup> Since then, a number of MPs who took the potion have tested positive for COVID-19.

<sup>87</sup> See *The Media Analysis*, Vol. 11, #1

were followed.<sup>88</sup> However, proponents of mandatory cremation have not given equal weightage to the more recent recommendations by the expert committee.

### Supporting burials

The Tamil press and the Sinhala alternative press primarily featured voices of opposition politicians and minority religious leaders who supported allowed burials. Reporting on this stance bought into an opposing narrative of 'racism'. This narrative emerged as a result of i) growing insecurity and fear among some segments of society for the wellbeing and safety of minority communities and ii) the belief that minorities tend to be treated like outsiders and are excluded from the policy making process. This narrative can be understood through the host-guest structure discussed in past reports—where Sinhala-Buddhists are viewed as the primary citizens and minorities as guests who are encouraged not to 'challenge existing power structures'.<sup>89</sup> Some actions, taken by governments in the past, including the incumbent government, have reinforced this narrative. One of the most recent examples in this regard is the banning of niqab following the Easter attacks.<sup>90</sup>

#### *i) Ethno-religious motives*

Within this context, proponents of burials argued that mandatory cremations were anti-Muslim<sup>91</sup> and racist,<sup>92</sup> citing the devastating impact it had on the Muslim community. Cremation is prohibited in the Islamic faith, as 'it is considered a violation of the dignity of the human body'.<sup>93</sup> As a result, some families have even chosen to leave bodies of their family members in mortuaries rather than permit cremation.<sup>94</sup> Following the enforced cremation of a 20-day old infant against the family's wishes, several Muslim leaders expressed their heartbreak.<sup>95</sup> This incident escalated the issue and related reporting. When the Maldivian Government offered to allow Sri Lankan Muslims to be buried in their country, voices in the press noted the 'humiliation' of receiving the offer, when the Sri Lankan Government has not done anything.

<sup>88</sup> For more information, see: <http://epaper.dailymirror.lk/epaper/viewer.aspx>

<sup>89</sup> Please see Verité Research, *Report on Understanding press coverage on religious freedom for the month of June 2019* at <http://www.minormatters.org/en/media-pdfs> [last accessed 26 January 2021].

<sup>90</sup> *BBC News*, April 29, 2019, available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-48088834> [last accessed 26 January 2021].

<sup>91</sup> *Dinamina*, December 22, p. 5.

<sup>92</sup> *Virakesari* November 04, frontpage; *Anidda*, December 20, p. 2; *Virakesari*, December 17, p.10; *Lankadeepa*, December 23, p. 10.

<sup>93</sup> *Sri Lanka to cremate Muslim COVID-19 victims despite objections*, Aljazeera News, December 9, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/9/sri-lanka-to-cremate-muslim-covid-19-victims-despite-objections>

<sup>94</sup> *Sri Lanka: Covid-19 Forced Cremation of Muslims Discriminatory*, Human Rights Watch, January 18, 2021, available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/01/18/sri-lanka-covid-19-forced-cremation-muslims-discriminatory> [last accessed 26 January 2021].

<sup>95</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 12, frontpage; *Thinakaran*, December 12, p. 7; *Thinakaran*, December 14, frontpage; *Virakesari*, December 15, p. 2.

While government actors framed the issue of mandatory cremations as unique, unavoidable, and unfortunate circumstances, it was interpreted by the Tamil and alternative press as part of a longer history of exclusionary and discriminatory policies, and anti-Muslim sentiment. Through this lens, reporting fed into a larger critique of how minorities are treated in Sri Lanka, as a result of Sinhala Buddhist majoritarianism. The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka noted in April that "at a moment of unprecedented health crisis like that at present, views of the public health specialists and other relevant scientists must prevail in the interest of all. However, when cultural or religious sensitivities are involved, the proper path is to dialogue with the particular community concerned so that a final decision is taken in a consultative manner."<sup>96</sup>

The Tamil press also featured several protests against the regulations, where individuals tied white cloths to the gates of a cemetery to express mourning and solidarity with those who were not allowed to bury their dead.<sup>97</sup> However, police removed the cloth, and military personnel were seen to be monitoring those who came to the site.<sup>98</sup> . Consequently, such actions seemed to strengthen the pre-existing narrative among the minority community on racism, further bolstering the growing polarisation

#### *ii) Supporting evidence*

Proponents of burials justified their stance on two grounds: i) how mandatory cremations are a violation of human rights, and ii) the lack of scientific evidence to support the recommendations of the first expert committee.

Several local and international bodies, such as the Sri Lanka Human Rights Commission and Amnesty International, criticised the government for not respecting the rights of Muslims and other minorities by mandating cremation.<sup>99</sup> Reporting in the past has surfaced similar criticisms of the president and his party for other alleged human rights violations. For example, in the last year, the government has been criticised for the killing of prisoners in state custody,<sup>100</sup> for

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<sup>96</sup> Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, April 7, available at: <https://www.hrsl.lk/hrsl-position-on-regulation-on-disposal-of-bodies-of-covid-19-victims/> [last accessed 26 January 2021].

<sup>97</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 14, frontpage; *Virakesari*, December 15, p. 2; *Thinakaran*, December 19, p.13.

<sup>98</sup> *Virakesari*, December 15, p. 2.

<sup>99</sup> R. Mahamoor (10 December 2020), *Forced cremations in Sri Lanka*, Amnesty International Blog, available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/12/forced-cremations-in-sri-lanka/> [last accessed 26 January 2021].

*Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka*, April 7, available at: <https://www.hrsl.lk/hrsl-position-on-regulation-on-disposal-of-bodies-of-covid-19-victims/> [last accessed 26 January 2021].

<sup>100</sup> See *The Media Analysis*, Vol 10, #43



the detention of lawyer Hejaaz Hizbullah without charge,<sup>101</sup> and for suppression of dissent.<sup>102</sup>

Reporting a noted that the recommendations put forward by the first expert committee did not align with the guidelines of recognised international bodies, such as the WHO. Muslim leaders and groups also noted that there was “no scientific reasoning” for mandatory cremations<sup>103</sup> and urged the government to make a “scientific decision”.<sup>104</sup> The lack of scientific evidence against burials and divergence from global guidelines was used by pro-burial proponents to support the claim that the motivation for mandatory cremations was anti-Muslim sentiment, not health and safety. This further contributed to the larger narrative on racism and minority exclusion.

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<sup>101</sup> T. Ruwanpathirana (15 July 2020) *On Hejaaz Hizbullah: The latest victim of Sri Lanka’s draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act*, Amnesty International, available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/07/sri-lanka-on-hejaaz-hizbullah-and-the-prevention-of-terrorism-act/> [last accessed 26 January 2021].

<sup>102</sup> *Sri Lanka: Increasing Suppression of Dissent*, Human Rights Watch, August 8, available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/08/08/sri-lanka-increasing-suppression-dissent> [last accessed 26 January 2021].

<sup>103</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 19, P. 14.

<sup>104</sup> *Thinakaran* November 26, p. 6; *Thinakaran* November 28, p. 3.

## CONCLUSION

This report was based on media reportage featured during the months of November and December 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 128 articles dealing with religious freedom under five overarching themes. The events/issues that were qualitatively analysed in this report related to one of these five themes, i.e., religious inequality and discrimination. The articles selected for analysis were chosen on the basis that they featured new events/issues that 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 on the mandatory cremation of patients who succumbed to COVID-19. Reporting surfaced deeper polarisation on religious freedom in Sri Lanka, with two distinct and opposing narratives—one of 'extremism' and one of 'racism'. Within this context, reporting highlighted two contesting stances: 1) Supporting mandatory cremations and 2) supporting burials. The first stance was advocated primarily by the mainstream Sinhala press and advanced a narrative of extremism. The second stance was advocated by the Tamil and alternative Sinhala press and advanced a narrative of racism. Proponents of both stances examined the issue through an ethno-religious lens, drawing from larger historical narratives, and provided evidence to support their stance. Proponents of mandatory cremation drew from and reinforced the narrative of Islamist extremism and anti-Muslim sentiment in Sri Lanka. By contrast, supporters of burials drew from and reinforced minorities' narratives of racism and Sinhala Buddhist majoritarianism.

## RELATED REPORTING

**Was it dictators who ruled the country from '78 until Sajith's father took over? - Provincial Councils Minister Prof. Sarath Weerasekara** - (Prasanna Sanjeewa Tennakoon) - The minister answers general questions about COVID-19 and Mike Pompeo. He says that had all the Sinhala Buddhist members of parliament voted for 20A, the government would not have had to seek the support of the Muslim MPs. He stated that any help obtained was so that they could fix the country in the future. He said that it is wrong to summarise the entire SLPP campaign for election has being accusatory towards Muslims with regard to sterilisation pills being in food and other stories that were around at the time.<sup>105</sup>

**What the government's nationalist forces say - is it favourable to leave the opposition and join the government?** - (Dayaseeli Liyanage) - A few opinions reported on how certain parties in parliament that are Muslim voted for 20A for a government that swore it would not seek the help of extremist parties. The general consensus is that the Muslim parties should not be allowed to 'soar beyond the powers of the government' and that the government has forgotten its roots i.e. forgotten that the Sinhala Buddhist clergy is willing to help the government. They also say that those members of parliament in the opposition who voted for 20A should not be brought under the wing of the government party.<sup>106</sup>

**Gnanaloka Thera's Story: a monk who got beaten up by Tamil Nadu extremists** - (Prasanna Sanjeewa Tennakoon) - The Buddhist monk in question recalls how he was almost killed while in Delhi by a group of extremists who were under the false assumption that a Tamil genocide was occurring in Lanka at the time. He recalls it in detail. He also says that he is a Buddhist monk and that it is not in his nature to be hateful towards anyone.<sup>107</sup>

**Recite the Rathana Sutra at every monastery, says PM** - PM Mahinda Rajapaksa has requested the clergy to recite the Rathana Sutra in every monastery for the safety and wellbeing of the people in the country who are facing the COVID-19 threat.<sup>108</sup>

**We must get used to a discipline not out of fear of the law but because we have to protect each others' lives - Cardinal** - (Special Correspondent) - Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith has stated that it is the responsibility of the people to be disciplined in the face of the COVID-19 epidemic

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<sup>105</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 1, p. 16.

<sup>106</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 1, p. 18.

<sup>107</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 1, p. 5.

<sup>108</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 2, Front Page.

that is sweeping the country once again. He stated that the people should follow the law because the rest of society depends on it.<sup>109</sup>

**Ancient inscription found in Digavapi - belongs to 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> century AC (After Christ) - (Navarathna Samaratunga)** - The Ampara Archaeological Unit has discovered an inscription belonging to the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> century AC at the site of the ancient Digavapi stupa, as a result of the construction being done there.<sup>110</sup>

**134<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ananda College - the Ananda-Nalanda pioneers of Buddhist education -** The article details the journey of Ananda College upto now - it talks about principals, teachers and students.<sup>111</sup>

**The Pujapitiya Batagalla Health Centre - 18 years in deterioration** - (Mohammed Aasik) - The people of Pujapitiya state that the health centre that was built there owing to the need of the people, is disrepair and has been abandoned for 18 years - it is almost destroyed now.<sup>112</sup>

**Insult to heritage!** - The column talks about what Sri Lankans have inherited from their ancestors in terms of prayer and how the people of the country have traditions related to prayer that happen every time the country is in need of help. The writer says that the health minister's recent venture into her religious beliefs in order to help save the country from COVID-19 should not be mocked by the opposition because she is merely doing what this country is famed to do. The writer also mentions the rituals that Sri Lankans from every religion do in time of crisis, in detail.<sup>113</sup>

**May the Buddha statue being brought to Tissamaha Vihara be a bridge between the North and South** - (Gnanatissa Jayawardena, Pinsiri Ariyaratne) – Ven. Bellanwila Dhammarathana Thera expresses his sincere wish for the Buddha statue that has been kept in the iconic Tissamaha Vihara in Dondra Head, Jaffna, to be a gateway and a bridge towards unity in the North and South parts of the country.<sup>114</sup>

**Although construction work is complete, Uchchalika Rajamaha Vihara is still closed - Worshippers lament** (Dayaratna Ambogama). The historically significant Uchchalika Rajamaha Vihara monastery has been restored via reconstruction by the Central Cultural Fund. While a year has passed since work has been completed, the monastery is still not open to the public.

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<sup>109</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 3, p. 8.

<sup>110</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 4, p. 10.

<sup>111</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 4, p. 12.

<sup>112</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 4, p. 18.

<sup>113</sup> *Dinamina*, November 5, p. 4.

<sup>114</sup> *Divaina*, November 5, p. 5.

The people in the surrounding area in Anuradhapura, where the monastery is located, are unhappy about this and are expressing their disappointment about the fact.<sup>115</sup>

**Fake church showing up on Google Maps in Dambulla for Zahran Hashim - Even his pictures can be viewed - Dambulla City Council in vehement opposition** (Special Correspondent for Sigiriya). Google Maps currently shows a fake location in Dambulla, which is shown to be a Muslim church/mosque where Zahran Hashim conducts religious sessions and engages in preachings. There are pictures depicting Hashim's preachings that pop up on the map in this location. The Dambulla City Council is vehemently against this and all regional ministers, irrespective of party politics, have banded together to create a proposal which stipulates that legal action be taken in order to tackle this issue and fix the Google Maps inaccuracy. The mayor stated that there is no actual building in that location, and that this issue needs to be handled with the utmost care so that the efforts in the country towards unity and reconciliation are not affected.<sup>116</sup>

**"Every time the country faced hardship, Ven. Maduluwawe Sobhitha Thera took the initiative" Karu Jayasuriya reminisces** (Nimale Kodithuwakku). Karu Jayasuriya stated many great things about Ven. Maduluwawe Sobhitha Thera, a known activist and highly regarded member of the Buddhist clergy, at the 5-year commemorative ceremony of the Thera's death. He went on to talk about how Sobhitha Thera always defended the country in times of crisis and was always willing to stand up for the country in challenging times. He also went on to say that after Sobhitha Thera's death in 2015, the country plunged into an era of uncertainty and deceit, and that the truth will come out eventually with regards to all of that.<sup>117</sup>

**Opposition towards monastery being built in Bogaswewa** (Special Correspondent for the Northern Province). The leader of the Tamil National Alliance in Mullaitivu has expressed his opposition towards the building of a Buddhist monastery in the Bogaswewa area, a place that belongs to the Tamil citizens in Vavuniya. He claims that the building of this monastery has caused damage to the neighbouring forest and to the area in general.<sup>118</sup>

**"All people of all religions must work with extreme responsibility in the face of COVID-19" - General Secretary of the BBS, Ven. Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara Thera** (Upali Karunaratne). Gnanasara Thera has said that all people, when carrying out their religious activities, should take great care and responsibility in terms of COVID-19. He also stated that the government needs to give the public a clear picture of the situation. He also said that if Muslim extremism is allowed to rear its head once again, another batch of Zahran Hashims will be created. He said

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<sup>115</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 6, p. 15.

<sup>116</sup> *Dinamina*, November 7, p. 3.

<sup>117</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 9, p. 8.

<sup>118</sup> *Dinamina*, November 11, p. 3.

that everyone should be careful about their religious practices at this time. He pressed on the issue of Muslim extremism and said that the government must control it and protect the traditional Muslims in the country from it.<sup>119</sup>

**Was permission given for Muslim people who died from COVID-19 to be buried? – Gnanasara Thera asks the Government** – (Sirimantha Rathnasekara) – General Secretary of the BBS Ven. Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara Thera has demanded from the president and prime minister to immediately inform the country whether or not the government gave permission for the bodies of Muslims who died of COVID-19 to be buried instead of cremated. He says that if that is not the case, then the General Secretary of the Ceylon Thowheed Jamath, Abdul Razik should be arrested and legal action should be taken against him for spreading false narratives.<sup>120</sup>

**"Those who die of COVID-19 should be disposed of according to health guidelines and not in the way that extremist groups want" – Ven. Gnanasara Thera** (Sirimantha Rathnasekara). General Secretary of the BBS, Ven. Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara Thera, stated that the cremation/disposal of the bodies of those who died of COVID-19 needs to be done in accordance with health guidelines issued by specialists, and not on the demands of certain extremist groups. He also said that if the government is willing to dance to the tune of these groups, then Muslim extremism in the country will only continue to grow. This statement is with regards to a statement of thanks issued by the General Secretary of the National Thowheed Jamath, in which he thanks the government for listening to the concerns of the Muslim people and thanks the government for allowing Muslim bodies to be buried instead of cremated. Gnanasara Thera said that, because the country is in a dire situation, the bodies of those who had COVID-19 should be cremated, in keeping with health guidelines, irrespective of the person's faith or religion.<sup>121</sup>

**"Because they won't take them, they are stuck on this side" says SJB MP Lakshman Kiriella** (Prasanna Sanjeewa Tennakoon). The MP sits down with the newspaper to talk about the country's affairs. He talks about the COVID-19 response and how poorly the government is handling it. He says that the government should have created a parliamentary committee to fight the virus but they did not. He says that the army needs to take a backseat and allow health officials to run the operation. He also talked about the SJB MPs who sided with the government party regarding 20A, saying that they have been renounced by the party, even though those MPs might say that they still belong to the SJB. He also spoke about the Muslim minister from Kandy, and how certain SJB members helped him secretly and some helped him openly.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> *Dinamina*, November 11, p. 11.

<sup>120</sup> *Divaina*, November 11, Front Page.

<sup>121</sup> *Divaina*, November 11, p. 7.

<sup>122</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 11, p. 18.

