



#MINORMATTERS



UNDERSTANDING PRESS COVERAGE ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

PERIOD COVERED : OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2018

INTRODUCTION

Ethno-religious violence is a growing problem in post-war Sri Lanka. Events in Mawanella (2001),¹ Gintota (2017),² Aluthgama (2014)³ and most recently in Digana (2018)⁴ demonstrate the extent and frequency of this type of violence.

The following report was prepared by Verité Research (VR) for Minor Matters. The report is the first in a series of reports that analyses English, Sinhala, and Tamil language newspapers on matters relating to religious freedom in Sri Lanka. These reports examine the role of print media in terms of its reporting on the subject. The reports aim to analyse the frequency and tonality of coverage in various newspapers in English, Sinhala and Tamil to provide both quantitative and qualitative insights into press reportage pertaining to religious freedom.

The tonality of press coverage is assessed by observing press articles in terms of their sentiment with respect to 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, as well as pictures and any other additional cues used to position sentiment regarding the news item, are analysed.

The present report also qualitatively analyses articles related to religious freedom within the context of broader overarching themes relevant to religious freedom. Newspaper summaries that have a bearing on religious freedom are listed in chronological order at the end of the report.

1 G.H. Peiris, A reappraisal of evidence and claims. Emerging Buddhist – Muslim rivalry in Sri Lanka? The Island (2017). Accessed 11 December 2018 http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=167737

2 Dharisha Bastians, Gintota and the shadows of extremism. Daily FT (2017). Accessed 11 December 2018 <http://www.ft.lk/opinion/Gintota-and-the-shadows-of-extremism/14-643843> 3 Dharisha Bastians, Death toll rises to 4 from Aluthgama riot.. Daily FT (2014). Accessed 11 December 2018

<http://www.ft.lk/article/308988/Death-toll-rises-to-4-from-Aluthgama-riots> 4 Digana turns divisive' Daily FT (2018). Accessed 11 December 2018 <http://www.ft.lk/top-story/Digana-turns-divisive-/26-650661>

METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this study, religious freedom can be understood to comprise the freedom:

- To have or to adopt a religion or belief of one's choice;⁵
- Not be discriminated or suffer any disability on the grounds of religion;⁶
- Not be subject to any restriction or condition with regard to access to places of public worship of one's own religion⁷; and
- To be entitled to manifest one's religion or belief in worship, observance, practice or teaching.⁸

Press reports on religious freedom appearing from October to December 2018 were monitored. Accordingly, the following 13 – daily and weekend – newspapers in the three official languages of Sri Lanka, Sinhala, Tamil and English, were examined (see table below).

English Newspapers	Sinhala Newspapers	Tamil Newspapers
Sunday Observer/ Daily News	Lankadeepa/Sunday Lankadeepa	Virakesari
Daily Mirror	Divaina/Sunday Divaina	Thinakaran
	Dinamina/Silumina	Uthayan
	Anidda	

The above newspapers were selected on the basis of readership data in the National Demographic and Media Survey produced by Kantar LMRB for the year 2017. Lankadeepa and Virakesari have the highest readership from the daily Sinhala and Tamil newspapers respectively. The Divaina has the second highest readership from the daily Sinhala newspapers. Sunday Observer and Daily News have the highest readership from the weekend and daily English newspapers respectively. Daily Mirror has the second highest readership from the daily English newspapers.

Anidda, which is a new alternative newspaper, was picked outside of the readership data by taking into consideration the nature of its content, which can

Article 10 of the Sri Lanka Constitution.

6 Article 12 (2) and article 27 (6) of the Sri Lanka Constitution. 7 Article 12 (3) of the Sri Lanka Constitution.

8 Article 14 (1) (e) of the Sri Lanka Constitution.

be identified as giving an alternative insight into events. As its content is likely to be different from the mainstream newspapers, it was included in the Sinhala newspaper sample. Likewise, Uthayan, a Jaffna-based publication, was taken outside of the readership data, as it is a regional publication. As state newspapers were included for both English and Sinhala, Thinakaran was selected to represent a state-based Tamil newspaper and maintain consistency, despite it having low readership.

In these newspapers, articles that have a bearing on religious freedom were considered eligible to be picked for assessing the tonality of their reporting. Examples of such articles include:⁹

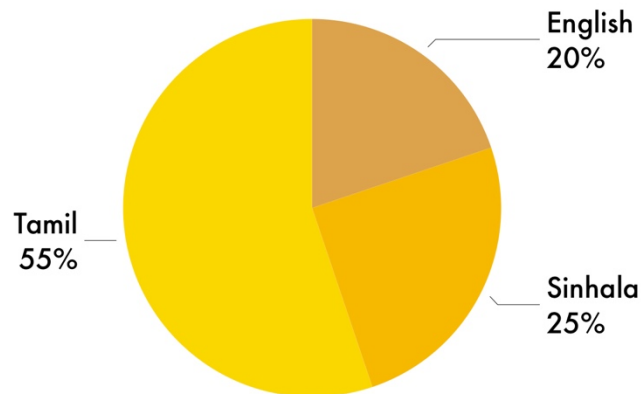
- Articles referring to instances of physical violence that are religiously motivated, or target religious communities/figures or sites;
- Articles referring to or containing speech prompting physical violence or threatening remarks targeted at religious institutions, its leaders and community;
- Articles that discuss court cases, laws or regulations pertaining to religious freedom.

⁹ N.B. the aforementioned list is only illustrative and not exhaustive.

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

NUMBER OF ARTICLES CARRIED IN PRESS

English | Sinhala | Tamil
October - December 2019



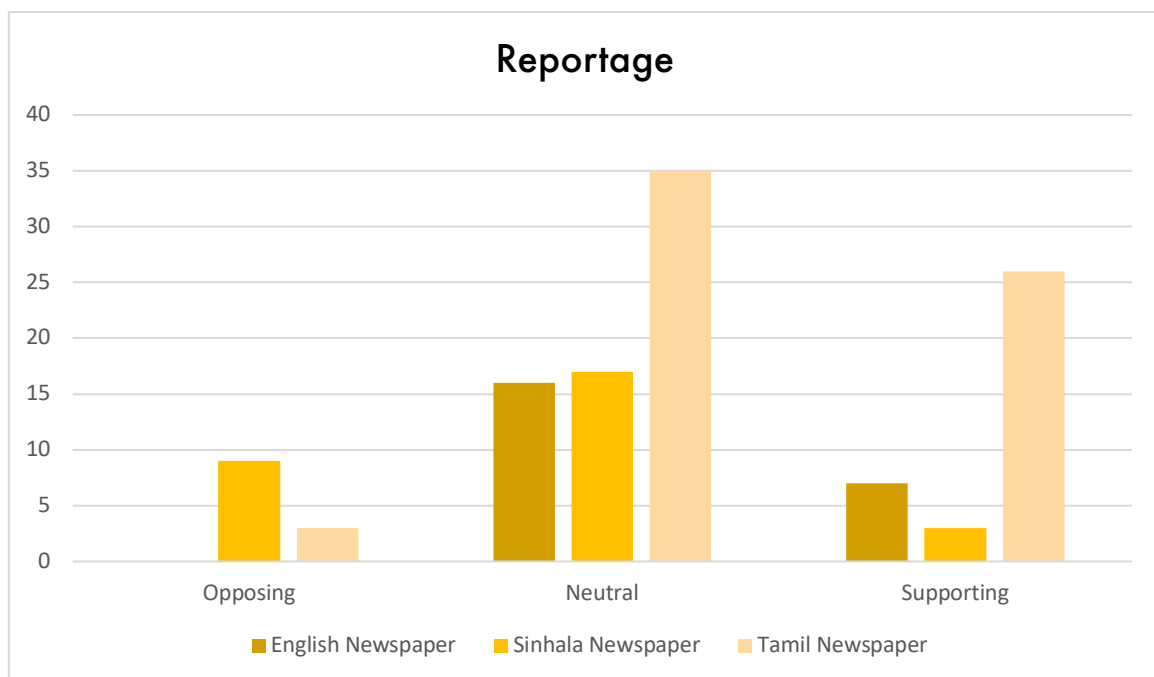
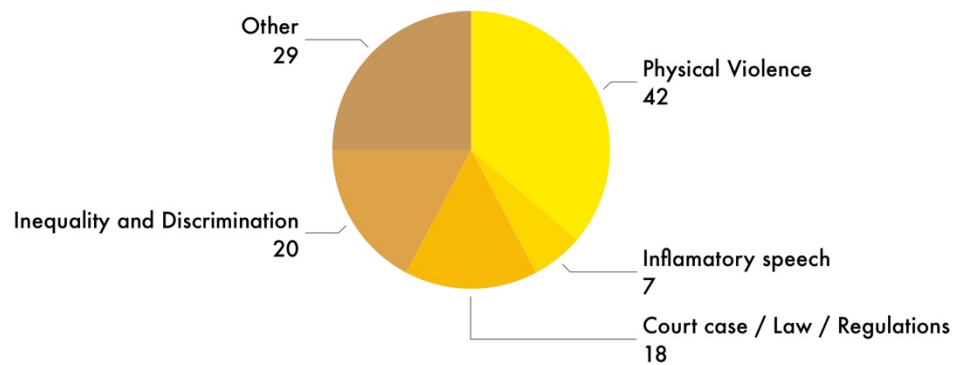
From October to December 2018, a total of 116 articles relating to religious freedom were carried in the English, Sinhala and Tamil press. The Tamil newspapers carried 64 of these articles, constituting 55 percent of the total coverage. Meanwhile, Sinhala and English newspapers accounted for 25 percent and 20 percent of the coverage respectively –i.e. 29 and 23 articles.