**Dambulla City Council disgraced by fake Google Maps location of a Muslim church in the middle of the city** (Kanchana Kumara Ariyadasa). Google Maps currently shows a fake location in Dambulla, which shows Muslim church/mosque that is not really there. The Dambulla city council is vehemently against this and all regional ministers, irrespective of party politics, have banded together to create a proposal that stipulates legal action to be taken in order to tackle this issue and get the Google Maps inaccuracy fixed. The mayor stated that there is no actual building in that location, and that this issue needs to be handled with the utmost care so that efforts in the country towards unity and reconciliation are not affected.<sup>123</sup>

**Reconstruction of the Dighavapi Stupa begins with the prime minister in attendance.** The reconstruction activities of the historically significant Dighavapi Stupa started October 11. The PM was in attendance at the auspicious ceremony.<sup>124</sup>

**"The government has started unnecessary conversations and is taking the public's concentration on a different path" - Ven. Omalpe Sobhitha Thera** (Prageeth Janaka). Ven. Omalpe Sobhitha Thera stated that the government is attempting to take the public's attention away from the reality of the situation by creating a false debate about whether or not the bodies of those who died from COVID-19 are being cremated or buried. He further stated that the virus does not discriminate according to religion and, therefore, necessary health steps should be according to guidelines and not with regard to people's religious beliefs.<sup>125</sup>

**"Sixty nine lakhs of people did not vote for the government so that it could pass different laws for different religious groups" - Ven. Prof. Akmeemana Dayarathana Thera** (Chaminda Silva, S. P. Ariyaratne). Dayarathana Thera stated that the people who voted the current government in did not do so with the hope that they would treat different religious groups differently and enact different laws for different religions. He spoke about various issues in the country and specifically addressed the "Rapix Tex" test kits that the government claims they did not bring down to Sri Lanka.<sup>126</sup>

**"Celebrate Deepavali at home", requests the Director General of Health Services from Hindu citizens** (Sujith Hewajulige). Dr. Asela Gunawardena, Director General of the Health Service, has requested all Hindu citizens to kindly stay at home and celebrate Deepavali. He stated that it is unsafe and inappropriate for people to go to kovil at this time.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 11, p. 12.

<sup>124</sup> *Divaina*, November 12, Front Page.

<sup>125</sup> *Divaina*, November 12, p. 10.

<sup>126</sup> *Divaina*, November 12, p. 10.

<sup>127</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 12, p. 11.

**Dambulla City Council disgraced by fake Google Maps location of a Muslim church in the middle of the city** (Kanchana Kumara Ariyadasa). Google Maps currently shows a fake Muslim church / mosque located in Dambulla. The Dambulla City Council is vehemently against this and all regional ministers, irrespective of party politics, have banded together to create a proposal that stipulates that legal action be taken in order to tackle this issue and get the Google Map inaccuracy fixed. The mayor stated that there is no actual building in that location, and that this issue needs to be handled with the utmost care, so that the efforts in the country towards unity and reconciliation are not affected.<sup>128</sup>

**Request from health officers: Do not celebrate Deepavali in the kovil premises; Celebrate at home** (Diana Udayanganee). The Ministry of Health has announced that, this year, Deepavali celebrations should not take place within kovil premises or among gathered sets of people - it has advised people who are celebrating to stay where they are and celebrate remotely.<sup>129</sup>

**Take steps to protect archaeological sites in the East, plots of land belonging to Muhudu Maha Vihara – Ven. Warakapola Indasiri Thera to Prime Minister** (Nalaka Sanjeewa Dahanayake). Chief monk of the Muhudu Maha Vihara, Warakapola Indasiri Thera has requested PM Rajapaksa to ensure the protection of the 72 acre land that is a part of the monastery as well as the hitherto unidentified areas in the East of archaeological importance. This was said when the PM visited the monastery.<sup>130</sup>

**COVID-related deaths - final rites should be done according to guidelines from the Ministry of Health– Ven. Narangpanawe Ananda Thera** (Asela Kuruluwansa). Narangpanawe Ananda Thera said that the decision about whether to cremate or bury the body of someone who died of COVID should be taken according to the guidelines and recommendations issued by the Ministry of Health and not according to religious inclinations . He further stated that, if it is dangerous for those alive when a body is buried, then irrespective of religion - Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism - that body should be cremated.<sup>131</sup>

**PM advises that Muhudu Maha Vihara premises be made a place of worship** (Anura Balasuriya). The prime minister has instructed the secretary of the Ministry of Buddhist Affairs to mark the land that is a part of the Muhudu Maha Vihara in Pottuvil, and to make that land officially a place of worship.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 12, p. 12.

<sup>129</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 13, p. 1.

<sup>130</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 13, p. 6.

<sup>131</sup> *Dinamina*, November 13, p. 6.

<sup>132</sup> *Divaina*, November 13, p. 11.



**Let the whole country be of one mind about COVID deaths and the disposal of bodies** (Sujeewa Thathsara). The Buddhist clergy expressed their thoughts on the procedure regarding the disposal of bodies of those who have died of COVID-19. They stated that at this time, everyone should be following the same procedure and that the followed procedure should be the best one that the health authorities declare everyone should follow.<sup>133</sup>

**Bodies of those who died of COVID-19 need to be disposed of after understanding the situation** (Sujeewa Thathsara). With regards to the bodies of those who died of COVID-19, Ven. Pahiyangala Ananda Sagara Thera says that the disposal of said bodies needs to be done according to health guidelines in a way that maximises the safety of the rest of the public, during a pandemic situation.<sup>134</sup>

**Amending the marriage certificate.** The writer talks about the issue with burying the bodies of Muslim people who died of COVID-19. He points out that Muslims seemed to be forcing the government to allow burials, and that there is a rumour that a letter containing the fact that the WHO declared burials to be in line with health guidelines was sent to the PM. He also talks about how extremist Muslim politicians are trying to sway the government to their side and are not acting in a way that is conducive to handling a pandemic situation. The writer remarks that people have to worry about making life on earth easier and better and not about making life in heaven better.<sup>135</sup>

**Allowing Muslim bodies to be buried is an invitation for the genocide of Muslims -** (Uditha Senarath Kunkunawe). The writer says that what most of the farsighted experts have failed to pay adequate attention to is the ritualistic practice that Muslim people do to dead bodies before they are buried. Accordingly, a dead body is bathed and cotton is stuffed in the body's nostrils and ears, and the body is then shrouded in a cloth. This ritual is done almost exclusively by men and there is a high risk that, during these rituals, the virus can spread. The biggest problem is the water that is used to bathe the body being released into open spaces. This could cause Muslim children and elders in the area to contract the virus. The writer says that, therefore, allowing Muslim burials would lead to the genocide of the race, and that politicians need to open their eyes to the truth and not merely fight for religion without paying attention to possible implications.<sup>136</sup>

**I didn't experiment on burials - Prof. Meththika Vithanage** (Tharindu Uduwaragedara). Prof. Meththika Vithanage of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura stated that she did not carry out

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<sup>133</sup> *Divaina*, November 14, p. 13.

<sup>134</sup> *Divaina*, November 14, p. 14.

<sup>135</sup> *Divaina*, November 15, p. 6.

<sup>136</sup> *Divaina*, November 15, p. 16.

any experiments related to burials of bodies and that the statements she made were not based on her own research on the matter.<sup>137</sup>

**National government that was brought in secret** (A Citizen). The writer points out that the President has betrayed his constituents by actually bringing in the 20<sup>th</sup> Amendment in parliament. He also states that the peculiarity of this comes from the fact that the staunch Sinhala Buddhist groups that backed up the president were among those who severely criticised 20A when it was first introduced, and continued to oppose its passing,<sup>138</sup>

**COVID-19 does not care about race or religion.** The writer states that the current situation with regards to the debate on whether or not to bury bodies of Muslim people is becoming more dangerous than the virus itself. He states that, while certain Muslims are worried about the burials, the Muslim politicians are giving these concerns a voice, and that they have placed their political goals atop their list of reasons for "criticising" the act of incinerating bodies. The writer says that politicians are not looking to get justice for the people, but to forward their agenda. He also says that it is unwise for anyone to curate an experience that everyone in the country is going through.<sup>139</sup>

**Government and opposition clashes - debates on budget** - (Gajaba) - The writer sums up the country's political news for the past few weeks, citing COVID-19 as taking public attention away from other issues. He talks about the Cabinet meeting, the president's year in office, the requests for Basil Rajapaksa to come to parliament, the government appointing four subcommittees to look into developing the agro-economy, S.B. Dissanayake's lament that MPs were not a metre apart during the cabinet meeting, the opposition leader's statement that the public will not be made into lab rats, 11 MPs from Kalutara meeting Sajith Premadasa and Premadasa's first congratulations to Joe Biden on his win.<sup>140</sup>

**Is burying COVID-19-laden bodies suitable?** (Muditha Dayananda) The writer talks about the world and its handling of the virus. Ven. Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara Thera says that the issue about burying Muslim bodies should not even be discussed, because religious issues are touchy subjects. He further stated that, given the fact that it is a pandemic situation that the country is facing, it is important that the public follow the government's guidelines and not fight to have their religious rituals carried out. The writer explains the WHO's reasoning behind allowing any form of disposal to take place. Prof. Meththika Vithanage states that such decisions should be taken by checking whether the virus can travel in the water used to exhume bodies. The Ceylon Thowheed Jamath says that there is no scientific basis regarding the government's decision to

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<sup>137</sup> *Anidda*, November 15, p. 1.

<sup>138</sup> *Anidda*, November 15, p. 9.

<sup>139</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 15, p. 4.

<sup>140</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 15, p. 5.

only cremate the bodies of those who die of the virus and that if such a scientific reason is shown, they are willing to let go of their fight.<sup>141</sup>

**The only Buddhist temple in Kalpitiya gets bulldozed.** The writer says that every kilometer in Sri Lanka contains some sort of archaeological, historically significant relic or some other value. The Allirani Castle, a temple that was said to be historically significant, has now been bulldozed, according to people living in the area. While there are many myths about the place, it seems that half of the area has been bulldozed to allow coconut plantation.<sup>142</sup>

**The opposition was waiting for the pandemic to become spring (prosperous time)** (Prasana Sanjeewa). State Minister Channa Jayasumana comments on the ideas spreading about the government's handling of the virus. He states that the government is very much actively trying to control the virus and has not given up. He also stated that the ministers from the previous administration were always good at talking up a big game but never delivered, so their statements on the matter are less than valid. He stated that the opposition is waiting for the situation to become a spring so that they can use it to their advantage.<sup>143</sup>

**Is this the last battle for nationalists?** The writer says that President Rajapaksa's time in office is the "last battle" that nationalists will be able to fight, because if the presidency goes without any nationalist policies being implemented, the chances will be less than slim for them going forward in their venture.<sup>144</sup>

**What should our one goal be?** (Prof. A. T. Ariyaratne). The writer claims to look at world affairs through Buddhist teachings. He states that he has met leaders who want power all to themselves and will do anything to get that power, and that he has also met leaders who genuinely want every citizen to have equal rights and for equality to reign true. He states that if a leader wants autonomous power, history has taught us that when that fails it is not the public but that leader that suffers.<sup>145</sup>

**If decisions are made by taking account of extremists' requests, many issues will take place in the country.** Ven. Keppitiyagoda Siriwimala Thera has stated that the government should not make decisions by paying heed to science or by listening to the complaints made by extremist groups, but by putting together a panel of experts to decide on the matter.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 15, p. 6.

<sup>142</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 15, p. 19.

<sup>143</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 15, p. 22.

<sup>144</sup> *Anidda*, November 15, p. 8.

<sup>145</sup> *Anidda*, November 15, p. 6.

<sup>146</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 15, p. 12.

**One law for every race** (W. A. Wijesinghe). The writer says that the public requests that Sinhala, Muslim, Hindu and Burgher people be treated equally with equal considerations of the law, and if this does not happen there will be racial conflict in the country.<sup>147</sup>

**The path regarding COVID-19 related decisions that will not lead you astray** (Haegoda Vipassi Thera). The writer says that the guidelines issued by the WHO state that any body of a person who died of COVID-19 should be cremated to avoid the virus being spread from the body, and that the entire country's public should follow this guideline irrespective of religion.<sup>148</sup>

**It is unfair to go against the authority of world health experts' and bury Muslim bodies** (Gnanatissa Jayawardena, Pinsiri Ariyaratne). Ven. Akmeemana Dayaratne Thera has stated that in a situation where the WHO has declared that the bodies of those who die of COVID-19 should be cremated, it is unfair to everyone to allow the bodies of Muslims who died from the virus to be buried against WHO advice.<sup>149</sup>

**Ven. Napana Thera's passing: Former Minister Hakeem expresses grief.** Former Minister Rauff Hakeem expressed his condolences on the passing away of the chief prelate of the Ramanna chapter, stating that he was an individual who fought to achieve unity among all races of people in this country.<sup>150</sup>

**There is no scientific basis for cremating bodies - Reevaluate your decision - Patriotic Sri Lankan Muslims request.** The Patriotic Sri Lankan Muslims organisation has forwarded a letter to the secretary of the Ministry of Health asking them to reconsider the burning of bodies. The letter states that there is no scientific reasoning that suggests that burying a body will make the virus spread, and that no authority or recognised health body in the world has released any scientific finding that supports the theory that burying bodies will spread COVID-19.<sup>151</sup>

**Auctioning off religion and race at the polls** - The writer talks about the six Muslim MPs who voted in favour of 20A in parliament, and says that their action has probably led Muslims to doubt the nature of racial party politics. The writer says that such thinking would not occur only because the MPs cast their vote for 20A, but because the Muslim citizens view that act as going against the wishes of their community.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 15, p. 19.

<sup>148</sup> *Divaina*, November 16, p. 5.

<sup>149</sup> *Divaina*, November 16, p. 11.

<sup>150</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 19, p. 6.

<sup>151</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 19, p. 14.

<sup>152</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 21, p. 4.

**They could have listened to the clergy when passing 20A** (Nimale Kodithuwakku). Karu Jayasuriya states that the president, who says time and time again that he would obtain the advice and the blessings of the Maha Sangha, should have done so before bringing in the 20<sup>th</sup> Amendment to parliament and passing it.<sup>153</sup>

**Pirith chantings begin with the president's presence – Over 200 Monks in Attendance.** A pirith chanting ceremony set to last 21 days began on the 18<sup>th</sup> of November with the president in attendance and with over 200 monks present. The ceremony's main aim is to wish wellness and health upon the citizens of the country.<sup>154</sup>

**Until Zahran's collaborators are caught, national security is in danger** (Muditha Dayananda). Former Senior Deputy Police Chief at the CID Ravi Seneviratne, states that until those who helped Zahran Hashim with his terrorist activities and those who commanded him to do them are found and arrested, the national security of Sri Lanka is not guaranteed.<sup>155</sup>

**On the day of the terrorist attack, intelligence head got through to the former president's personal bodyguard three times** (Muditha Dayananda). The telephone operator who worked at former president Maithripala Sirisena's official house during the time of the Easter attacks confirmed that while the president was away in Singapore, the heads of CID called the house and got in touch with the president's security guard three times. At the time, however, the president was in a hospital in Singapore.<sup>156</sup>

**Ali Sabry's relative's body gets buried** (Tharindu Uduwaragedara). It is being reported that a female relative of Ali Sabry's who, upon death, tested positive for COVID-19, has been buried upon her death. After the initial PCR test, pressure from above the chain of command had compelled another test to be done, which apparently tested negative for the virus.<sup>157</sup>

**"Reevaluate body disposal guidelines" - Patriotic Muslims write to the secretary of health.** The item contains a letter written by the Patriotic Muslims of Sri Lanka to the health secretary of the country. The letter lists various facts and findings related to the virus and notes that the WHO has not declared burials unsafe. They request the Ministry of Health to at least re-evaluate their stance on cremations and, if possible, to include guidelines to follow when burying a body in their recommendations.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 21, p. 5.

<sup>154</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 21, p. 5.

<sup>155</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 21, p. 15.

<sup>156</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 21, p. 15.

<sup>157</sup> *Anidda*, November 22, Front Page.

<sup>158</sup> *Anidda*, November 22, p. 8.

**The people probably won't tolerate it...** (Dhanushka Silva). Anuruddha Pradeep Karnasuriya states that, while the government is failing in its actions, there is an assumption that the opposition party, like the previous government's opposition coalition, is travelling down a nationalistic route. He says that this assumption is brought out by liberal leftists and that he does not subscribe to it. He says that attention needs to be paid to the UNP and the SJB. He states that Sinhalese parties do not want to kill off minorities in the country, but merely want to secure the safety of the country. He notes that the SJB and the UNP directly address pockets of the people and vow to increase salaries if they are elected.<sup>159</sup>

**President in Anuradhapura for an inaugural ceremony** (Gajaba). The writer recaps the last week in politics and notes the special news of the week. Firstly, the SLPP Budget was introduced. Secondly, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa completed a year of presidency and the prime minister's birthday also occurred. The article also talks about the likes of Sajith Premadasa and Harin Fernando, and mentions the "hunting" of journalists who write against the government and asks for it to stop.<sup>160</sup>

**A year's journey for our president** (Prasanna Sanjeewa Tennakoon). The article describes Gotabaya Rajapaksa's time as defence secretary and his role in bringing down the terrorists who ravaged the country for 30 years, and also looks back at the year of presidency. The article also explores the legacy of the Rajapaksa name and talks about the brothers in question.<sup>161</sup>

**When it was decided to release two of the four people arrested in suspicion of the Vanathavillu incident, AG's advice was not sought** (Muditha Dayananda. Former CID Officer Ravi Seneviratne admitted that, when he recommended that the defence secretary release two of the four individuals arrested after finding explosives in Vanathavillu, he did not seek the advice of the AG.<sup>162</sup>

**Arrest Sumanthiran, who engaged in the LTTE celebration not even 24 hours after the court order against it was issued** (Sirimantha Rathanasekara). Gnanasara Thera has asked the government to arrest M.A. Sumanthiran, who he says engaged in celebrating the LTTE not even 24 hours after the court order prohibiting it had been passed. He further stated that the government needs to stop their habit of appearing as lions to the East and as feeble dogs to the North and put their foot down.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> *Anidda*, November 22, p. 13.

<sup>160</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 22, p. 5.

<sup>161</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 22, p. 6.

<sup>162</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 23, p. 23.

<sup>163</sup> *Divaina*, November 23, Front Page.