Religious freedom was discussed during the reporting period under these five themes:

1. Physical violence;
2. Inflammatory speech;
3. Court cases/law/regulation
4. Inequality and discrimination; and
5. Other

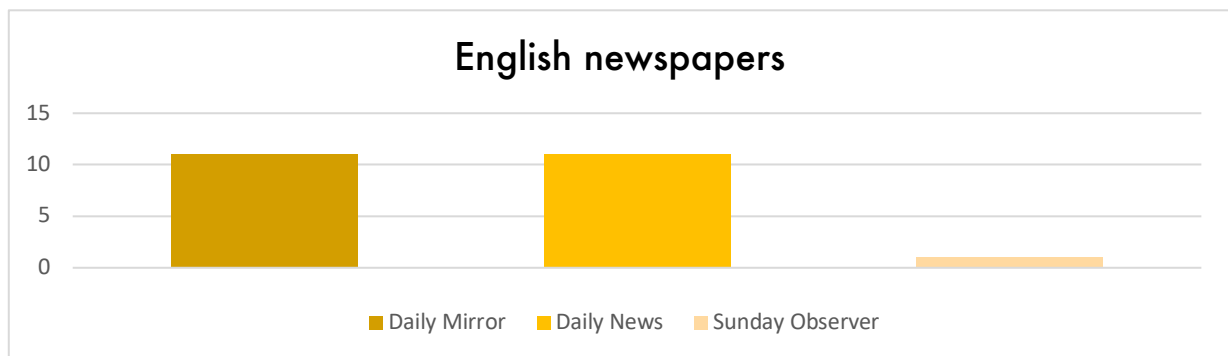
OVERARCHING THEMES PERTAINING TO RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

October - December 2019



- Of the 23 articles in the English newspapers, 16 were neutral and 7 were supporting religious freedom.
- There were 29 articles in the Sinhala newspapers from October to December 2018 – 17 neutral, 9 opposing and 3 supporting religious freedom.
- Tamil newspapers carried 35 neutral, 26 supporting and 3 opposing religious freedom.

Coverage in English newspapers



English Newspapers	No. of Articles	Reportage		
		Supporting	Neutral	Opposing
Daily Mirror	11	3	8	-
Daily News	11	4	7	-
Sunday Observer	1	-	1	-
Total	23	7	16	

English newspapers carried 23 articles that had a bearing on religious freedom, of which 16 were neutral and 7 were supporting religious freedom.

The 7 supporting articles included coverage of the following events:

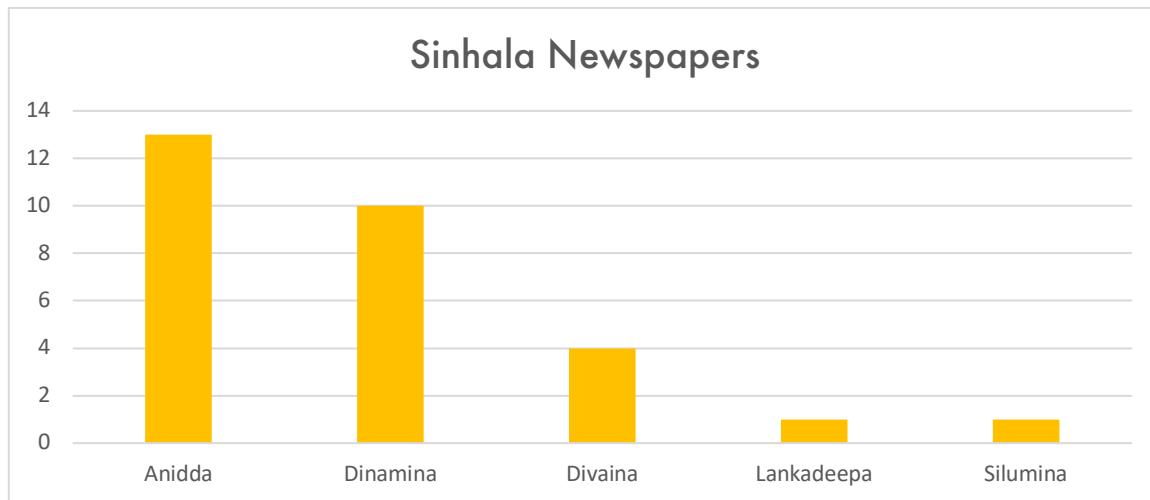
- Aid for places of religious worship. This article reports that the Ministry of National Policies and Economic Affairs will spend Rs. 155,000 to develop places of religious worship in Hail-Ela, Haputale, Lunugala, Uva Paranagama, Passara, Soranathota, and Welimada.¹⁰
- The President's dedication in spreading values of Theravada Buddhism. President Maithiripala Sirisena expressed his dedication to deliver the values of Theravada Buddhism to the world while protecting its philosophy and by joining hands with all countries in the region.¹¹
- Related reporting on the vandalisation of Buddha statues in Mawanella on 26 December 2018. These reports called for strict implementation of the law against 'extremist' actions', and also featured voices of political actors who advocated for religious harmony and reconciliation. Notably, the English press did not make reference to the ethnicity of the suspects.¹²

¹⁰ Daily News, October 5, p. 2.

¹¹ Daily News, October 17, p. 3; Daily Mirror, October 17, p. 4.

¹² Daily News, December 29, p. 1; Daily News, December 29, p. 3; Daily News, December 28, p. 4.

Coverage in Sinhala Newspapers



Sinhala Newspapers	No. of Articles	Reportage		
		Supporting	Neutral	Opposing
Anidda	13	-	5	8
Dinamina	10	1	8	1
Divaina	4	2	2	-
Lankadeepa	1	0	1	-
Silumina	1	0	1	-
Total	29	3	17	9

- The Sinhala press featured 29 articles that have a bearing on religious freedom, with 17 neutral, 9 opposing and 3 supporting.
- With 13 articles, Divaina had comparatively higher coverage on religious freedom, followed by Lankadeepa with 10 articles.
- The 3 supporting articles included coverage of the following events:
 - A statement made by United National Party (UNP) MP S.M. Marikkar requesting Muslims who value reconciliation to help with the construction of the vandalised Buddha statues as a gesture of supporting reconciliation.¹³
 - An editorial advocating for an end to religious discrimination in light of the Mawanella incident.¹⁴

¹³ Dinamina, December 28, p. 1; Lankadeepa, December 28, p. 5.

¹⁴ Dinamina, December 29, p. 8.

- In comparison, the 9 articles that were opposing in tone included coverage of the following:
 - An interview with Amith Weerasinghe, founder of the Mahason Balakaya, and also featured allegations levelled against him for creating communal unrest under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). In the interview, he expressed that he was baselessly arrested for having spoken on behalf of the rights of the Sinhala ethnicity. He further stated that his case is similar to the case brought against former State Minister of Child Affairs Vijayakala Maheswaran, who also spoke on behalf of the rights of the Tamil ethnicity, but was immediately released on bail upon her arrest. On account of this he claimed that the law was implemented differently for the two individuals. His statement thereby hinted at rousing anti-Tamil sentiments.¹⁵
 - A Hindu Kovil was reportedly built forcefully in the places of worship in Samankulama, Vavuniya. The Divaina claimed that Samankulama is an archaeological Buddhist place of worship. As such, it accused the Hindus of forcefully capturing this place of worship and establishing a Hindu temple in 1985.¹⁶
 - In light of the vandalisation of the Buddha statues in the Mawanella area, some of the mainstream Sinhala press reports attacked ‘Muslim extremism’ for having allegedly carried out the vandalisation. Terminology used in the reportage to refer Muslims included ‘sinners’, ‘Muslim fanatics’, ‘Sri Lankan Taliban’, and ‘violent beggars who lack ideology’. These articles had the effect of creating a hostile environment by discriminating against Muslims and inadvertently opposing their religious freedom.¹⁷
 - Leader of National Freedom Front (NFF), Wimal Weerawansa drew parallels between groups of individuals behind the Digana and Mawanella incidents and the Tamil Diaspora, who he alleged were trying to fulfil their political needs and to be in power by arousing racism. He stated that there were programmes to destroy Buddha statues in Mawanella. Furthermore, he stated that the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and Tamil Diaspora want to create communal unrest.¹⁸

¹⁵ Divaina, November 11, p. 13.