**I do not condone killing off the people who point out the problems of the government** (Seneviratne Kahatapitiya). Akmeemana Dayaratne Thera states that it is extremely wrong for the government to even attempt to destroy the certain Bhikshus and national organisations that attempt to point out the government's flaws.<sup>164</sup>

**"The last five years housed a government that insulted Buddhism" - Minister Johnson Fernando.** Minister Johnston Fernando points out that the previous government, during its five year run, was one that insulted Buddhism to the highest degree while in power.<sup>165</sup>

**Not fair to only arrest Hemasiri and Pujith for not preventing the Easter attacks** (Muditha Dayananda). Former President Maithripala Sirisena accepted on the 25<sup>th</sup> that it is unfair to only blame former Defence Secretary Hemasiri Fernando and former Police Chief Pujith Jayasundara for not preventing the Easter attacks. He made this statement to the special commission probing the attack. He further admitted that the *yahapalana* government was becoming a headache for him and that he would have preferred if the parliament broke down on the day of the attack and never reconvened. He also stated that foreign countries and Muslim politicians were the sources that backed up Muslim extremists in the country. He blamed political parties based on race, ethnicity and religion as being the hotbeds for extremist thought.<sup>166</sup>

**I now understand the technological connection between the Vanathavillu explosives storage and Zahran's extremism - former Police Chief Pujith says in final statement** (Muditha Dayananda). Former Police Chief Pujith Jayasundara stated to the commission probing the Easter attacks that he has now made the connection with regards to technology in the store of explosives that were found in Vanathavillu and Zahran Hashim's extremist activities. He also stated that he did not remember being informed that there might be an attack taking place (back then, before the Easter attack) by the CID's former Senior Deputy Police Chief Ravi Seneviratne, and that he learned about this possibility when he was talking to the commission.<sup>167</sup>

**Hizbullah's campus appropriated by government** (Sujith Hewajulige and Anjula Mahika Weeraratne). The Minister of Education, G.L. Peiris, has stated that the Batticaloa Campus Institution that was built by former Governor of the Eastern province, M.L.A.M. Hizbullah, has been seized and appropriated by the government and that the facilities of the building will be redistributed so that university students can enjoy them. The building allegedly has more

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<sup>164</sup> *Dinamina*, November 25, p. 9.

<sup>165</sup> *Divaina*, November 26, p. 2.

<sup>166</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 27, p. 8.

<sup>167</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 28, p. 9.

facilities and amenities than popular state universities and even teaches Sharia Law as a subject.<sup>168</sup>

**No matter how interested he was, the former governor couldn't catch Zahran for the Police** (Muditha Dayananda). Former Governor M.L.A.M. Hizbullah stated to the commission probing the Easter attacks that, no matter how passionate or interested he was in capturing Zahran for the authorities, he could have never done so because, as he believes, Zahran had powerful allies within the intelligentsia that were providing him with protection.<sup>169</sup>

**Animated and inanimated communication** (Hemantha Arunasiri). The writer lends the reader his thoughts on a photograph by Sam Harris called "The Moral Landscape" and writes about the perception of religion through the eyes of the religious, as a special connection that man establishes with a higher power. He also says that the main operating clause for such beliefs to work is the faith that there is something more powerful outside of man's five senses that controls his actions.<sup>170</sup>

**The remembrances the North cannot do** - The writer talks about the ban on ceremonies to commemorate those who died in the North during the civil war and talks about how the attorney general's (AG's) department is uncharacteristically interested in brushing off the arguments made by the people in the North in favour of allowing them to have commemoration ceremonies. He further states that the AG and his department have been meddling in affairs too much, and that the main difference between the commemoration ceremonies in the North and South is that the South commemorates Sinhala Buddhists and that the North wants to commemorate Tamil people. He thus points out the possibility of a racist agenda.<sup>171</sup>

**Who is above Zahran?** (Lasantha Ruhunage) - Former Senior Deputy Inspector General of Police of the CID, Ravi Seneviratne, has stated that until those who were above Zahran Hashim in rank and were giving him his orders are found out, this country's security cannot be guaranteed.<sup>172</sup>

**Cremation guidelines unconstitutional - Human Rights Commission** (Anuranga Jayasinghe). Sri Lanka Human Rights Commission wrote a letter to the Ministry of Health stating that it is

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<sup>168</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 28, p. 6.

<sup>169</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 28, p. 10.

<sup>170</sup> *Anidda*, November 29, p. 21.

<sup>171</sup> *Anidda*, November 29, p. 5.

<sup>172</sup> *Anidda*, November 29, Front Page.



unconstitutional to simply mandate that all bodies of COVID-19 patients be cremated, and also demands that the ministry put out safety guidelines for burials as soon as possible.<sup>173</sup>

**"Rock Aiya" who departed amidst trials and tribulations** (Pavithra Rupasinghe). The article is about M.K. Rocksamy, a renowned musician who passed away 30 years ago in November. His legacy and talent for music making is documented and it is mentioned that certain Sinhala Buddhists started complaining about his songs at the time, although he did not operate with a religious or racist agenda.<sup>174</sup>

**Is a constitution needed?** (S. G. Punchihewa). The writer talks about the idea of a new constitution. He posits that a new constitution should not just be "new" because it is not what the previous constitution was, but should rather be more equal to all people in its articles and ensure that no religion or race is given prominence over the other.<sup>175</sup>

**Atalugama, that always attracts COVID-19** (Muditha Dayananda and Bimal Shyaman Jayasinghe). The article is about Atalugama, an area that has been plagued by COVID-19 cases for a long time. The writer relates the history of an incident involving a reporter who travelled to the area in order to obtain a statement from an Islamic leader about the government prohibition on large gatherings for religious activities and, as the reporter pulled up in front of the mosque, he was thrashed by unknown assailants for no reason at all. He also talks about other occurrences where the citizens of Atalugama have been attacking the police.<sup>176</sup>

**"When are you taking oaths in parliament?" "I Am Yet to Decide."** (Prasanna Sanjeewa Tennakoon). The writer talks to Basil Rajapaksa on his thoughts about when or if he will join the current parliament. The writer notes that Rajapaksa was the mastermind behind the SLPP election and the Gotabaya Rajapaksa election as well. Rajapaksa stated that the president never said that his government was a Sinhala Buddhist one and also says that he has not decided whether to come into parliament or not.<sup>177</sup>

**Muslim leaders who fraudulently obtained government land** - (Muditha Dayananda). It was revealed to the commission probing the Easter attacks that former Governor of the Eastern Province M.L.A.M. Hizbullah, fraudulently arranged for government land to be given to him so

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<sup>173</sup> *Anidda*, November 29, p. 1.

<sup>174</sup> *Anidda*, November 29, p. 21.

<sup>175</sup> *Anidda*, November 29, p. 8.

<sup>176</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 29, p. 3.

<sup>177</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 29, p. 10.

that he could build the Batticaloa Campus Institute. This was proved with evidence by relevant officials at the authorities responsible for granting such lands for public use.<sup>178</sup>

**12 petitions from Hakeem, Rishad and co. to be further considered** (Thilini de Silva and Ranjan Katugampola). The 12 Fundamental Rights petitions filed by Muslim politicians such as Rauff Hakeem and Rishard Bathiudeen and other civilians and organisations against the government regulations that mandate only the cremation of bodies of those who die of COVID-19, have been tabled from consideration by the Supreme Court until the December 30.<sup>179</sup>

**Four Buddha statues and two Sariyuth-Mugalan statues found in a ditch** (Srinath Prasanna Jayasuriya). Four Buddha statues and two Statues of Sariyuth and Mugalan have been discovered in a ditch next to a field.<sup>180</sup>

**The orders for arresting people for terrorism should come from a deputy police chief** (Muditha Dayananda). Deputy IGP Ajith Rohana stated that when people are arrested on suspicion of terrorism, the orders should be issued through a deputy police chief.<sup>181</sup>

**No recollection whether former chiefs tried to reach the president in Singapore about the Easter attacks** - (Muditha Dayananda). Former President Maithripala Sirisena stated that he does not remember whether anyone contacted him via mobile phone about the Easter attacks while he was in Singapore receiving treatment.<sup>182</sup>

**Person who celebrated at Ilwali Cemetery for "Mahaviru Day" arrested** (Dinasena Rathugamage). A man who celebrated the infamous Mahaviru day in Jaffna was arrested by the police for doing so.<sup>183</sup>

**12 petitions against COVID-19 related cremations discarded.** The court has thrown out the petitions contesting the health guidelines in place that mandates cremating bodies of those who die of COVID-19, that were filed by various parties who demanded for Muslim bodies to be allowed burials.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 29, p. 24.

<sup>179</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 30, p. 2.

<sup>180</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 30, p. 6.

<sup>181</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 30, p. 14.

<sup>182</sup> *Lankadeepa*, November 30, p. 14.

<sup>183</sup> *Divaina*, November 30, p. 3.

<sup>184</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 2, p. 6.

**Batticaloa campus is illegal** (Muditha Dayananda). The Batticaloa Campus that was built by M.L.A.M. Hizbullah is illegal as the land was obtained by fraudulent means from the relevant authorities.<sup>185</sup>

**If Easter attacks investigations are not done properly, we will look for other options** (Anuranga Jayasinghe). Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith stated that he has suspicions about whether the commissions probing the Easter attacks are doing their jobs properly and also said that he would have to take other steps if the commission does not do so.<sup>186</sup>

**Dan chased from Malwattu monastery** (Lasantha Ruhunage). "Sinha-le" leader Dan Priyasad was chased away from the Malwattu monastery when he arrived there for some work.<sup>187</sup>

**The media is arousing racism by spreading fear about Atalugama** (Nithya Sewwandi). The writer notes that the Muslim leaders in Atalugama have actually managed to calm the people down and get them to agree peacefully to undergo PCR tests, and that the media is not reporting this and, therefore, are attempting to arouse racism by omitting this fact.<sup>188</sup>

**Proposals for new constitution** This is an excerpt from a letter sent to the Cabinet with proposals for the new constitution. They are: 'make religions and the state independent of each other, citizen's media should be responsible towards the public, the government must encourage innovation and must have a system in place to test untested medicines/cures.'<sup>189</sup>

**How Islamic banking ripped me off** (Rifdi Ali). The article is about a story of a lady who was ripped off by a bank that claimed to honour the principles of Islamic banking, named Free wealth Global.<sup>190</sup>

**The law will be enacted against those who harm artefacts** (Upali Karunaratne). State Minister Vidura Wickramanayake stated that he would enact the law against anyone who harmed or destroyed sacred artefacts that represent the heritage of Sri Lanka.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 2, p. 10.

<sup>186</sup> *Anidda*, December 6, Front Page.

<sup>187</sup> *Anidda*, December 6, p. 2.

<sup>188</sup> *Anidda*, December 6, p. 3.

<sup>189</sup> *Anidda*, December 6, p. 6.

<sup>190</sup> *Anidda*, December 6, p. 14.

<sup>191</sup> *Dinamina*, December 8, p. 15.

**Monks and citizens unite: set fire to cattle pens** - A few cattle pens that had been erected in Weheragoda Yaya, at a place that is of historical significance, were destroyed by villagers and the Buddhist monks in the area.<sup>192</sup>

**Rs. 4000 worth pack from Muslim Cultural Affairs Department** - A dry ration pack worth Rs. 4,000 was given to people living in Galle Fort, courtesy of the Muslim Cultural Affairs Department.<sup>193</sup>

**Unjust to restrict body burials - the commission has no base for their reasoning** - (Pahan Wijesekara). MP Abdul Haleem stated that there is no basis whatsoever for the COVID-19 prevention commission to restrict the burial of bodies of those who have died of the virus, and that doing so is unjust to Muslim people as their religion prohibits cremation.<sup>194</sup>

**Body of a monk from Netherlands in Rathgama** (Lalith Chaaminda, S.K. Kaluarachchi and Sugathapala Diyagahage). The body of a monk from the Netherlands, who was in Sri Lanka for meditation and was meditating at the Polgasduwa Monastery, was discovered in Rathgama two days ago. The body was found by the police.<sup>195</sup>

**Representatives from many non-governmental organisations pressured investigations, says Former Director of Terrorism Investigation Unit, Deputy IGP Nalaka de Silva** (Muditha Dayananda). Former Director of the Terrorism Investigation Unit of the CID, Deputy IGP Nalaka de Silva, stated that during the *yahapalana* administration there were many representatives from non-governmental organisations who would constantly loiter around the CID headquarters and put pressure on investigations. He made this statement to the presidential commission probing the Easter attacks. He stated that the pressure thereby exerted made it difficult to carry out investigations properly. He also mentioned that a rather talented officer of the CID has now had to seek treatment at a mental health facility following the difficulties that he had to face while interrogating Zahran Hashim. He further said that officers were often jealous of each other and operated in a manner that prioritised personal issues over national security.<sup>196</sup>

**"Jamiyyathul Ulama" brings watalappan to presidential commission** (Subhashini Senanayake). Rizwi Mufthi, the president of the Jamiyyathul Ulama organisation, upon arriving to the presidential commission probing the Easter attacks with some people, was seen bringing in parcels of Watalappan into the meeting. The writer of the article points out that it is

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<sup>192</sup> *Dinamina*, December 8, p. 21.

<sup>193</sup> *Dinamina*, December 9, p. 21.

<sup>194</sup> *Dinamina*, December 10, p. 6.

<sup>195</sup> *Divaina*, December 10, Front Page.

<sup>196</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 9, p. 8.

problematic for the leader of the organisation of Islamic religious leaders of the country to treat an official appointment such as that of giving a statement to the presidential commission probing the Easter attacks, which was caused by Islamic terrorists, as somewhat of an inappropriate situation to bring greetings with traditional desserts in tow.<sup>197</sup>

**Case against Ven. Gnanasara Thera postponed to 11<sup>th</sup> February** (A. J. A. Abeynayake). The General Secretary of the Bodu Bala Sena, Gnanasara Thera, against whom a case was made with regard to his slanderous and insulting statements towards the followers of the Islamic faith, is set to go to court regarding the matter on a postponed date - February 11th.<sup>198</sup>

**Are we, the Batticaloa Sinhalese, illegals?** The writer speaks about the Sinhalese people living in war-ravaged Batticaloa, and lends a voice to the citizens living there, who claim that there is no help for them from the government, that the officials in the area treat them coldly and that they are even denied proper identification and therefore cannot vote. The article is a passionate plea from the Sinhalese in Batticaloa towards the government to finally pay attention to them. They claim that, if not for the Buddhist monks in the area, they would be worse off right now.<sup>199</sup>

**Appeal Court President Arjuna removes himself from petition hearing of Hizbullah** (Thilini de Silva and Ranjan Katugampola). The President of the Court of Appeals, Judge Arjuna Obeysekara, has decided to remove himself from the proceedings related to examining the petition put forward that requires the director of the CID to allow Hizbullah's lawyers to consult him while he is under arrest on suspicion of terrorist activity.<sup>200</sup>

**Leader of Jamiyyathul Ulama: The whole country needs one law, we can't have a separate law for Muslims** (Muditha Dayananda). M.I.M. Rizwi, the leader of the National Jamiyyathul Ulama, stated that every person in the country should be under the same law, and special laws should not be in place for only Muslims. He stated this while giving evidence to the presidential commission probing the Easter attacks, and was also questioned about a video that was played to him which showed a sermon being conducted to Sri Lankans living in Saudi Arabia. He stated that anyone could take a quote from Islamic scripture and use it to incite extremism.<sup>201</sup>

**Allow bodies of Muslims to be buried, says Dilan Perera** (Sujith Hewajulige and Anjula Mahika Weeraratne). MP Dilan Perera stated in parliament yesterday that the government should

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<sup>197</sup> *Dinamina*, December 11, p. 4.

<sup>198</sup> *Divaina*, December 11, p. 4.

<sup>199</sup> *Divaina*, December 11, p. 11.

<sup>200</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 11, p. 2.

<sup>201</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 11, p. 8.

allow for bodies of Muslim people who have died of COVID-19 to be buried while health guidelines are followed. He said that he feels the pain of the Muslim citizens of the country.<sup>202</sup>

**Body parts of Ven. Jinawansa Thera from the Netherlands, further observed in Colombo** (Anuradha Priyadarshana). Jinawansa Thera's death was ruled suspicious and the preliminary observations of his body seem to support that theory. It has been decided that certain parts of his body will be sent to Colombo for further observations and assessments.<sup>203</sup>

**Leaders should immediately involve themselves and protect the ancient site of Karadiyan Aru, Batticaloa, we can no longer watch our national heritage being destroyed** (Susantha Amarabandu). Chief Monk of the Mangalarama Monastery in Batticaloa Ven. Ampitiye Sumanarathana Thera, has issued a statement that he cannot allow for anyone to build anything on ancient grounds, claiming that the site is a privately owned property.<sup>204</sup>

**An archaeological monument in Vijithapura has been bulldozed and a wall for a church has been built** - (Sudath Ekanayake) - Officer in charge of archaeological sites has filed a complaint to the police in Vijithapura that a certain party has bulldozed an ancient archaeologically important monument and is planning to build a Muslim church in its stead, a wall for which is already being built.<sup>205</sup>

**COVID-19 does not discriminate based on race and religion; the cremation/burial debate is an unnecessary one, says Ven. Omalpe Sobhitha Thera** (Prageeth Janaka). Omalpe Sobhitha Thera stated that there should not be a debate on whether dead bodies should be cremated or buried and that it is completely unnecessary. He also posits that the severity of this issue has been built up in order to distract the citizens of the country from other, more dire events that are taking place.<sup>206</sup>

**Choose dry, elevated land to bury bodies, PM instructs officials** (Diana Udayanganee). The prime minister has instructed those in charge to search for dry soil areas where the ground water is situated at a very deep level underground, in accordance with guidelines issued by the health department, in order to avoid water contamination by buried bodies.<sup>207</sup>

**Student dies after kovil's bell-rope strangles his neck** (Norwood Ranjith Rajapaksa). Norwood police has reported that an eight year old schoolboy was strangled to death by the rope that

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<sup>202</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 11, p. 8.

<sup>203</sup> *Dinamina*, December 12, p. 3.

<sup>204</sup> *Divaina*, December 12, p. 3.

<sup>205</sup> *Divaina*, December 12, p. 5.

<sup>206</sup> *Divaina*, December 12, p. 7.

<sup>207</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 12, p. 5.

hangs from the large bell at a kovil; while the boy was playing with the rope, it twisted around his neck and trapped him in a chokehold which killed him.<sup>208</sup>

**We used to be just fine in Thambala, now racist poison has been brought** (Nithya Sewwandi). The article is an expose` on the alleged news report by Hiru News about there being cattle pens in Thambala. The writer uncovers that the Muslim cattle herders have previously been affected by the BBS shutting down their cattle pens, but received notice and permission to carry on by the government, at which point the news story about illegal cattle pens being built made its rounds. The writer points out the fallacy of the reporting by Hiru News very clearly.<sup>209</sup>

**Cardinal takes goalpost and runs** (K. W. Janaranjana). The writer argues that the cardinal has expressed his disappointment in the Rajapaksa government in his own way by stating that if the investigations on the Easter attacks are further postponed, new solutions will have to be found and new groups of people will have to be given responsibility. The writer points out that, at the start of the new government's time, the cardinal was fully confident in their capabilities but seems to be regressing from that attitude now. He says that one cannot simply let go of the cardinal's somewhat cryptic statement at a time like this and that explanations need to be given with regards to what he meant by certain phrases like "new groups of people".<sup>210</sup>

**The cardinal and minority politics** (Jayadeva Uyangoda). The writer talks about the cardinal's policies towards the government. He analyses the situation through a unique lens and notes that several learned individuals of minority groups have decided to accept their fate as secondary citizens of the country and forge a new political path by living with the Sinhala Buddhist rhetoric that the country works under. However, the general citizen who belongs to these minorities may not agree with this way of thinking, which makes it interesting to see how the cardinal works with his minority politics.<sup>211</sup>

**Thihariya town and Muslim opposition** (Aruna Jayawardena). Moulavi Munir Mulafir sent a personal letter, the contents of which is presented in this article. In it, he notes that the public media is attempting to cover the government's own shortcomings by stating that Muslim people are not submitting to PCR tests, when in fact, 99 percent of those in Thihariya town who volunteered for PCR testing are Muslim people. Further, it was a Muslim church that provided support for tests to be carried out. He stated that a few people are spreading misinformation on WhatsApp and Facebook about Muslims not submitting to tests, which might be as a result of people wrongly interpreting the loudspeaker announcements asking people to report for testing. He stated separately that it is not just Muslims who are escaping

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<sup>208</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 12, p. 10.

<sup>209</sup> *Anidda*, December 13, p. 4.

<sup>210</sup> *Anidda*, December 13, p. 6.

<sup>211</sup> *Anidda*, December 13, p. 7.

testing and that Sinhalese people do it too. He explains that a Muslim person is afraid for a positive result because the current situation suggests that if they die of COVID-19, his body will be cremated and not buried, as his religion mandates. He notes that the refusal to submit to PCR tests is an indirect result of the government's inhumane cremation policies as well.<sup>212</sup>

**Ministers and MPs showered with feasts (Gajaba)** - The writer sums up the political landscape of the country during the last few weeks and for the immediate future. He reports about another online cabinet meeting that is being scheduled, the government's preparations for provincial council elections, the discussion to be had on the issue of cremation, the large dinner that the Speaker hosted at his residence last week since the budget was finalised, the opposition's accusations against the government, the fact that a group of experts are set to join the SJB, and the steps being taken to rebuild the UNP by its deputy leader in Puttlam.<sup>213</sup>

**Suspects arrested for harming archaeological treasures at Vijithapura (B. M. Wijesuriya).** The people in charge of a Muslim church's building efforts bulldozed the ancient archaeologically significant land at Vijithapura fortress and are claiming that they owned the land and had built a wall for a new church. They were arrested on multiple charges and will remain arrested until the December 24, 2020.<sup>214</sup>

**Bulldozing monuments in Vijithapura: 10 people arrested - President of the Alahapperumagama Mosque also arrested - They rubbed chillies on a stone tablet!** (Sudath Ekanayake). Ten people in charge of a Muslim church's building efforts bulldozed the ancient archaeologically significant land at Vijithapura fortress, claiming that they owned the land and had built a wall for a new church. They were arrested on multiple charges.<sup>215</sup>

**Warrant issued to arrest those in charge of Veddukkunarimalai Lingeswara Kovil in Vavuniya- who forcefully claimed a Buddhist historical site - on sight** - (Dinasena Rathugamage). The officials who are in charge of the Veddukkunarimalai Lingeswara Kovil in Vavuniya have been accused of forcibly taking historically Buddhist sites for their use and the warrant for their arrest on sight has been issued by the Vavuniya magistrate court.<sup>216</sup>

**Netherlander monk's death: 100 policemen on special investigation (M. Susil Priyantha).** A special force of over 100 policemen from Rathgama police began an investigation into the

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<sup>212</sup> *Anidda*, December 13, p. 10.

<sup>213</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 13, p. 5.

<sup>214</sup> *Dinamina*, December 14, p. 3.

<sup>215</sup> *Divaina*, December 14, p. 5.

<sup>216</sup> *Divaina*, December 15, p. 5.



death of Jinawansa Thera, who was a national of the Netherlands, whose body was found floating with his feet tied to a rock, which led the police to believe that there was foul play.<sup>217</sup>

**The CID has not rejected Hizbullah's lawyers from meeting him - Dates and times to be announced today** (Thilini de Silva and Ranjan Katugampola). The attorney general stated that while the CID has not rejected Hizbullah's request to have his lawyers visit him while he is under arrest, they are also about to formally inform the court of the dates and times that they have set aside for these visits.<sup>218</sup>

**There are enough Muslim mosques in the country; We don't need any more, says former Muslim Affairs Minister Halim** (Muditha Dayananda). M.H.A. Halim, former Muslim Affairs Minister, informed the presidential commission probing the Easter attacks that there are enough Muslim mosques in the country right now and that there is no need for any more of them to be built. He also stated that steps must be taken to halt the construction of any more mosques, immediately. He also said that he found out about the growing sense of extremism in the Eastern part of the country after the Easter attacks.<sup>219</sup>

**Maldivian island for burying Lankan Muslims' bodies** (Chathura Pamunuwa). It has been reported that the Maldivian government has offered an island for the bodies of the Muslims in Sri Lanka who died of COVID-19 to be buried and that they have notified our authorities about it. This comes in the wake of the fact that our government still has not approved the burial of bodies.<sup>220</sup>

**General Secretary of Ceylon Thowheed Jamath: Many non-Muslims visit our website and attempt to convert to Islam** (Muditha Dayananda). General Secretary of the Ceylon Thowheed Jamath told the presidential commission probing the Easter attacks that he was directly involved in ordaining the marriage between the suicide bomber who struck the Katuwapitiya church in Negombo and his wife. He answered many questions and, among those questions was the inquiry as to whether his organisation actively engages in converting non-Muslims to Islam, to which he replied that many non-Muslims visit the website for the organisation, after which they want to convert to the religion.<sup>221</sup>

**Victims of the Easter attacks received less compensation than victims of Digana - Beruwala** (Muditha Dayananda). S.M. Bathiudeen, who is overseeing the harm reparation efforts of the country, told the presidential commission probing the Easter attacks that the victims of the

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<sup>217</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 15, p. 2.

<sup>218</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 15, p. 2.

<sup>219</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 15, p. 8.

<sup>220</sup> *Divaina*, December 16, p. 4.

<sup>221</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 17, p. 8.

Easter attacks were given less compensation in comparison to what was given to the people who were hurt by the incidents of unrest in Digana and Beruwala.<sup>222</sup>

**Masterminds behind the Easter attacks still roaming free** - The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka issued a notice detailing the fact that the major masterminds responsible for the Easter attacks have yet to be caught and brought to justice. It also urges the government to not let party politics get in the way of investigations that are being carried out in order to get to the bottom of the issue.<sup>223</sup>

**The Batticaloa Campus that broke the law** (Namini Wijedasa). The writer talks about how the institutions involved in building the Batticaloa University have all broken the law in order to get the necessary paperwork, funding and approval sorted. She points out the problematic nature of the activities that have taken place. The bank's seeming negligence, problems with the paperwork authorising the institute as a higher education institute and the unlawful way in which the land for the premises was procured are all scrutinised in detail.<sup>224</sup>

**Beruwala - Digana victims paid more compensation than Easter attacks victims** (Subhashini Senanayake). The victims of the Easter attacks were given less compensation in terms of financial sums in comparison to what was given to the people who were hurt by the incidents of unrest in Digana and Beruwala, according to an interview done by the presidential commission probing the Easter attacks.<sup>225</sup>

**Cardinal requests christmas to be celebrated in accordance with health guidelines** - (Sujith Hewajulige) - The cardinal has requested all Catholic priests to adhere to health guidelines with regard to Christmas celebrations in church, this year. He mentioned that permission has been granted for churches to conduct mass in batches of no more than 50 people per batch.<sup>226</sup>

**Deputy IGP Ajith Rohana also came for the launch of the translation of the Quran** - (Muditha Dayananda) - General Secretary of the National Thowheed Jamath Abdul Razik stated to the presidential commission probing the Easter attacks that while Shariya law is not suitable to be used with regard to criminal behaviour and issues, it is necessary to be in use with regard to the daily civil lives of Muslim citizens of this country. He stated further that with regard to issues such as marriage and divorce, Shariya law is imperative and that his organisation is willing to work with the government if it wants to bring in amendments. He further explained that at an event in 2015, where he launched the Quran translated to Sinhalese, many Muslim ministers

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<sup>222</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 17, p. 8.

<sup>223</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 17, p. 10.

<sup>224</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 17, p. 14.

<sup>225</sup> *Dinamina*, December 17, p. 5.

<sup>226</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 18, p. 10.

were present and that current Police Media Spokesperson Ajith Rohana provided security for the event.<sup>227</sup>

**Buddha statue and gold ornament more than 5000 years old found in Bondupitiya house -** (Thusitha Kumara de Silva) - A 40-year old man was arrested after a gold Buddha statue and sacred ornament, suspected to be items buried within stupas, were found in his home, along with an instrument that can be used to dig up the stupas for the hidden treasure.<sup>228</sup>

**Protests in the North against cremating bodies of Muslim COVID-19 patients -** (Dinasena Rathugamage) - Several protests took place in Mannar, Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu, organised against the cremation of bodies of Muslim people who have passed away due to COVID-19. In addition to Muslim protesters, quite a few Tamil nationals were also a part of the protests.<sup>229</sup>

**Zahran's group's file was sent to attorney general a month after attack -** (Muditha Dayananda) - Senior lawyer Nishara Jayaratne stated to the presidential commission probing the Easter attacks that a 300-page report on Zahran Hashim and the National Thowheed Jamath was sent into the Attorney General's office a month after the Easter attacks took place, by the Terrorism Investigation Unit. She further stated that while there were reports that the file on the terrorists was apparently sent to the AG's office in 2018, this did not happen until May 6, 2019.<sup>230</sup>

**Thowheed Jamath takes to the streets at Kalpitiya; demands permission to bury Muslims' bodies -** (Amarananda Wijesekara) - The members of the Sri Lanka Thowheed Jamath organisation protested peacefully in Kalpitiya and demanded permission to be granted by the government to bury the bodies of Muslim people who have died of COVID-19 instead of cremating them. More than 50 people showed up, with cutouts and banners made to display.<sup>231</sup>

**Vijithapura fortress violated -** (Upul Thammitta) - The writer explains to the reader of the historical and legendary significance of the Vijithapura fortress and also explains the current situation where the land and the attached Jumma Muslim mosque are separated by a wall. In the building of this wall, the Vijithapura fortress was significantly damaged and after complaints were made to the police, a suspect was arrested.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 18, p. 8.

<sup>228</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 18, p. 2.

<sup>229</sup> *Divaina*, December 18, p. 3.

<sup>230</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 19, p. 8.

<sup>231</sup> *Divaina*, December 19, p. 11.

<sup>232</sup> *Silumina*, December 20, p. 11.

**Afraid of whom?** - (Lasantha Ruhunage) - The writer talks about the recent incident where the Maldivian Government tweeted its support of the Muslims in Sri Lanka and offered up one of their islands for burials, and questions the integrity of our president and the humiliation that this whole situation has brought him. The writer says that it is obvious that the president has not yet discussed this with his cabinet and asks why and who he is afraid of, and what is keeping him from doing so.<sup>233</sup>

**Burning the infant is a racist crime - The Hindu** - (Pavithra Rupasinghe) - The Hindu news organisation has reported that the 20-day old infant's cremation (after he tested positive for COVID-19 and the government forced his parents to concede to the cremation) was a racist crime/ a crime with racial bias.<sup>234</sup>

**Breakdown of civil life, social instability and the government's insensitivity** - (Jayadeva Uyangoda) The writer critiques the state of the country as it is now and points out what is wrong with the way people are treated and how the government's uncaring inaction is affecting the lower income and middle class citizens. He states that the government's insensitivity to the plight of most of its citizens has caused many issues and that the government is not even trying to help out. He questions what the government has actually done for its citizens and lands on the answer "blind faith, racism, fake patriotism and idolisation of politicians".<sup>235</sup>

**A country that cannot give its citizens a burial ground and its useless Muslim politicians** - (K. W. Janaranjana) - The writer talks about how the government is not allowing Muslim people to bury their dead if the dead tested positive for COVID-19 and talks about the recent incident where a 20-day old infant's body was burned. He also talks about how embarrassing it is that the Maldivian government openly announced that it was in talks to accommodate the burial of Muslim bodies of Sri Lankans in one of their islands, while our president is not doing anything. The writer criticises our president and his government for being weak and indecisive. He notes that it is clear that many prominent political leaders are of the belief that these bodies should be allowed to be buried but that this does not matter for any politician whose only goal is to further their own agenda.<sup>236</sup>

**Champika** - (Citizen) - The writer talks about Patali Champika Ranawaka, who recently left his party, the JHU. He remarks that Ranawaka does not proudly wave the flag of racism and racial differentiation and that that flag belongs to the Rajapaksas.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> *Anidda*, December 20, Front Page.

<sup>234</sup> *Anidda*, December 20, p. 2.

<sup>235</sup> *Anidda*, December 20, p. 7.

<sup>236</sup> *Anidda*, December 20, p. 10.

<sup>237</sup> *Anidda*, December 20, p. 11.

**Is it fair to deny burials?** - (Priyanjith Alokabandara) - The writer interviews prominent journalists, lawyers and other people with political opinions and writes about the injustice that is occurring with regard to the bodies of Muslim people not being buried. The major ideas being talked about are the fact that as a society, we are worsening; that there is a campaign taking place against Muslims; that Muslim citizens' fundamental rights are being violated; and the flawed logic behind the denial to bury any bodies.<sup>238</sup>

**Ministers' clash of opinions for provincial council elections** - (Gajaba) - The writer summarises the past 9 months and talks about the impact of COVID-19 on the country and the government's efforts to rid the nation of the virus. He then proceeds to mention the doings of certain politicians: that Bandula Gunawardena made a song for the PM, that Keheliya Rambukwella visited the PM with an orchid plant, that Basil Rajapaksa resumed work, that G.L. Peiris and Pavithra Wanniarachchi discussed with each other about reopening schools, about new positions being filled, about the SJB taking its woes to the streets etc.<sup>239</sup>

**Eastern politics that started with Ashraf** - (D B S Jeyaraj) - The writer talks about M.H.M. Ashraf, the spearhead of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress' leadership on his 20th death anniversary; he reminisces about the plane crash that killed him and 14 others. The article details the man's achievements as a politician.<sup>240</sup>

**Accountant who sent SMS messages saying mosques will be attacked arrested** - (Indika Ramanayake) - An accountant who sent SMS messages stating that the mosques would be attacked has been arrested.<sup>241</sup>

**Different concoction cures only baseless tricks on people** - (Bigun Menaka Gamage) - The writer interviews Sudharshini Fernandopulle, a politician and specialist physician, who breaks down the myth behind medicine and states that the ayurvedic cure is baseless and should not be administered willy-nilly without approval, the same way that the process works with western medicine.<sup>242</sup>

**Punish those who insult Buddhism** - (Nimale Kodithuwakku) - Former Minister Vajira Abeywardena stated that Ven. Pallegama Sirinivasa Thera should be lauded for his effort to protect the Sri Maha Bodhi from harm, in a letter addressed to the same. He also stated that

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<sup>238</sup> *Anidda*, December 20, p. 15.

<sup>239</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 20, p. 5.

<sup>240</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 20, p. 18.

<sup>241</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 21, Front Page.

<sup>242</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 21, p. 4.

the government should apply the force of the law towards those who actively insult and work towards the degradation of Buddhism in the country.<sup>243</sup>

**Sri Lanka should be protected from extremists and principlists** - (Professor Rohan Gunaratne) - The country's extremists and ideologists are using their political platforms to generate and disseminate their personal preferences and related ideas. Extremists are using racial and religious biases to achieve their individual goals. After the Easter attacks, anti-Muslim rhetoric was spreading while the Muslim community stood deaf to those ideas.<sup>244</sup>

**Municipal Council MP remanded for striking cremation protestor with a pole, granted bail** - (Wimal Keerthi) - A municipal council MP, who struck a man belonging to an organisation that was protesting the anti-Muslim cremation policies with an iron pole, is being granted bail.<sup>245</sup>

**Court orders relatives to take health officials' orders - on refrigerating bodies** - (D G Sugathapala) - Galle Magistrate Judge instructed police to take into account the advice given by health officials with regard to storing the dead bodies of those who died of COVID-19 in refrigerators. The bodies in question were stored due to the request made by the relatives of those who died, until the government makes a definite decision about its stance on burials.<sup>246</sup>

**Considerations to be made for burying Muslims' bodies** - (Diana Udayanganee) - Minister Ramesh Pathirana said that the cabinet has ordered health authorities to take into consideration the requests being made by Muslims to allow them to bury the dead bodies of those who died of COVID-19. He further stated that the government has not made a decision with regard to sending the dead bodies to the Maldives for burial, yet.<sup>247</sup>

**With regard to burials: the government is trampling the rights of one of its communities** - (Nimale Kodithuwakku) - Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa stated that the government, while preaching that the health guidelines should be followed, is effectively ignoring and walking all over the rights of one of its communities' religious beliefs and therefore striking a blow towards the religious identity of that community. He said that he severely condemns the way in which the government is actively ignoring the rights of a community in order to further its political agenda.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 21, p. 8.

<sup>244</sup> *Divaina*, December 22, p. 5.

<sup>245</sup> *Dinamina*, December 22, p. 5.

<sup>246</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 22, p. 6.

<sup>247</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 23, p. 10.

<sup>248</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 23, p. 10.