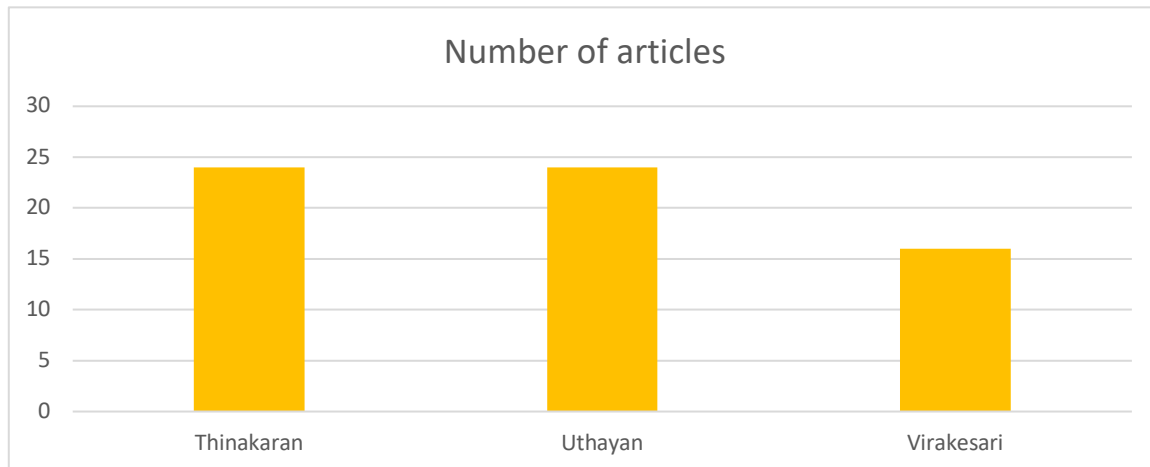
¹⁶ Divaina, November 19, p. 12.

¹⁷ Divaina, December 27, p. 1; Divaina, December 27, p. 8; Divaina, December 27, p. 7; Divaina, December 30, p. 5; Divaina, December 30, p. 5.

See <https://twitter.com/EthicsEye/status/1082860902670626816>.

¹⁸ Lankadeepa, December 29, p. 8; Divaina, December 31, p. 10.

Coverage in Tamil newspapers



Tamil Newspapers	No. of Articles	Reportage		
		Supporting	Neutral	Opposing
Thinakaran	24	13	10	1
Uthayan	24	9	14	1
Virakesari	16	4	11	1
Total	64	26	35	3

There were 64 articles relating to religious freedom in the Tamil press, with 26 supporting, 35 neutral and 3 opposing religious freedom.

- The 26 supporting articles included coverage of the following events:
 - A statement made by State Minister of Education, Velusamy Radhakrishnan, who stated that no one has the right to forcibly convert students to other religions, as they could have a psychological mind set where they are unable to take crucial decisions, and warned that steps would be taken against those who attempted to do so.¹⁹
 - A regional conference on religious harmony held in Ampara.²⁰
 - Reported attempts by the Department of Archaeology to take over the land belonging to the Vedukkunari temple to build a Buddhist temple. The article reports on the move being thwarted following protests organised by the administrative board and the public. Further, a directive issued by the police to prevent the administration and the public from entering the temple premises was also withdrawn

¹⁹ Thinakaran, October 1, p. 3.

²⁰ Thinakaran, October 2, p. 3.

following protests. The article also condemns acts of the department, specifically ones targeting Hindu temples.²¹