**There's no time where the virus becomes inactive in dead bodies - if buried bodies were to fall into hands of extremists, there will be massive destruction** - (A J A Abeynayake) - Senior Lawyer Charitha Siriwardena stated to the Supreme Court that the WHO has said that the virus is not inactive in a dead body and that the virus can spread through a dead body. He further praised the government's decision to burn the bodies and stated that if these buried bodies were to be dug up by extremists, they could use it in nefarious ways. He also added that as a country that was recently subject to a horrifying attack by extremists, we need to remain overly cautious.<sup>249</sup>

**Beruwala Provincial Council heats up over body cremation issue** - (Chaminda Prasad) - The Muslim MPs in this provincial council stated their opposition to the government's cremating of these bodies and pretty soon a fight broke out at the meeting. While it was kept under control, an MP for the government who was standing on a table and enthusiastically speaking, took ill with a heart condition at the scene. Due to the chaos that took over the meeting, it was ended abruptly.<sup>250</sup>

**Body in Karapitiya cremated** - (Nimanthi Ranasinghe, J K L Chaminda) - The final rites for the dead body of the person who died in Karapitiya hospital will be done according to the guidelines issued earlier, with regard to bodies of those with COVID-19. Previously, the court instructed those involved to either cremate the body immediately or have it stored in a refrigerator until a decision is made.<sup>251</sup>

**COVID-19 cremations: the court gets in trouble every time those responsible change their mind about the matter** - (Nimanthi Ranasinghe) - Wattala Magistrate Court Judge Buddhika Sri Ragala stated that it is the court that gets in trouble when the leaders responsible for the decisions regarding the cremation of bodies of Muslims who died with COVID-19 change their minds constantly and take different decisions at random times. He also stated that whatever decisions made about this issue should not be politically motivated ones.<sup>252</sup>

**State Minister Janaka Wakkumbura: opposition leader is going everywhere and inciting problems that weren't there before** - (Diana Udayanganee) - The state minister said that Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa is visiting Islamic holy places and mosques and making speeches there that will lead to the development of racism. He pointed out that the

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<sup>249</sup> *Divaina*, December 24, Front Page.

<sup>250</sup> *Divaina*, December 24, p. 13.

<sup>251</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 24, p. 10.

<sup>252</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 24, p. 8.

government has created a body of representatives to look into the health guidelines put out by WHO and will not do anything that will harm Muslims in this country.<sup>253</sup>

**Karu Jayasuriya: allow muslims to conduct final rites according to their religion** - (Nimale Kodithuwakku) - Former Speaker Karu Jayasuriya stated that any Sri Lankan has the right to be buried in their home country after their death in the way that they want, and that this right needs to be respected and given to the people who are being slighted in that regard in the current context. He stated that he is requesting the government to consider the WHO and the UN recommendations on this matter and allow people to have their religious final rites fulfilled.<sup>254</sup>

**UNP Leader Ranil: decision regarding cremation of COVID-19 infected bodies should be taken after every party is brought into discussion** - (Anjula Mahika Weeraratne) - UNP Leader Ranil Wickremesinghe stated that with regard to the problem of burying or cremating the bodies of those who died with COVID-19 should be made after discussing it with all religious groups in the country and getting their opinion. He further stated that the right to bury or cremate is a right that belongs to the specific communities of the country.<sup>255</sup>

**50 for a wedding, 50 for a funeral, but the government's strongmen have gatherings for 500 people** - (Nimale Kodithuwakku) - MP Lakshman Kiriella has expressed his disdain at the way the government has allegedly let go of its responsibility. He says that the government has given up the maintenance of the virus as well as the country as a whole. He stated that the government is in the wrong for breaking its own rules and having large gatherings. He also demanded that the government provide a solution to the cremation issue immediately.<sup>256</sup>

**Burial? Cremation? Issue will be solved through discussions** - (Ravi Liyanage, D. G. Sugathapala, J. K. L. Chaminda) - Minister of Justice Ali Sabry stated to the press in Galle that he would have discussions about the various opinions surrounding the idea of cremation and burial of dead bodies and find a solution to the current problem after. He also stated that specialist physicians need to be consulted and has a positive feeling about the outcome.<sup>257</sup>

**Tense situation at meeting about Devanagala in Aranayaka: police summoned** - (Pradeep Kumara Dharmasena, P. Shantha Bandara) - A meeting that was held in Aranayake with the Governor of Sabaragamuwa Province Tikiri Kobbekaduwa in attendance as chief guest, related to the historically significant Devanagala rock and attached land property to it. When an SLPP

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<sup>253</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 24, p. 5.

<sup>254</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 24, Front Page.

<sup>255</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 24, Front Page.

<sup>256</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 25, p. 8.

<sup>257</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 25, p. 8.



MP from Aranayake was giving his thoughts on the matter, the situation started to get tense because some others disagreed with him. Police officers were brought in to deal with the situation.<sup>258</sup>

**May all difficulties vanish - a merry Christmas to all!** - The writer talks about the spirit of Christmas and the percentage of people who celebrate in Sri Lanka, remarks that the country, which is fed by Buddhist principles, prides itself on coexistence and wishes for the world to turn over a new leaf in the new year.<sup>259</sup>

**Jesus' teachings can be used to kickstart the world that is standing still because of COVID-19** - The president has stated that the world could benefit from the teachings of Jesus Christ this Christmas season to kick start its cultural, economic and social activities, after COVID-19 brought everything to a standstill. He notes that Christ preaches about acceptance of all people and working towards the betterment of the community, and says that these teachings can be used to help everyone get back on their feet.<sup>260</sup>

**Don't keep bodies in freezers - take a decision immediately** - (Anjula Mahika Weeraratne) - Former PM Ranil Wickremesinghe stated that the government should decide soon about what to do with bodies of COVID-19 patients, because stashing the bodies in freezers may have adverse effects. He stated that they should take steps to make sure those effects are handled properly as well.<sup>261</sup>

**Protect the Nachchaduwa Tank and the land where the Kusava Pabbatharama monks used to live - public asks government** - (M.M.P.G. Perera) - The people of the surrounding area of Nachchaduwa Tank are asking the government to enforce protection of the area and the land on which they say Buddhist monks of old were inhabitants. It seems that there is various construction happening on this particular land, which is what has led to the pleas by the villagers to the government.<sup>262</sup>

**The issue about bodies of Muslim people dying of COVID-19 needs to be solved soon - Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara Thera** - (Upali Karunaratne) - Gnanasara Thera dispels the rumour that the Buddhist monks are against the burial of bodies, stating that that is not the case. He urges the government to decide soon while also saying that it is the duty of Buddhist monks to look out for the Buddhism of this country and identify the problems and deal with them. He questions

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<sup>258</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 25, p. 6.

<sup>259</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 25, p. 4.

<sup>260</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 25, Front Page.

<sup>261</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 25, Front Page.

<sup>262</sup> *Divaina*, December 25, p. 14.

who is keeping an eye of Muslim extremism, and said that it is too early to criticise the current government on that front.<sup>263</sup>

**Baddegama Samitha Thera distributes face masks to those who attend holy mass** - Former Provincial Council MP Baddegama Samitha Thera visited the Baddegama church for Christmas, and gave face masks to the people at the premises who had come for holy mass.<sup>264</sup>

**The government's "paniya" is just a ploy to save face** - (Hemantha de Silva, Gnanadasa Ranmuthu) - Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa stated that the current government is tricking the public by presenting the "paniya" miracle cure for the virus and is striking a deadly blow to the public's right to life in the process. He stated that the new epidemic is "Power-19" and that the government needs a vaccine injected that helps them remember the promises they made to the public. He goes on about the failings of the government and even criticises their stance on Buddhism, noting that they paid off 8 Muslim MPs to vote in their favour for the constitutional amendment.<sup>265</sup>

**If burying the bodies of COVID positive muslims has negative effects, it will not be allowed** - (H. M. Dharmapala) - SJB MP Imtiaz Bakir Makar stated that if there is evidence that the burying of bodies of Muslims who died from COVID-19 has any negative effects on society, it will not be permitted. However, according to the WHO, burial of bodies has been declared as safe and entirely possible.<sup>266</sup>

**Is civil society successful?** - (Prabodha Rathnayake) - The writer likens the world right now to the plot of a disaster movie. He says that in a movie, after the crisis is averted, the world becomes a better version of itself by fixing the small issues that led to the main crisis. He says that this is not the case, however, with regard to the world right now and how governments all over the world are dealing with COVID-19 with no insight or foresight whatsoever. He goes on to list a number of injustices that cannot be cured by a simple vaccine. Among these reasons is the unlawful arrest of persons, the ignoring of parliamentary democracy and invalidation of the same, militarisation, destruction of the environment, dirty politics, presidential pardons, violence against women, governmental support for mythical ideas, inequality, intolerance of diversity and so forth. He ends his article by invoking the movie "Parasite" and notes that all these issues can be fixed only if a civil society is re-energised.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> *Dinamina*, December 26, p. 8.

<sup>264</sup> *Divaina*, December 26, p. 2.

<sup>265</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 26, p. 5.

<sup>266</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 26, p. 5.

<sup>267</sup> *Anidda*, December 27, p. 16.

**No need for provincial councils?** - (Priyanjith Alokabandara) - Many people from different disciplines talk about their opinion of provincial councils. These opinions are various, with some agreeing that provincial councils are needed and elections need to be held, and others remarking that a solution that goes beyond provincial councils must be arrived at.<sup>268</sup>

**Superstition given wings, extremism given horns** - (Thisarani Gunasekara) - The writer talks about the current status of the government, pulling from the past, various quotations made by people who supported the Rajapaksas, with regard to what Gotabaya Rajapaksa "needs" to get the country on its feet. She remarks that while he has got everything he wanted, his work for the country pales in comparison. She talks about certain supporters using their platform to spread racial hate and inculcate the narrative about Islamic extremism as a ploy to get the public to vote for Rajapaksa. She analyses extensively how the Muslim person has been made out to be the sole enemy of the state and remarks that politics has become a place where devils are created for the sole purpose of hate. The writer forewarns the Sri Lankan public that they have a choice to think critically and not fall for the racial trap that the Rajapaksas are setting up for them and pave their own way.<sup>269</sup>

**The technique of asking the gods about cures for diseases lie with wild tribesmen** - (Sujeewa Senarath) - Specialist physician Ajith Amarasinghe states to the media that the current idea about the gods having miracle cures for diseases has been harming western medicine as a concept greatly. He also states that Buddhism is a philosophy that rejects the idea of a divine deity who runs the world. He explains that ayurvedic medicine in its true form is not based on myth and belief but on scientific fact, and that the current trend of belief vs. medicine needs to stop.<sup>270</sup>

**This is an executive dictatorship** - (M.A. Sumanthiran, MP) - MP Sumanthiran explains the status of the court system in the country right now and expresses his disdain over how the courts are operating currently. He also mentions the various issues that have taken place in the past that highlight the problems with the court system.<sup>271</sup>

**"I feel that we were excellently duped"** - The writer talks about the current government and how it has duped the general public with false promises and talks about the issue surrounding the burial of bodies of Muslims who died of COVID-19 and its baseless ban in the country. He states that most medical professionals in this country are taking decisions about this issue by

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<sup>268</sup> *Anidda*, December 27, p. 15.

<sup>269</sup> *Anidda*, December 27, p. 13.

<sup>270</sup> *Anidda*, December 27, p. 13.

<sup>271</sup> *Anidda*, December 27, p. 10.

giving prominence to something other than science: Islamophobia. He states that the fear of Muslims is the downfall of our society and of pluralistic mentality.<sup>272</sup>

**How must the politics of the cardinal and this country's catholic people be?** - (Cyril Ederamulla)

- The writer questions the cardinal's stance on politics and details how he has fallen out of favour with his own religious subjects. The writer concludes that there is not one person who can adequately represent the Catholic minority of this country in the political landscape, and states that the people should rightly only engage in politics with regard to their political party affiliations and those representatives. He also remarks that the percentage of Catholics who are educated is extremely high in any case.<sup>273</sup>

**A letter to the president** - (Prof. Gunadasa Amarasekara) - Acclaimed academic Gunadasa

Amarasekara points out to the president that the government and the opposition are vying for the attention of Islamic extremists and are competing with each other to please Muslim extremists through their actions. He stated that in the past, Gotabaya Rajapaksa obtained his victory by not listening to the voices of extremists and that the public had clearly understood the danger they were in. He states that now, the opposition and government should work diligently with regard to the sensitive issues that are circling them in a way that extremists do not get to win.<sup>274</sup>

**Mangala Samaraweera's funeral speech** - The writer talks about how Samaraweera recently

addressed a gathering of less than 30 people, which looked like a funeral gathering, and spoke about the failure of the Sinhala Buddhist ideology. The writer criticises Samaraweera's stance, remarks that his supporters are dwindling in number and that this year is not one to fairly judge because for the most part, everyone was stuck at home and no productive work was done. The writer talks about how the current situation cannot be used as a yardstick to measure Gotabaya Rajapaksa's "pass or fail" grade, and remarks that Samaraweera is with the UNP now, perhaps to purge the party of the little support that it has left.<sup>275</sup>

**Insulting the "pirith pan" and asking for burial - a political critique on the procession of extremists coming behind dead bodies** - (Isuru Prasanga) - The writer talks extensively about

the situation with regard to burials vs. cremations of bodies of those who died of COVID-19 who were Muslim. He states that the request to bury is solely a culture and religion based request and that such requests should only be granted if they don't pose any danger towards others from other factions of society in any way. He states that if this is the case, burials should be allowed, but the racist politics that are going on behind this issue are abysmal to

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<sup>272</sup> *Anidda*, December 27, p. 6.

<sup>273</sup> *Anidda*, December 27, p. 6.

<sup>274</sup> *Divaina*, December 27, p. 3.

<sup>275</sup> *Divaina*, December 27, p. 4.

comprehend. He criticises Muslim politicians for the way they handle the situation and talks about Ali Sabry as someone who got the role of Minister of Justice without any qualification for it and that he stands for extremist requests unconditionally. He speaks about the leftist parties and their support of Muslim religious freedoms and questions why they have never spoken about the religious freedoms of Buddhist people before. While the people of the country have kept aside their religious beliefs for COVID-19, the writer says, the likes of Ali Sabry stand firm on extremist views and getting those views legalised. The writer says that those who stand for the rights of Muslims these days are not doing so for the love of the people but because they want to cause an upset to the Sinhala Buddhist culture of the country.<sup>276</sup>

**Don't wrongly perceive Sharia law** - (S A C Mohammed Suhail) - The writer claims that the idea about Sharia law that is going around today is a misconception that was placed by the Western media as anti-Muslim rhetoric and has now made its way to Sri Lanka. He talks about the origins of the concept and how other countries have butchered it for their own gain. He states that in Islam, there is no place for cruel acts and hopes that the world can live in harmony.<sup>277</sup>

**Government has messed up with corona** - (Bigun Menaka Gamage) - MP Thalatha Athukorale is interviewed about the issue with regard to COVID-19 and the burial of bodies of Muslims. She states that there is a heavily politicised reason behind the banning of burials. She also states that the government is lamenting that they have no money, yet certain ministries are experiencing a heavy inflow of revenue. She also states that her party hopes to make Sajith Premadasa president in 2024.<sup>278</sup>

**Virus resides in dead body 5 days after death** - (Gayan Suriyaarachchi, Sirangika Lokukarawita, J.K.L. Chaminda) - Specialist physician Ruwan Nanayakkara has announced that COVID-19 resides in the dead body of someone for more than 5 days posthumously.<sup>279</sup>

**Don't fall prey to the traps of moderate extremists and cunning advisors** - Professor Gunadasa Amarasekara has requested the president and all other political leaders to stay away from falling prey to the extremist views of those who claim to be moderate and advisors. He states that the cremation of bodies irrespective of religious beliefs is a law that pertains to everyone, given the fact that COVID-19 is extremely novel and volatile and its behaviour is not still clearly known.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> *Divaina*, December 27, p. 19.

<sup>277</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 28, p. 2.

<sup>278</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 28, p. 4.

<sup>279</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 28, p. 10.

<sup>280</sup> *Divaina*, December 28, p. 7.

**No point chasing the dead - we need to protect the living** - (Asela Kuruluwansha) - State Minister Dilum Amunugama has stated that since COVID-19 is a global pandemic inducing virus, priority must be given towards the safeguarding of the health of people and not their religious beliefs being carried out. He stated the importance of laying aside religious and racial differences and working together.<sup>281</sup>

**Carols in the temple** - The prefects of Anamaduwa Maha Vidyalaya performed Christmas Carols at Anamaduwa Sri Anandarama Temple on the 25<sup>th</sup>.<sup>282</sup>

**I am against keeping dead bodies in freezers - State Minister Dilum Amunugama** - (Samathi Weerasekara) - State Minister Dilum Amunugama has stated he is against keeping bodies of those who died of COVID-19 in freezers until a decision regarding the disposal of said bodies is made. He affirmed that the right way to dispose a body is whatever method that benefits the health of all people.<sup>283</sup>

**New organisation in the East** - An organisation has been established to go against a future leader "Dajjal" who will allegedly try to destroy Islamism.<sup>284</sup>

**Protests in Vavuniya against cremations...** (Sithum Chaturanga) A protest took place in front of Vavuniya Muslim Maha Vidyalaya on the 26<sup>th</sup> against the cremation of the bodies of Muslim people who died of COVID-19.<sup>285</sup>

**Father-son duo walking in protest of cremations** - (Lakshmi Jayakody) - A father and son engaged in a protest march from Kalmunai to Sainthamaruthu on behalf of the injustice occurring to Muslims whose bodies are being cremated against the wishes of their religion and family.<sup>286</sup>

**Cremate COVID-19 bodies - monks protest near president's office** - (Sujith Hewajulige) - Many monks engaged in a protest in front of the president's office demanding that the bodies of all those who have died from COVID-19 be cremated.<sup>287</sup>

**Committee of decision making for cremation consists of suitable people, not henchmen, says Professor G. L. Peiris** - (Diana Udayanganee) - Minister of Education G.L. Peiris remarked that

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<sup>281</sup> *Dinamina*, December 29, p. 11.

<sup>282</sup> *Dinamina*, December 29, p. 21.

<sup>283</sup> *Divaina*, December 29, p. 7.

<sup>284</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 29, p. 6.

<sup>285</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 29, p. 13.

<sup>286</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 29, p. 13.