- Observation made by Government Agent of the Trincomalee District, N.A.A. Pushpakumara. He stated that conducting religious functions at the Divisional Secretariat – where members of all communities take part – would pave the way for reconciliation.²²
- Statement made by the Bishop of Mannar, Rt. Rev. Fidelis Fernando, at an event held at the Mannar Education Zone. The Bishop stated that religious leaders should respect all religions and languages.²³
- A comment made by the Secretary of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), V. Anandasangaree. This statement was made following the unrest at the Kalmunai Municipal Council over the controversy surrounding the petition to remove a Hindu temple. He called upon those who believed in God to respect places of worship belonging to other religions. Furthermore, Tamil National Alliance (TNA) member of the Kalmunai Municipal Council, A. Wijeratnam, remarked that the move obstructed the worshipping rights of Tamils.²⁴
- Deputy Education Director for Sammanthurai, Ahmed Kiyas, stated that if students of all three communities studied together, there would be a permanent solution. He outlined that all religions taught good values and added that students should learn about other religions and communities starting from their childhood.²⁵
- Sri Lanka Jamaat-e-Islami's Ameer Ish Sheik stated that no one should impose the uniqueness of one's religion on others and they should live harmoniously with people of other communities and religions.²⁶
- A religious reconciliation exhibition in Mannar.²⁷
- Nuwara Eliya District Coordinator for the Human Rights Commission (HRC), Viranjana Sumanasekara, stated that religious leaders should play an important role in fostering religious reconciliation in the country.²⁸

21 Uthayan, October 7, p. 7; Uthayan October 8, p. 9; Thinakaran, October 13, p. 16; Virakesari, October 14, p. 8.

22 Thinakaran, October 16, p. 10.

23 Uthayan, October 17, p. 6.

24 Virakesari, October 19, p. 8; Uthayan, October 20, p. 3; Thinakaran, October 25, p. 11; Thinakaran, October 26, p. 3.

25 Virakesari, November 12, p. 18.

26 Thinakaran, November 14, p. 8 ²⁷ Thinakaran, December 20, p. 14.

²⁸ Thinakaran, December 11, p. 6.



- Compensation provided for worship places affected by the war in the Eastern Province. Accordingly, Minister M.L.A.M. Hizbullah handed over LKR 1,000,000 compensation to two mosques and LKR 300,000 to one mosque all of which are located in Kaththankudy.²⁹
- Calls for the non-disturbance of peace and the implementation of the law against those involved in the vandalisation of the Buddha statues in Mawanella. Notably, the Tamil press did not make reference to the ethnicity of the suspects.³⁰

In comparison, the 3 articles that were opposing in tone included coverage of the following:

- Several people taking over and occupying land belonging to India's Chidambaram temple in Karaveddy.³¹
- Petition filed to remove the Pillaiyar temple within the Kalmunai North Divisional Secretariat.³²
- Statement made by the Shivsena Organiser, Maravanpulavu Sachchithananthan. He stressed on working towards electing a provincial council that would formulate a law to ban religious conversion. He stated that the need for such law is in order to preserve the religious and cultural landmarks and values for the benefit of the future generation. The above article was graded based on the premise that of the blanket prohibition of conversion would be inconsistent with religious freedom, particularly, the freedom to have or to adopt a religion of one's choice.³³

²⁹ Thinakaran, December 2, p. 8.

³⁰ Virakesari, December 29, p. 4; Thinakaran; December 29, p. 4; Virakesari, December 28, p. 11; Thinakaran; December 29, p. 1.

³¹ Uthayan, October 3, p. 2.

³² Virakesari, October 18, p. 22; Thinakaran, October 26, p. 18; Virakesari, October 26, p. 16.

³³ Thinakaran, October 24, p. 14.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

From October to December 2018, the articles monitored were discussed under five overarching themes pertaining to religious freedom. They are: 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. Under the aforementioned themes, the most prominent articles with a bearing on religious freedom included coverage of the following events in Sri Lanka; 1) vandalism of several Buddha statues in Mawanella ; 2) the attempted assault and verbal abuse of the divisional secretary of Eravur, Chenkaladi in Batticaloa by a Buddhist monk; 3) a Fundamental Rights petition filed by five students of the Vavuniya Campus of Jaffna University; 4) a petition to remove a Hindu temple within the Kalmunai Divisional Secretariat; and 5) threats to Hindu places of worship.

The first event relates to physical violence, whereas the second event is categorised under inflammatory speech. The third and fourth events are classified under court cases, laws and regulations. The last topic is classified under ‘inequality and discrimination’, which includes any form of discrimination on religious grounds. The ‘other related reporting’ category accounts for all reportage of isolated nature that cannot be brought under one specific theme (see below).