<sup>287</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 29, p. 10.

the committee appointed to look into the cremation of bodies of those who died of COVID-19 consists of people who are suitable and fit the bill and are not henchmen on any kind. He says that there is no truth to this accusation.<sup>288</sup>

**Solve the cremation problem with discussions: the government wasting time to decide on sensitive matters is only encouraging international powers to step in** - (Anjula Mahika Weeraratne) - UNP Deputy Leader Ruwan Wijewardene states that his recommendation is for the health authorities and relevant leaders of the various religious ministries of this country to get together and come to a decision regarding the burial or cremation of bodies of those who have died of COVID-19 soon, so that the international powers are not given the chance to interfere with state matters unnecessarily.<sup>289</sup>

**Making cremation vs. burial a political issue is a big mistake - no scientific reason behind cremation** - (Pushpakumara Mallawaarachchi) - Imtiaz Bakir Makar has stated that there is no scientific reasoning to back up the decision taken to cremate all bodies of those who died of COVID-19 and noted that certain media representations being made about the situation are quite unfortunate.<sup>290</sup>

**Health opinions? Religious opinions? Let us conference** - The writer states that the most important thing going forward is protecting the lives of those who are living and that all religious factions need to understand this before we move on from the current issue regarding cremation of Muslim bodies. He states that the country needs one decision made with scientific and medical opinion and information for the whole country to stand for.<sup>291</sup>

**Priority is the health of the living public, not the final rites of those who died, says MP Premnath C. Dolawatte** - (Diana Udayanganee) - SLPP MP Dolawatte stated that importance and priority right now should be given to the protection of the health of those who are alive and not on the final rites of those who have died.<sup>292</sup>

**No matter what race, if you died of COVID-19, you will be cremated** - (Bandu Thambawita) – Ven. Thebuwana Piyananda Thera said at a protest in Mathugama that no matter what the religious affiliation or race of someone who died, if the death was caused by COVID-19, that body will be cremated. He stated that it does not matter which race anyone belongs to, and

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<sup>288</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 29, p. 8.

<sup>289</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 29, p. 8.

<sup>290</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 29, P.. 8.

<sup>291</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 29, p. 4.

<sup>292</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 29, p. 2.

that their only request is that any body of someone who died of the virus should not be subject to a burial at any case.<sup>293</sup>

**Will burials be permitted? Committee hands over report to health secretary** - (Ranjan Kasthuri) - The health secretary received the report of the specialised committee that was appointed to decide whether or not bodies of those who died of COVID-19 could be buried.<sup>294</sup>

**Burying bodies? Cremating them? Political shape behind decision** - (Shane Seneviratne) – Ven. Narampanawe Ananda Thera stated that the current issue of whether or not bodies of those who died of COVID-19 should be buried or cremated is an issue that has religious roots but is quickly becoming a politically shaped issue that is spreading among the people faster than the actual virus is.<sup>295</sup>

**Hingula Junction Buddha statue's covering damaged** - (Bandara Jayaratne, Srinath Prasanna Jayasuriya, P. Shantha Bandara) - Mawanella police discovered that a Buddha statue that was placed in the Hingula Junction had its glass covering damaged and tampered with.<sup>296</sup>

**Buddha statue in Mawanella struck** - (Pradeep Kumara, Saman Wijaya Bandara) - Mawanella police stated that a Buddha statue that was placed in the Hingula Junction had its glass covering damaged and tampered with in the early hours of December 28.<sup>297</sup>

**Don't insult Hindu deities - the Tamil people will lose their faith in the government** - (Subhashini Senanayake) - MP Mano Ganesan has forewarned the government that insulting Hindu gods and goddesses will likely make the Tamil citizens of the country lose their faith in the government. He also stated that there should be regulations with regard to how medicine is given to control the virus.<sup>298</sup>

**Mawanella Buddha statue's glass covering shattered, stf protection to the Town of Hingula** - (Pradeep Kumara Dharmaratne, Jayantha Senanayake) - The police special task force was summoned to Mawanella on suspicion of malicious destruction of the glass casing that covered a Buddha statue at the Hingula Junction.<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>293</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 29, p. 2.

<sup>294</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 30, p. 10.

<sup>295</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 30, p. 8.

<sup>296</sup> *Lankadeepa*, December 30, p. 1.

<sup>297</sup> *Dinamina*, December 30, p. 6.

<sup>298</sup> *Dinamina*, December 30, p. 10.

<sup>299</sup> *Divaina*, December 30, Front Page.



**Devanagala historical site in the hands of land invaders** - (Asela Kuruluwansha) – Sabaragamuwa Province Governor Tikiri Kobbekaduwa stated to the deputy chief prelate of the Asgiri Chapter that lands that belong to the historically potent Devanagala area are being invaded and poached by those with fake deeds and fake property rights.<sup>300</sup>

### Tamil Press

**The policy of Muslim political leaders is questionable** (Sahabdeen) The leaders of society should have policies. If the leaders do not have policies, the future of the society will be zero. The Muslim community is in such situation. Muslim leaders are in the government but it seems that they do not have policies. When Sri Lanka goes towards politics based on ethnicity, when solutions for the ethnic crisis, economic development, and new constitution are widely spoken of, the Muslim politicians have no framework. They have been raising their hands while being in governments to support bills without understanding the contents. When 18A was brought by Rajapaksa, the Muslim MPs supported it. The people are still unaware of why Muslim MPs supported 18A. Later, they supported 19A. Now, most of the Muslim MPs except for Rauff Hakeem and Rishad Bathiudeen supported 20A. All these decisions clearly show that they do not have firm policies in their politics. 20A would have been defeated if the 9 SJB MPs had not supported it. They could have at least demanded for the burial of bodies of Muslims when they supported it. Muslim MPs stated in their election campaigns that if Gotabaya Rajapaksa is the president and Mahinda Rajapaksa is the prime minister, the Muslim community would be in trouble. Now they have supported 20A in order to strengthen that same president.<sup>301</sup>

**Hindu priest arrested** A Hindu priest was arrested by the Puliyankulam Police for allowing devotees from other districts and conducting religious service at the temple. He was accused of breaching of health guidelines.<sup>302</sup>

**“Observe the All Souls Day at home”- government** The government has called on the Catholic community to observe the All Souls Day at home due to the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>303</sup>

**Prayer services at Hindu temples on the request of the PM** Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa has requested all Hindu temples to conduct religious services seeking divine intervention to get rid of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>304</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> *Dinamina*, December 31, P.e 9.

<sup>301</sup> *Virakesari*, November 01, p. 2.

<sup>302</sup> *Virakesari*, November 01, p. 6.

<sup>303</sup> *Thinakaran* November 02, p. 3.

<sup>304</sup> *Thinakaran* November 02, p. 3.

**Decision will be taken after discussion with expert committee on cremation of those who die of COVID-19”- Sabry and Wanniarachchi** (R. Yasi) Responding to queries raised by opposition MPs in parliament, Minister of Justice Ali Sabry and Minister of Health Pavithadevi Wanniarachchi stated that a decision on the cremation of those who died of COVID-19 would be taken after discussion with the expert committee appointed to look into the matter. <sup>305</sup>

**“Allow the Janazas of Muslims to be buried”- Hakeem, Bathiudeen and Rahman calls on the government** (R. Yasi) MPs Rishad Bathiudeen, Rauff Hakeem and Mujibur Rahuman have called on the government to allow Muslims who die of COVID-19 to be buried according to Islamic practices. They made the request while addressing parliament. <sup>306</sup>

**“Cremation of those who die of COVID-19 is an extremist decision” - Premadasa** (R. Yasi) Leader of the Opposition Sajith Premadasa alleged that the decision to cremate Muslims who die of COVID-19 was an extremist decision. He added that the decision has breached the decision of the World Health Organisation as well as Islamist doctrine. <sup>307</sup>

**Religious services can be conducted adhering health guidelines** It was decided to allow conducting religious services at the places of worship within the limit of Eravur Pattu Divisional Secretariat. It was decided that the health guidelines should be strictly adhered to during the services. <sup>308</sup>

**Prayer services seeking divine intervention against COVID-19 pandemic** A prayer service was observed at the Thanthonreeswarar Hindu Temple seeking divine intervention to get relief from the COVID-19 pandemic. <sup>309</sup>

**Prayer services seeking divine intervention against COVID-19 pandemic** A prayer service was observed at a mosque in Malikaikadu seeking divine intervention to get relief from the COVID-19 pandemic. <sup>310</sup>

**Prayer services seeking divine intervention against COVID-19 pandemic** A prayer service was observed at St. Anthony’s Church in Vavuniya seeking divine intervention to get relief from the COVID-19 pandemic. <sup>311</sup>

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<sup>305</sup> *Virakesari* November 04, frontpage.

<sup>306</sup> *Virakesari* November 04, frontpage.

<sup>307</sup> *Virakesari* November 04, frontpage.

<sup>308</sup> *Virakesari* November 06, p. 6..

<sup>309</sup> *Virakesari* November 09, p. 6.

<sup>310</sup> *Virakesari* November 09, p. 6.

<sup>311</sup> *Virakesari* November 09, p. 7.

**Sampanthan calls on Hindu people to celebrate Deepavali at home** Leader of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) R. Sampanthan has called on the Hindu people to celebrate the Deepavali festival while being at their homes in order to be safe from the COVID-19 pandemic. <sup>312</sup>

**“Is there a hidden hand behind controlling of the matter of cremation of Janazas?”** - Shifan Member of the Kalmunai Municipal Council Badurdeen Mohamed Shifan asks whether an invisible hand controls the matter cremating Muslims who die of COVID-19. He added that people in India have staged protests supporting burial of janazas in Sri Lanka. <sup>313</sup>

**“Government does not prevent burial of those who die of COVID-19”** - Sabry Minister of Justice Ali Sabry stated that the government does not prevent the burial of dead bodies of the COVID\_19 victims of Muslims. He stated that the expert committee appointed by the Ministry of Health is unwilling and hesitate to allow them to be buried. <sup>314</sup>

**Decision made to cremate those who die of COVID-19 of Eastern Province in Polonnaruwa or Ampara** Special prayer services were observed at the Ketheeswara Temple in Mannar seeking divine intervention for relief from COVID-19. The services were organized on the request made by Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa. <sup>315</sup>

**Special religious services at Ketheeswara Temple for relief from COVID-19** Special prayer services were observed at the Ketheeswara Temple in Mannar seeking divine intervention for relief from COVID-19. The services were organized on the request made by Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa. <sup>316</sup>

**“Deepavali is sharing greetings with love and compassion”** - President President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's Deepavali message reads, "Hindu Devotees across the globe light up lamps and engage in religious observances with the expectation of dispelling the darkness of ignorance and illuminating wisdom. Deepavali is a renowned cultural celebration where devotees extend wishes of enlightenment and share greetings with love and compassion. In my view, cultural festivals of this nature provide great opportunity to build communal reconciliation and mutual understanding among the people and empower ethnic and religious harmony."<sup>317</sup>

**PM's Deepavali message** Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, in his Deepavali message, stated that as we strive to overcome the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic together, we must

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<sup>312</sup> *Virakesari* November 09, p. 9.

<sup>313</sup> *Virakesari* November 09, p. 9.

<sup>314</sup> *Virakesari* November 10, frontpage.

<sup>315</sup> *Virakesari* November 10, p. 5.

<sup>316</sup> *Virakesari* November 10, p. 8.

<sup>317</sup> *Virakesari* November 14, p. frontpage.

also strive to uplift each other and ensure that our shared quest of a bright and peaceful future is realised. “I would like to wish a happy Deepavali to all those celebrating the Festival of Lights, including Hindu devotees. Lighting a lamp on this joyous occasion symbolises the spiritual victory of light over darkness, good over evil, and knowledge over ignorance. Deepavali is also a reminder that we must dedicate ourselves to overcome all challenges together as a community. It is through unity that we can defeat ignorance and ensure that compassion prevails in our hearts.”<sup>318</sup>

**“Stay at home and celebrate Deepavali”- Vavuniya District Secretariat** District Secretary of Vavuniya Saman Bandulasena has called on Hindu devotees to stay at their homes and celebrate the Deepavali festival.<sup>319</sup>

**“Do not gather with more than 25 persons at temples” - Jaffna District Secretariat** District Secretary of Jaffna K. Mahesan has called on Hindu devotees not to gather more than 25 persons at a time at temples to celebrate the Deepavali festival.<sup>320</sup>

**“Government should take a good decision, respecting the Muslims”- Hasen Ali Mohammed Thambi** Hasen Ali, Secretary of United Peace Alliance, said that the government should respect the rights of Muslims and take a favourable decision on the cremation of those who die of COVID-19. He added that cremation of dead bodies of Islamists is against the doctrine of Islam.<sup>321</sup>

**“It is unfortunate to look at everything on the basis of ethnic extremism”- Sabry** Minister of Justice Ali Sabry stated that he would not support the call for burial of those who die of COVID-19 if it affects anyone. He added that it was unfortunate to look at everything on the basis of religious extremism.<sup>322</sup>

**“My aim is to establish an all religious and ethnic reconciliation” - New District Secretary of Mannar** The newly appointed District Secretary of Mannar Nanthini Shanthi De Mel said that her aim was to establish all religious and ethnic reconciliation and build sustainable development. She said that she expects cooperation from the religious leaders to do so.<sup>323</sup>

**“Muslims who are good at Sinhala should explain to the Sinhalese about the cremation of those who die of COVID-19” - Harees** H.M.M. Harees MP has called on Muslims who are good at

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<sup>318</sup> *Virakesari* November 14, p. frontpage.

<sup>319</sup> *Virakesari* November 14, p. 6.

<sup>320</sup> *Virakesari* November 14, p. 9.

<sup>321</sup> *Virakesari* November 15, p. 5.

<sup>322</sup> *Virakesari* November 16, p. 9.

<sup>323</sup> *Virakesari* November 17, p. 6.

Sinhala language to explain the Sinhalese people why the dead bodies of Muslims should be buried. He added that the Sinhalese people should be made aware of the Islamic practice so that they could understand the request made by Muslims to bury bodies. <sup>324</sup>

**Chief Incumbent of the Sri Lanka Ramanna Maha Nikaya Aggamaha Panditha Napane Pemasiri Mahanayake Thera** Chief Incumbent of the Sri Lanka Ramanna Maha Nikaya Aggamaha Panditha Napane Pemasiri Mahanayake Thera passed away. <sup>325</sup>

**Religious leaders bless President, PM** Buddhist, Christian, Islamic and Hindu priests conveyed their blessings to President Gotabaya Rajapaksa on marking the completion of his first year of presidency and Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa on his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday which falls on November 18. <sup>326</sup>

**“Waiting for the decision on burial or cremation of those who die of COVID-19” – Rambukwella** Minister of Mass Media Keheliya Rambukwella said that the cabinet of ministers has no authority to take a decision on burial of bodies of those who die of COVID-19. He added that they have been waiting for the decision which will be taken by the health sector. <sup>327</sup>

**“I will not hesitate to take action against those who act against ethnic reconciliation” - New District Secretary of Mannar** The newly appointed District Secretary of Mannar Nanthini Shanthi De Mel said that her aim was to establish all religious and ethnic reconciliation and build sustainable development. She said that she expects cooperation from religious leaders to do so. De Mel went on to say that she would not hesitate to take action against those who act against ethnic reconciliation. She committed herself to eradicate ethnic and religious differences during her tenure. <sup>328</sup>

**Bodies of Muslims who die of COVID-19 to be buried in Thalaimannar.** It was reported that the government has been considering to bury the bodies of Muslims who die of COVID-19 in Thalaimannar. <sup>329</sup>

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<sup>324</sup> *Virakesari* November 17, p. 11.

<sup>325</sup> *Thinakaran* November 18, frontpage.

<sup>326</sup> *Thinakaran* November 18, frontpage.

<sup>327</sup> *Thinakaran* November 18, frontpage.

<sup>328</sup> *Virakesari* November 19, p. 6.

<sup>329</sup> *Thinakaran* November 19, frontpage.

**Special pooja in Ampara on PM's birthday** Special pooja observances were held at a Hindu temple in Ampara on marking the 75th birthday of Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa. The pooja was organized by the Department of Hindu Religious Affairs. <sup>330</sup>

**COVID-19: Special pooja in Ampara for devine help** (M.N.M. Abraz) Special pooja observances were held at a Hindu temple in Ampara seeking divine assistance to get rid of COVID-19 pandemic and the safety of the country. <sup>331</sup>

**“Do not bury all Muslims who die of COVID-19 in areas where Tamils live densley” – Nirmalanathan** TNA MP Charles Nirmalanathan called on the government to bury Muslims who die of COVID-19 in their respective districts. He added that Mannar is not a cemetery to bury all Muslim victims. He added that they have no problem with burying Muslims according to Islamic practices. <sup>332</sup>

**“State honours for Prelate's funeral” – Rambukwella** Minister of Mass Media Keheliya Rambukwella said that the final rites of the Chief Incumbent of the Sri Lanka Ramanna Maha Nikaya Aggamaha Panditha Napane Pemasiri Mahanayake Thera will be conducted with state honours while adhering to quarantine instructions. He added that the final rites will be attended by the president and the prime minister. <sup>333</sup>

**President's address to the nation** “It is no secret that the majority who voted for me then were Sinhalese. They rallied because they had legitimate fears that the Sinhala race, our religion, national resources and the heritage would be threatened with destruction in the face of various local and foreign forces and ideologies that support separatism, extremism and terrorism. An administration that protects the rights of all citizens regardless of racial or religious differences will be established during my tenure. I have always acted in accordance with the pledge I made in front of Ruwanweli Maha Seya to protect the unity of the country and to safeguard and nurture the Buddha Sasana as per the Constitution, the supreme law of this country.” <sup>334</sup>

**President's condolence message on the demise of most Ven. Napane Pemasiri Mahanayaka Thera** "I was deeply saddened to learn about the demise of most Venerable Aggamaha Panditha Napane Pemasiri Mahanayaka Thera of the Ramanna Nikaya. The passing away of the Mahanayaka Thera is not only a loss to the nation, but to Buddhists all over the world. Most Venerable Aggamaha Panditha Napane Pemasiri Mahanayaka Thera was a patriarch of the

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<sup>330</sup> *Thinakaran* November 19, p. 5.

<sup>331</sup> *Thinakaran* November 19, p. 12.

<sup>332</sup> *Thinakaran* November 19, p. 13.

<sup>333</sup> *Thinakaran* November 20, frontpage.

<sup>334</sup> *Thinakaran* November 20, p. 4.

Maha Sangha and a symbol of the meaningful depiction of the teachings of the Buddha. He spent his entire life as a monk to provide a most compassionate service to the people”.<sup>335</sup>

**“State honours for Prelate’s funeral” – Rambukwella** The final rites of the Chief Incumbent of the Sri Lanka Ramanna Maha Nikaya Aggamaha Panditha Napane Pemasiri Mahanayake Thera will be conducted with state honours while adhering to quarantine instructions.<sup>336</sup>

**Cremation of bodies: Hope solution soon” – Athaullah** (Zams Fahim) A. L. M. Athaullah said that he believes that the government would make a good decision on the cremation of Muslims who die of COVID-19. He added that the Rajapaksas always respect all religions.<sup>337</sup>

**Prayers seeking bliss for PM at mosque** A prayer service has been organized to be held at a mosque in Anuradhapura on November 18, seeking bliss for Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa on his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday.<sup>338</sup>

**“Mannar is not a cemetery to bury all Muslims who die of COVID-19” – Nirmalanathan** TNA MP Charles Nirmalanathan called on the government to bury Muslims who die of COVID-19 in their respective districts. He added that Mannar is not a cemetery to bury all Muslim victims.<sup>339</sup>

**“Do not politicise the deaths of COVID-19”- Gnanasara Thera** General Secretary of the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) Ven. Gnanasara Thera said that Minister of Justice Ali Sabry should not politicise the matter of cremation of dead bodies of those who die of COVID-19. He added that the Sinhala Buddhists had sacrificed their religious rights at difficult situations. He added that it was unfortunate as Muslims seek rights to bury the dead bodies.<sup>340</sup>

**“I did not pressure anyone to bury my relative who died for COVID-19”- Sabry** (S. Nishanthan) Minister of Justice Ali Sabry emphasized that he had not pressured anyone to bury his relative who had died of COVID-19. He added that if anyone proves that he had done so, he would resign his ministry portfolio and the parliamentary membership.<sup>341</sup>

**“Fundamentalism would be eradicated” - Weerawansa** (S. Nishanthan) Minister of Industry Wimal Weerawansa stated that President Gotabaya Rajapaksa would take strong decisions on

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<sup>335</sup> *Thinakaran* November 21, frontpage.

<sup>336</sup> *Thinakaran* November 21, frontpage.

<sup>337</sup> *Thinakaran* November 21, frontpage.

<sup>338</sup> *Thinakaran* November 21, p.2.

<sup>339</sup> *Thinakaran* November 23, p.11.

<sup>340</sup> *Thinakaran* November 23, p.8.

<sup>341</sup> *Thinakaran* November 24, frontpage.

those who were behind the Easter attacks. He added that Rajapaksa would also take measures to eradicate sources of teaching fundamentalism. <sup>342</sup>

**“Members from other communities also be included in the PTF on Archaeological sites” - Hakeem** (S. Nishanthan) Leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) Rauff Hakeem stated that the Presidential Task Force on archaeological sites in the Eastern Province should include the members from other communities as well. He added that fair and just cannot be expected from a task force which consists of the same community. <sup>343</sup>

**“Cannot give priority on cremation of dead bodies on the basis of religion or ethnicity”- Samaraweera** Dr. Sudath Samaraweera of the Epidemiology Unit said that the decision on cremating of dead bodies of those who die of COVID-19 was taken on the recommendation of the expert committee. He added that priority cannot be given to bury them on the basis of ethnic or religious basis. <sup>344</sup>

**PM requested to grant rights to bury Muslims who die of COVID-19** Addressing parliament, Hafeez Nazeer Ahamed of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) called on Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa to grant rights to bury Muslims who die of COVID-19. <sup>345</sup>

**Patriotic Muslims organization requests to review the decision of cremation of those who die of COVID-19** Patriotic Muslims organization has sent a letter to Secretary to the Ministry of Health S. H. Munasinghe requesting to review the decision of cremation of Muslims who die of COVID-19. <sup>346</sup>

**Police prevent Hindu religious festival on the Great Heros’ Day** The Chavakachcheri Police had prevented a Hindu temple’s annual festival which fell on the 27th of November – the Great Heros’ Day. The temple officials explained that there were no connections between the festival and the day, the police allowed to proceed with a very few participants. <sup>347</sup>

**“The gazette on cremation of those who die of COVID-19 should be stopped”- Hakeem** Leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) Rauff Hakeem stated that the gazette notification on cremation of those who die of COVID-19 should be stopped. He made the request while

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<sup>342</sup> *Thinakaran* November 24, p.2.

<sup>343</sup> *Thinakaran* November 24, p.6.

<sup>344</sup> *Thinakaran* November 25, frontpage.

<sup>345</sup> *Thinakaran* November 25, p. 3.

<sup>346</sup> *Thinakaran* November 25, p. 4.

<sup>347</sup> *Thinakaran* November 25, p. 13.



addressing in parliament. He called on the government to take a scientific decision in this regard. <sup>348</sup>

**FR petitions filed against cremation of Muslims who die of COVID-19 to be taken up on November 30** The Supreme Court has postponed the Fundamental Rights petitions filed against the cremation of Muslims who die of COVID-19 to November 30. <sup>349</sup>

**“Not acceptable to force cremation of those who die of COVID-19”- HRC** The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka has told the Ministry of Health that forcing of cremation of those who die of COVID-19 is not acceptable. <sup>350</sup>

**“The gazette on cremation of those who die of COVID-19 should be stopped”- Hakeem** Leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) Rauff Hakeem stated that the gazette notification on the cremation of those who die of COVID-19 should be stopped. He made the request while addressing in parliament. He called on the government to take a scientific decision in this regard. <sup>351</sup>

**FR petitions filed against cremation of Muslims who die of COVID-19 to be taken up on November 30** The Supreme Court has postponed the Fundamental Rights petitions filed against the cremation of Muslims who die of COVID-19 to November 30. <sup>352</sup>

**Chunnakam Police violently shattered the lamps of November Festival of Hindus** The Chunnakam police personnel have shattered the small lamps and banana trees which are used to light on the annual November Festival of Hindus in a Hindu temple premises. Later, Minister Douglas Devananda intervened and the police allowed the public to proceed the lightening festival. <sup>353</sup>

**“They do not know the difference between the Deepavali festival lighting Maaveerar Naal lighting”- Kajendren** All Ceylon Tamil Congress (MP) Selvarajah Kajendren told parliament that he condemns the Sinhala chauvinists who do not know the difference between the Deepavali festival lighting Maaveerar Naal lighting. <sup>354</sup>

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<sup>348</sup> *Thinakaran* November 26, p. 6.

<sup>349</sup> *Thinakaran* November 27, frontpage.

<sup>350</sup> *Thinakaran* November 27, frontpage.

<sup>351</sup> *Thinakaran* November 28, p. 3.

<sup>352</sup> *Thinakaran* November 28, p. 3.

<sup>353</sup> *Thinakaran* November 30, p. 11.

<sup>354</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 1, p. 3.

**Court requested to issue interim order preventing cremation** Lawyers including TNA MP M.A. Sumanthiran argued at the Supreme Court requesting the court to issue an interim order to prevent forced cremation of those who die of COVID-19. However, the government side lawyers argued justifying the decision of the government to remain the cremation. <sup>355</sup>

**“Allow the Muslims who die of COVID-19 to be buried”- Premadasa** Leader of the Opposition Sajith Premadasa made a request towards the government requesting it to allow the Muslims who die of COVID-19 to be buried. He made the request while addressing parliament. <sup>356</sup>

**The petitions against cremations of those who die of COVID-19 rejected** The Supreme Court with the consent of a majority of the judges has ruled in favor of dismissing 11 fundamental rights petitions filed seeking an order nullifying the gazette notification on the cremation of bodies of people died due to COVID-19 yesterday (1<sup>st</sup>).<sup>357</sup>

**The petitions against cremations of those who die of COVID-19 rejected** The Supreme Court with the consent of a majority of the judges has ruled in favor of dismissing 11 fundamental rights petitions filed seeking an order nullifying the gazette notification on the cremation of bodies of people died due to COVID-19 yesterday (1<sup>st</sup>).<sup>358</sup>

**Shritharan calls for investigation on army and police on disturbing Deepavali festival** Tamil National Alliance (TNA) MP S. Shritharan questioned why the army and police get panic during the month of November and disrespect the Deepavali festival of Hindus. Addressing parliament that an individual was arrested in Jaffna when lighting the Deepavali lamp at Hindu temples on November 29. He added that a Jaffna University student was arrested for the same reason and later released. <sup>359</sup>

**Legal experts look for next move** Muslim legal experts are discussing the next possible moves to be taken to prevent cremation of those who die of COVID-19 after the decision of the Supreme Court.<sup>360</sup>

**“They do not know the difference between the Deepavali festival lighting Maaveerar Naal lighting”- Kajendren** All Ceylon Tamil Congress (MP) Selvarajah Kajendren told parliament that

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<sup>355</sup> *Virakesari*, December 1, frontpage.

<sup>356</sup> *Virakesari*, December 1, p. 2.

<sup>357</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 2, frontpage.

<sup>358</sup> *Virakesari*, December 2, p. frontpage.

<sup>359</sup> *Virakesari*, December 2, p. 2.

<sup>360</sup> *Virakesari*, December 2, p. 8.

he condemns the Sinhala chauvinists who do not know the difference between the Deepavali festival lighting Maaveerar Naal lighting.<sup>361</sup>

**“SC’s decision not to proceed on cremation of Janazas is unfortunate”- Kariyapper** General Secretary of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) Nizam Kariyapper state that he was worried over the decision of the Supreme Court not to proceed with the petition filed against the cremation of the dead of the Muslims of COVID-19.<sup>362</sup>

**One arrested in Jaffna when lighting the Deepavali lamp: Nirmalanathan, Ganesan and Weerasekara clash in parliament (S. Nishanthan)** Tamil National Alliance (TNA) MP Charles Nirmalanathan told parliament that an individual was arrested in Jaffna when lighting the Deepavali lamp at Hindu temples on November 29. When Minister of Sarath Weerasekara denied the allegation of Nirmalanathan, SJB MP Mano Ganesan also argued with Weerasekara. He stated that the police should not confuse the Maveerar Day and the Deepavali Festival of Hindus.<sup>363</sup>

**“Catholics wish to know the facts over the Easter Sunday attacks” - Cardinal** Archbishop of Colombo Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith says Catholics expect the facts over the Easter Sunday attacks to be revealed.<sup>364</sup>

**“What is the connection between the Easter attackers and India” – Ranawaka** Addressing parliament yesterday (3<sup>rd</sup>), Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) MP Patali Champika Ranawaka called on the government to find out who had directed the Easter Sunday attackers, the connection between them and the intelligence unit and the connection between them and India.<sup>365</sup>

**“Accreditation for the Hindu priests”- Devananda** Minister of Fisheries Douglas Devananda promised that accreditation would be given to the Hindu priests and the government would also provide livelihood assistance to them.<sup>366</sup>

**Stature of goddess Amman which was stolen four month ago, found** The statue of goddess Amman which was stolen from the Amman Kovil at Norwood was found after four months.<sup>367</sup>

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<sup>361</sup> *Virakesari*, December 2, p. 10.

<sup>362</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 3, p. 13.

<sup>363</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 4, frontpage.

<sup>364</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 4, frontpage.

<sup>365</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 4, frontpage.

<sup>366</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 6, frontpage.

<sup>367</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 4, frontpage.

**When the thoughts of Muslims be stick together? (S.M. Hashim)** The law in Sri Lanka does not compromise with regard to the cremation of Janazas. It is because of the divisions among the Muslim community. At this stage, the Muslims are to bow, and humbly request to bury those who die of COVID-19. <sup>368</sup>

**“Preventing the rights of burial of Janazas is shameful”- Shanakiyan (S. Nishanthan)** Tamil National Alliance (TNA) MP Shanakiyan Rajaputhiran Rasamanickam told Sri Lanka’s parliament that “Tamils are going to courts to remember their dead, Muslims are going to court to bury their dead.” He added, “You all should be ashamed,” he added, speaking on the refusal of the Sri Lankan government to bury Muslims who die of COVID-19. “I am ashamed. And I am ashamed of all the Muslim politicians who supported this government for the 20<sup>th</sup> Amendment.” <sup>369</sup>

**“Cremation of those who die of COVID-19 is not the decision of the government” – Amaraweera** Responding a query raised by Samaji Jana Balawegaya (SJB) MP Abdul Haleem over the cremation of victims of COVID-19, Minister of Environment Mahinda Amaraweera stated that the decision to cremate the bodies was not taken by the government. He added that the decision was made by the committee appointed by the Ministry of Health. <sup>370</sup>

**“Muslims do not ask for Eelam, but the right for burial”- Rahman** SJB MP (All Ceylon Muslim Congress) Ishak Rahman stated that the Muslims ask for the burial of those who die of COVID-19. He added that they do not ask for Eelam in the country. He added that 197 countries have allowed burying those who die of COVID-19. <sup>371</sup>

**“PM to convene a discussion on the burial of Muslims who die of COVID-19”** “A discussion is to be held at parliament today (10<sup>th</sup>) under the patronage of Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa to discuss the matter of the burial of Muslims who die of COVID-19. All Muslim MPs from the ruling party and the opposition and health sector officials have been invited for the discussion.”<sup>372</sup>

**“Government should take a favorable decision over the cremation of those who die of COVID-19”- Hakeem (S. Nishanthan)** Leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) MP Rauff

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<sup>368</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 6, p. 5.

<sup>369</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 7, frontpage.

<sup>370</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 8, frontpage.

<sup>371</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 9, p. 3.

<sup>372</sup> *Virakesari*, December 10, frontpage.

Hakeem called on the government to take a favourable decision over the cremation of Muslims who die of COVID-19. He made the comment in parliament. <sup>373</sup>

**“Government should listen to the request made by the Muslims over the cremation of those who die of COVID-19”- Ponnambalam (S. Nishanthan)** Leader of the All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC) MP Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam called on the government to listen to the request made by the Muslim and Christian communities over the cremation of those who die of COVID-19. He made the comment in parliament. <sup>374</sup>

**“Government will respond when parliament convenes next time”- Gunawardena (S. Nishanthan)** Responding to queries in parliament over the cremation of those who die of COVID-19, Minister of Foreign Relations Dinesh Gunawardena stated that the government would respond to the queries when parliament convenes next time. <sup>375</sup>

**“All people of the country expect justice”- Wigneswaran** Addressing parliament Tamil National People’s Alliance MP C.V. Wigneswaran stated that it is true that there are Buddhist archaeological sites in the North and East. He added that they are from the Tamil Buddhists and they should be preserved. He noted that therefore, the presidential task force on archaeological sites should have more Tamil members. <sup>376</sup>

**“We will bring everyone links to the Easter Sunday attacks before the law”- Namal Rajapaksa** Minister of Youth and Sports, Namal Rajapaksa stated that they would bring everyone who is linked to the Easter Sunday attacks before the law and punished. <sup>377</sup>

**Opposition parties raise concern over cremation of Muslims who die of COVID-19** All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC) MP Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam, Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) MP Rauff Hakeem and Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) MP Ishak Rahuman yesterday (10<sup>th</sup>) raised concern in parliament over the continuing silence of the government over the cremation of bodies of Muslims who die of COVID-19. <sup>378</sup>

**PM directs submitting a report resolving the cremation of Janazas within a few days** Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa has called on the officials of the Ministry of Health to submit a

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<sup>373</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 11, frontpage.

<sup>374</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 11, frontpage.

<sup>375</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 11, frontpage.

<sup>376</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 11, p. 5..

<sup>377</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 11, p. 12..

<sup>378</sup> *Virakesari*, December 11, p. frontpage.

report on how to resolve the crisis over the cremation of Muslims who die of COVID-19 within few days.<sup>379</sup>

**“Favourable environment in relations to burial of Muslims who die of COVID-19** In view of the growing pressure from the Muslim community, Muslim MPs met Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa to appeal to him to allow burial as it is done in many parts of the world. Rajapaksa met them after party leaders meeting at Temple Trees during the first week of this month. Muslim MPs from the government and the opposition stated that the meeting was satisfactory.<sup>380</sup>

**“What was the sin committed by this innocent 20 day old newborn baby for his body to be forcibly cremated?!”- Ali Zahir Moulana** SJB MP Ali Zahir Moulana tweeted, “What was the sin committed by this innocent 20-day-old newborn baby for his body to be forcibly cremated?! I am beyond disgusted and heartbroken! How much more cruelty and barbarity must we endure?!”<sup>381</sup>

**SLMC to discuss the matter of cremation of those who die of COVID-19** Sri Lanka Muslim Congress MP Harees said that the high level member of the party would convene a meeting to discuss the matters including the current political affairs and the cremation of Muslims who die of COVID-19.<sup>382</sup>

**Protest in Puttalam against cremation of Janazas** A group of people in Puttalam stated a protest against the forced cremation of Muslims who die of COVID-19.<sup>383</sup>

**Discussion on cremation of those who die of COVID-19** A discussion was held under the patronage of Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa on cremation of those who die of COVID-19. Muslim MPs and health officials took part in the discussion.<sup>384</sup>

**CID to investigate death of Dutch monk; PM directs IGP** Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa directed IGP C.D. Wickramaratne to conduct an immediate and comprehensive investigation into the death of a Dutch monk whose body was found in the lagoon at Rathgama. The body of the Buddhist monk (59) who was engaged in meditation at the Polgasduwa hermitage in

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<sup>379</sup> *Virakesari*, December 11, frontpage.

<sup>380</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 12, frontpage.

<sup>381</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 12, frontpage.

<sup>382</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 12, frontpage.

<sup>383</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 12, frontpage.

<sup>384</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 12, p. 2.