Overarching Theme	Event
Physical Violence	(1) Vandalisation of several Buddha statues in Mawanella.
Inflammatory speech	(2) The attempted assault and verbal abuse of the divisional secretary of Eravur, Chenkaladi in Batticaloa by a Buddhist monk.
Court cases, Laws & Regulations	(3) A Fundamental Rights petition filed by five students of the Vavuniya Campus of Jaffna University. (4) A petition to remove a Hindu temple within the Kalmunai Divisional Secretariat.
Inequality and Discrimination	(5) Threats to Hindu places of worship.

Physical violence

This theme will focus on violence or attempted violence, which is religiously motivated, and perpetrated against a person or property. Under this theme, religious freedom was discussed in relation to one main event during the month of December. This was the vandalism of several Buddha statues in Mawanella.

Vandalisation of several Buddha statues in Mawanella

There was unanimous condemnation of the vandalism of several Buddha statues in Mawanella across all language newspapers and by politicians.³⁴ Notably, the initial arrest of a Muslim individual resulted in some of the mainstream Sinhala press framing the incident as an attack led by 'Muslim extremists'. The incident thus renewed concerns over the resurgence of Buddhist-Muslim tensions.³⁵ However, this framing departed from the framing in English and Tamil reportage, which characterised the vandalism as an isolated incident without clearly identifying the perpetrators, and remained neutral in its reportage.

The press apportioned blame to different parties on account of their motives for involvement in the vandalism:

- a) 'Muslim extremists' were blamed for having carried out the vandalism of the Buddha statues.³⁶ For instance, the Hela Bodhu Saviya sent a letter to the President stating that Muslims were responsible for vandalising the Buddha statues.³⁷ The motive attributed to the Muslim extremists for their involvement in the incident was the intent to spread Wahhabism, and monopolising their religion.³⁸ Importantly, proponents of this strand of blame drew on the global stereotype, which presents certain Muslims as endorsing religious extremism and violence. Accordingly, some of the Sinhala newspapers echoed anti-Muslim stereotypes and sentiments in the local Sri Lankan context. Notably, Sinhala press reportage passed judgement on the alleged suspects by using terminology such as 'Muslim fanatics', 'Sri Lankan Taliban', 'violent beggars who lack ideology', and disclosed the suspects' personal information including their postal addresses.³⁹

34 Thinakaran, December 29, p. 1; Virakesari, December 28, p. 1; Virakesari, December 28, p. 11; Virakesari, December 28, p. 11; Virakesari, December 29, p. 1; Virakesari, December 29, p. 4; Daily News, December 29, p. 1; Daily News, December 29, p. 1; Daily Mirror, December 29, p. 3; Daily Mirror, December 27, p. 1; Divaina, December 27, p. 10; Dinamina, December 29, p. 1;

35 The Media Analysis Vol. 09, #1.

36 Divaina, December 27, p. 8; Divaina, December 27, p. 7; Divaina, December 30, p. 5; Divaina, December 30, p. 5; Anidda, December 30, p. 1.

37 Anidda, December 30, p. 1.

38 Divaina, December 30, p. 5; Divaina, December 27, p. 8.

39 Divaina, December 27, p. 8; Divaina, December 30, p. 5; Divaina, December 30, p. 5



Furthermore, specific press references were made to the perceived threats to Theravada Buddhism in relation to the alleged rise of Islamic extremism in Sri Lanka.⁴⁰

- b) 'Imperialists' and 'foreign powers' were blamed for having artificially created religious tension in the country. This view came from the Sinhala nationalist figure Dr. Gunadasa Amarasekara. He perceived the incident to be strategically initiated by foreign powers in an attempt to bring down a peacekeeping army. He outlined that the West has had a long-standing interest to divide the country. He remarked that previously the West had attempted to divide the country by supporting the LTTE, and then helping the 2015 government come into power, which is now pushing towards a new Constitution. In line with this, he viewed the Mawanella incident as yet another attempt by the West in their larger motive to divide the country.⁴¹
- c) The UNP-led government and the TNA were blamed for wanting a Sinhala- Muslim conflict. The motive attributed to these parties was that they benefitted from Buddhist-Muslim tensions.⁴² This strand of blame was conveyed by Leader of the National Freedom Front Wimal Weerawansa. Weerawansa cited previous instances to support this claim, such as the Ampara and Digana incidents in 2018, which allegedly detracted from the UNP's loss at the 2018 local government elections.⁴³

⁴⁰ Divaina, December 30, p. 5; The Media Analysis Vol. 09, #1.

⁴¹ Daily News, December 28, p. 7; Divaina, December 28, p. 13.

⁴² Lankadeepa, December 29, p. 8; Divaina, December 31, p. 10.