Rathgama was reported missing for several days and his body was found floating in the lagoon<sup>385</sup>

**“Sri Lanka Muslims are treated like second class citizens”- Rahuman** SJB MP Mujibur Rahuman alleged that cremation of 20-day infant of the Muslim community escalated a question if the Sri Lanka Muslims are treated like second class citizens in this country. He added that Muslims who die of COVID-19 are buried in countries like India and Thailand. <sup>386</sup>

**“Sinhala Buddhists are dissatisfied with the government as it denies burial”- Rajakaruna** Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) MP Harshana Rajakaruna stated that the Sinhala Buddhists are dissatisfied with the government as it denies burial of Muslims who die of COVID-19. <sup>387</sup>

**“Govt. agrees to build the Kinniya Hot Well Pillayar temple”- Sumanthiran** Tamil National Alliane (TNA) MP M.A. Sumanthiran stated that the government has agreed to build the Kinniya Hot Well Pillayar temple. He added that they had promised that they will not build a Buddhist temple at the location. <sup>388</sup>

**“No compromisation with regard to cremation of Janazas”- Harees** Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) MP H.M.M. Harees stated that the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) will hold discussions with the government over the cremation of Muslims who die of COVID-19. He added that his party and the party leadership will not compromise with the stance of the government to cremate the bodies. <sup>389</sup>

**“Diversity of every religion should be accepted”- Markar** Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) MP Imthiaz Bakeer Markar in an interview with the Thinakaran stated that the practice and diversity of each religion should be understood and accepted. He added that according to Islam, the dead body should be buried respectfully. <sup>390</sup>

**Bishop Victor Gnanapragasam dies in Pakistan** Bishop Victor Gnanapragasam, OMI, first Apostolic Vicar of Quetta, province of Baluchistan, Pakistan, passed away from this world on 12 December, 2020. He was the first and only Oblate Bishop from the Provincial Delegation of Pakistan. Victor Gnanapragasam was born in Jaffna, Sri Lanka on November 21, 1940. At the age of 19, he entered the Oblate novitiate in Kalutara, Sri Lanka, and received the First Vows

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<sup>385</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 12, p. 3.

<sup>386</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 12, p. 7.

<sup>387</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 12, p. 7.

<sup>388</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 13, frontpage.

<sup>389</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 13, frontpage.

<sup>390</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 13, p. 13.

on May 31, 1960. After completing the studies of philosophy and theology at the Major Seminary of Our Lady of Lanka in Kandy, he was ordained a priest on December 21, 1966.<sup>391</sup>

**Protest in front of SL Embassy in London against forced cremation** A protest was staged in front of the Sri Lanka Embassy in London against the forced cremation of Muslims who die of COVID-19 in Sri Lanka.<sup>392</sup>

**White handkerchiefs tied around the gate of Borella Cemetery against forced cremation** White handkerchiefs tied around the gates of Borella cemetery in memory of the 20-day-old infant who was forcibly cremated. A number of civil society activists and concerned citizens were seen tying handkerchiefs around the gates of the cemetery yesterday saying that the infant was cremated against the wishes of his parents. Among them was SJB MP Ali Zahir Moulana.<sup>393</sup>

**Arrest warrant against Vedukkunari Kovil administration** The court in Vavuniya issued an order to arrest the administrative officials of the Vedukkunari Hill Kovil in Vavuniya as they failed to appear before the court. Earlier in October, they were allowed to leave the court on bail when the case filed against the kovil administration by the Nedunkeni police.<sup>394</sup>

**“Review the decision to cremate the Janazas”- Muslim Council of Britain** The Muslim Council of Britain responds to forced cremations of Muslims who have died of COVID-19 in Sri Lanka. "The Muslim Council of Britain Responds to forced cremations of Muslims who have died of COVID-19 in Sri Lanka. News of the Sri Lankan government mandating the cremation of all those who have died of COVID-19 is deeply concerning. The policy contravenes upon the rights and religious beliefs of Muslims in Sri Lanka and is contrary to prevailing scientific opinion on the matter. Robust protocols, allowing for the safe, swift and Shari’ah compliant burial of Muslims have been developed and implemented by Muslim communities burying their dead the world over.<sup>395</sup>

**Ministry of Health recommends concrete graves for burial of those who die of COVID-19** Deputy Director General of Health Services Dr. Hemantha Herath said that the Ministry of Health was to propose concrete graves to end the forced cremation of Muslim COVID-19. He added that the proposal will be made to the expert committee appointed to address the issue. He further added that he believes the issue would be resolved soon.<sup>396</sup>

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<sup>391</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 14, frontpage.

<sup>392</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 14, frontpage.

<sup>393</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 14, frontpage.

<sup>394</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 14, frontpage.

<sup>395</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 15, frontpage.

<sup>396</sup> *Virakesari*, December 15, frontpage.



**“Review the decision to cremate the Janazas”- Muslim Council of Britain** The Muslim Council of Britain responds to forced cremations of Muslims who have died of COVID-19 in Sri Lanka. "The Muslim Council of Britain Responds to forced cremations of Muslims who have died of COVID-19 in Sri Lanka. News of the Sri Lankan government mandating the cremation of all those who have died of COVID-19 is deeply concerning. The policy contravenes upon the rights and religious beliefs of Muslims in Sri Lanka and is contrary to prevailing scientific opinion on the matter. Robust protocols, allowing for the safe, swift and Shari’ah compliant burial of Muslims have been developed and implemented by Muslim communities burying their dead the world over.<sup>397</sup>

**White handkerchiefs tied around the gate of Borella Cemetery against forced cremation removed** White handkerchiefs tied around the gates of Borella cemetery in memory of the 20-day-old infant who was forcibly cremated have been removed overnight. A number of civil society activists and concerned citizens were seen tying handkerchiefs around the gates of the cemetery yesterday saying that the infant was cremated against the wishes of his parents. Among them was SJB MP Ali Zahir Moulana.<sup>398</sup>

**Sri Lanka and Myanmar – a review (P. Manikkavasagam)** Sri Lanka and Myanmar are facing the ethnic crises. Both countries have been dominated by Buddhism and oppress the minority communities. In Myanmar the Rohingya Muslims are oppressed by the State while the Tamils and Muslims in Sri Lanka are oppressed by the Sinhala Buddhist chauvinists.<sup>399</sup>

**“Out of 188 countries, Sri Lanka is the only country which cremate those who die of COVID-19”- Senaratne** SJB MP Rajitha Senaratne alleged that Out of 188 countries in which the COVID-19 pandemic exists, Sri Lanka is the only country which cremate those who die of COVID-19. He added that the government deceived the public by false fact that the virus will spread from the buried bodies.<sup>400</sup>

**“The cabinet is not aware of the matter of burial in the Maldives” – Rambukwella** Responding to a question at the weekly cabinet media briefing on the burial of Muslims who die of COVID-19 in the Maldives, Co-cabinet spokesperson Keheliya Rambukwella said that the matter was not discussed at the cabinet. He added that every decision in this regard have been taken by the expert committee appointed by the Ministry of Health.<sup>401</sup>

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<sup>397</sup> *Virakesari*, December 15, frontpage.

<sup>398</sup> *Virakesari*, December 15, p. 2.

<sup>399</sup> *Virakesari*, December 15, p. 4.

<sup>400</sup> *Virakesari*, December 15, p. 9.

<sup>401</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 16, frontpage.

**“It is practically impossible to take those who die of COVID-19 to the Maldives”- Bandara** Opposition MP Nalin Bandara stated that it is practically impossible to take those who die of COVID-19 to the Maldives for burial. <sup>402</sup>

**“What is the final decision over the cremation of those who die of COVID-19”- Rahuman** Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) MP Mujibur Rahuman stated that the government should disclose its stance on the matter of burial of those who die of COVID-19. He added that the president says the bodies to be taken to the Maldives while the prime minister says they can be buried in concrete graves. <sup>403</sup>

**“No one can reject the right of burial of COVID-19 victim”- Hakeem** Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) MP wrote a letter to the Maldivian government on the matter of burial of those who die of COVID-19. He added that No one can reject the right of burial of COVID-19 victim. He thanked the Maldivian government for coming forward to assist. <sup>404</sup>

**“The cabinet is not aware of the matter of burial in the Maldives” – Rambukwella** Responding to a question at the weekly cabinet media briefing on the burial of Muslims who die of COVID-19 in the Maldives, Co-cabinet spokesperson Keheliya Rambukwella said that the matter was not discussed at the cabinet. He added that every decision in this regard have been taken by the expert committee appointed by the Ministry of Health. <sup>405</sup>

**“Govt. cannot deny the rights of burial in Sri Lanka” – Hakeem** Leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) and Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) MP Rauff Hakeem said that the government of Sri Lanka cannot deny the rights of burial of those who die of COVID-19 in our country. He also thanked the Government of the Maldives for coming forward to accept Sri Lanka’s request to bury the victims in their soil. <sup>406</sup>

**Maldives considering Sri Lanka’s request to bury Sri Lankan Muslims in the Maldives** Foreign Minister of the Maldives Abdulla Shahid tweeted saying Maldives President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih was considering the special request from President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to facilitate Islamic funeral rites in the Maldives for Sri Lankan Muslims succumbing to COVID-19. <sup>407</sup>

**“What is the final decision over the cremation of those who die of COVID-19”- Rahuman** Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) MP Mujibur Rahuman stated that the government should disclose its

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<sup>402</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 16, frontpage.

<sup>403</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 16, frontpage.

<sup>404</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 16, p.2.

<sup>405</sup> *Virakesari*, December 16, frontpage.

<sup>406</sup> *Virakesari*, December 16, frontpage.

<sup>407</sup> *Virakesari*, December 16, frontpage.

stance on the matter of burial of those who die of COVID-19. He added that the president says the bodies to be taken to the Maldives while the prime minister says they can be buried in concrete graves.<sup>408</sup>

**Cardinal praises government for resolving problems of Easter Sunday victims** Archbishop Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith commended the Prime Minister and the Government for resolving the problems and providing relief to the families of those affected by the terrorist attack on Easter Sunday. Archbishop Cardinal Ranjith made this observation at the end of a discussion held at Temple Trees today with the Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa on resolving the problems of the families affected by the terrorist attack on Easter Sunday 2019 and on the future development of the affected churches.<sup>409</sup>

**Ex-President disapproves burial of Sri Lankan Muslim virus victims in Maldives** Former President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom has voiced his opposition towards the burial of Muslims who die of COVID-19 from Sri Lanka in the Maldives. Maldivian Foreign Ministry had stated yesterday that the Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa had sent a letter to Maldivian President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih requesting for assistance in the burial of Muslims who passed away due to the virus in the nation.<sup>410</sup>

**"We should invite Sri Lankan Muslims to move and live in Maldives" - Dunya** Former Maldivian Foreign Minister Dunya Maumoon said on Twitter: "I think we should invite Sri Lankan Muslims to move and live in Maldives. I am surprised that our Government and allied "sheikhs" have not done so. I urge the Sri Lankan government to respect their Muslim minority's wish to have last rites of COVID-19 patients as per our religion!"<sup>411</sup>

**"Invite Sri Lankan Muslims to the Maldives" – Dunya (N. Thanuja)** Former Foreign Minister of the Maldives Dunya Maumoon tweeted, "I think we should invite Sri Lankan Muslims to move and live in Maldives. I am surprised that our Government and allied "sheikhs" have not done so. I urge the Sri Lankan Government to respect their Muslim minority's wish to have last rites of COVID-19 patients as per our religion".<sup>412</sup>

**Protest organized by Srilanka Thowheed Jamath cancelled half way** The Sri Lanka Thowheed Jamaath organized a protest against forced cremation of Muslims who die of COVID-19 and

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<sup>408</sup> *Virakesari*, December 16, frontpage.

<sup>409</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 17, frontpage.

<sup>410</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 17, frontpage.

<sup>411</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 17, p.3.

<sup>412</sup> *Virakesari*, December 17, p.3.

gathered at the Galle Face agitation areas to protest. But the police said that they had a court order preventing such protest on that days at the area and the protesters went back.<sup>413</sup>

**“The government ignores the religious practices to satisfy the racists”- Nirmalanathan** Tamil National Alliance (TNA) MP Charles Nirmalanathan said that the government ignores the religious practices to satisfy the racists so that they could take their administration forward with their support.<sup>414</sup>

**Concentrate on a spiritual celebration of Christmas – Archbishop Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith** Archbishop of Colombo Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith made a special request from the Christian community during a media briefing held at the Archbishop’s official residence. “Christmas should be celebrated this year remembering the poor, who have been severely affected by COVID-19” his eminence requested from the people. The cardinal stressed the need to “concentrate on a spiritual celebration of Christmas and encourage everyone to share the joy of Christmas with those brothers and sisters who have been deprived of joy and happiness due to the COVID 19 pandemic.”<sup>415</sup>

**UN Special Rapporteur welcomes Hakeems email to Maldivian government** Leader of Sri Lanka’s Muslim Congress, MP Rauff Hakeem has written to the Maldivian government, expressing grave concern over the ongoing discussion pertaining to their government's request to arrange burials for Muslims that succumb to COVID-19 in Maldives. The email, sent by Hakeem to Maldives’ Ambassador to Sri Lanka Umar Razzaq, outlines the stance of the country’s Muslim community, which seeks to bring an end to discriminatory policies. Meanwhile, Ahmed Shaheed, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, responded noting that the move could serve to further marginalise the Muslim population of Sri Lanka.”<sup>416</sup>

**1800 years time remains found at Deegawapiya Buddhist temple** 1,800 year old remains found at Deegawapiya Buddhist Temple. The remains are kept at the Ampara District Secretariat and religious services are conducted by Buddhist clergy and Hindu priests daily. <sup>417</sup>

**Hindu religious organization provide relief to Buddhist people** District Secretary D.M.L. Bandaranaike applauded the humanitarian aid provided by the Hindu Religious Organisation in

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<sup>413</sup> *Virakesari*, December 17, p.8.

<sup>414</sup> *Virakesari*, December 17, p.10.

<sup>415</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 18, frontpage.

<sup>416</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 18, frontpage.

<sup>417</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 18, p.4.

Ampara to Buddhist students and people during the COVID-19 pandemic. He added that it was an act beyond religious boundaries. <sup>418</sup>

**Eastern governor visits St Zion Church** Eastern governor Anuradha Yahampath visited St. Zion Church which was damaged by the suicide bomber on Easter Sunday. Yahampath promised that she would take the situation of the church to the prime minister. <sup>419</sup>

**White handkerchiefs tied in Valaichenai against forced cremation** White cloths were tied in Valaichenai and a protest was staged against forced cremation of Muslims who die of COVID-19. <sup>420</sup>

**Writ petition filed at the Court of Appeal** A writ petition was filed at the Court of Appeal against forced cremation of Muslims who die of COVID-19. Earlier, the Supreme Court with the consent of a majority of the judges had ruled in favor of dismissing 11 fundamental rights petitions filed seeking an order nullifying the gazette notification on the cremation of bodies of people who died due to COVID-19. <sup>421</sup>

**“Pani Dammika should not play with goddess Kaali”- Ganesan** Leader of the Tamil Progressive Alliance (TPA) Mano Ganesan stated that Dhammika Bandara who has found and producing the domestic “anti-COVID-19 potion” named “Dhammika Paniya” should not use Goddess Kaali. Bandara’s invoking the Hindu Goddess Kali to cure COVID-19 has also been mocked and criticized. <sup>422</sup>

**YMMA opposes to send those who die of COVID-19 abroad** The Young Men's Muslim Association (YMMA) has opposed sending Muslims who die of COVID-19 abroad for burial. <sup>423</sup>

**“Ensure the rights to bury the Muslims who die of COVID-19”- TNA** The Tamil National Alliance (TNA) has requested the government to allow the Muslims who die of COVID-19 in Sri Lanka according to the Islamic practice. It added that preventing them to be buried is human rights violation. <sup>424</sup>

**“COVID-19 virus is not spread through water”- Dr. Murali Vallipuranathan** Murali Vallipuranathan, a Community Medicine Specialist, said that it has been proved that the COVID-

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<sup>418</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 18, p.14.

<sup>419</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 19, p.8.

<sup>420</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 19, p.13.

<sup>421</sup> *Virakesari*, December 19, p.19.

<sup>422</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 20, frontpage.

<sup>423</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 20, p.2.

<sup>424</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 21, frontpage.

19 virus is not spread through water. Therefore, the virus will not spread from a buried body of COVID-19 patient.<sup>425</sup>

**Kumaratunga calls for reconsider the decision to cremate those who die of COVID-19** Former President Chandrika Kumaratunga has called on the government to reconsider the decision to only cremate those who die of COVID-19.<sup>426</sup>

**“Christian community has protected the Good News during the crisis times” - PM** Addressing the government Christmas celebration in Kurunegala, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa stated that the Christian community has protected the Good News during the crisis times.<sup>427</sup>

**A complaint was lodged against a woman disrespecting Hindu Goddess Kaali on Facebook** A complaint was lodged against a woman disrespecting Hindu Goddess Kaali on Facebook. The copies of the complaint was also sent to the president and the PM.<sup>428</sup>

**“Ministry of Health decides to add more members to the technical committee’ - Gunawardana** Director General of Health Service Dr Asela Gunawardana stated that the Ministry of Health decides to add more members to the technical committee which has been appointed to look into the matter of cremation or burial of those who die of COVID-19.<sup>429</sup>

**Galle Additional Magistrate orders not to cremate a Muslim COVID-19 victim** Following a complaint filed by a relative of a Muslim COVID-19 victim, the Galle Additional Magistrate orders not to cremate the victim and ordered to preserve it as the case is ongoing.<sup>430</sup>

**An individual who spread rumour to attack places of worship** An individual who had spread rumour that some Christian churches would be attacked yesterday (December 21) was arrested in Kandana.<sup>431</sup>

**“Let us celebrate Christmas by adhering health guidelines”- Fr. Jebaratnam** Vicar General of the Jaffna Dioceses of the Catholic Church Rev. Fr. Jebaratnam called on the Catholic community to celebrate Christmas by adhering health guidelines.<sup>432</sup>

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<sup>425</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 21, frontpage.

<sup>426</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 21, frontpage.

<sup>427</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 21, p.2.

<sup>428</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 21, p.3.

<sup>429</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 22, frontpage.

<sup>430</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 22, p.3.

<sup>431</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 22, p.3.

<sup>432</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 23, frontpage.

**Decision on cremation of those who die of COVID-19 by end of December”- Sabry** Minister of Justice Aly Sabry said that he hoped that a favourable decision would be taken by the government on the cremation of those who die of COVID-19 by end of December. <sup>433</sup>

**Protest against cremation of Janazas** A group of people in Borella stated a protest against the forced cremation of Muslims who die of COVID-19. <sup>434</sup>

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<sup>433</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 24, frontpage.

<sup>434</sup> *Thinakaran*, December 24, frontpage.