⁴³ The Media Analysis Vol. 09, #1.

Inflammatory speech

Inflammatory speech covers threatening remarks and/or verbal abuse targeting at religious institutions, its leaders, community, and others. Under this theme, religious freedom was discussed in relation to one main event during the month of October in 2018. This was the attempted assault and verbal abuse by Ven. Ampitya Sumanarathna Thera.

The attempted assault and verbal abuse of the divisional secretary of Eravur, Chenkaladi in Batticaloa by a Buddhist monk

Chief Priest of the Mangalaramaya temple, Ven. Ampitiye Sumanarathana Thera reportedly attempted to assault and verbally abuse the divisional secretary of Eravur for permitting the owner of a private land in the area to cut branches off a Bo tree.

The focus of this analysis is framed around the spectrum of terminology used by voices in the English and Tamil press to describe the behaviour of the Thera. Notably, the terminology used to describe the behaviour differed based on the type of reporting: (1) general news reports on the incident and behaviour of the Thera, and (2) reports featuring the community reaction towards the behaviour of the Thera.

First, general news reports in the Tamil press used neutral phrases such as ‘tense situation’ and the Thera having ‘expressed opposition’ to cutting the branches of the Bo tree, to describe the behaviour of the Thera.⁴⁴ By contrast, his actions received stronger criticism in Tamil press reports earlier this year. This is because the Thera was perceived to have instigated violent events by using inflammatory speech, before the anti-Muslim violence took place in Kandy earlier this year.

Second, coverage that focused on the community’s reactions featured protests against the behaviour of the chief priest held by the employees of the Eravur Pattu Divisional Secretary, Samurdhi officials, representatives of civil society organisations, and administrative officers of Batticaloa attached to the Sri Lanka Administrative Service Association.⁴⁵ As opposed to the general news reports, coverage in the Tamil and English press featuring the protests were vocal in their criticism towards the behaviour of the Thera. Virakesari, Thinakaran, and Daily News featured words such as ‘outrageous’, ‘unruly’, ‘aggressive’, and ‘violent’ to express opposition towards what was seen as heavy handed behaviour.

Outside the characterisation of the chief priest’s behaviour, press discussion hinted at a sentiment reflecting the persistent exceptionalism and impunity

⁴⁴ Virakesari, October 24, p. 7.

⁴⁵ Thinakaran, October 25, p. 17; Virakesari, October 26, p. 19.

allowed to the Thera's actions.⁴⁶ The coverage featuring the protest also highlighted the protestors' views that demanded 'government officers to be allowed to perform their duties freely' and sought the 'good governance' government's intervention to stop 'unlawful influences'.⁴⁷ Reactions were therefore fuelled by the fact that the Thera was being depicted as upholding Buddhist tradition over and above law and order.

Overall, the second type of reporting featuring the community reaction towards the behaviour of the Thera received significant traction in the Tamil press. Notably, this incident was not covered in the Sinhala press.

⁴⁶ The Media Analysis, Vol. 04, #16; Daily News, October 27, p.

<http://www.dailynews.lk/2018/10/27/local/166711/slasa-batticaloa-branch-urges-legal-action-against-thera>.

⁴⁷ Virakesari, October 26, p. 19; Daily News, October 27, p.

<http://www.dailynews.lk/2018/10/27/local/166711/slasa-batticaloa-branch-urges-legal-action-against-thera>.

Court Cases, Laws and Regulations

The above theme covers court cases, laws and regulations that promote or restrict religious freedom. Accordingly, during the month of October, religious freedom was discussed under this theme in relation to two events: 1) a fundamental rights petition filed by five students of the Vavuniya Campus of Jaffna University, and 2) a petition to remove a Hindu temple within the Kalmunai Divisional Secretariat. While the fundamental rights petition was examined from a pro-Sinhala Buddhist perspective, the petition to remove a Hindu temple was perceived as a resurgence of extremism.

A fundamental rights petition filed by five students of the Vavuniya Campus of Jaffna University

Five students attached to the Vavuniya campus of the Jaffna University filed a fundamental rights (FR) petition in the Supreme Court complaining that the University did not allow the students to conduct religious observances within campus premises. The students were barred from campus premises for their suspected involvement in bringing a wooden structure to campus in order to create a frame to place a Buddha statue (Budu Kutiya).⁴⁸

Press discussion of this issue was framed along two strands: (1) the students' right to expression as per article 14(1) of the Constitution, and (2) the reportedly continuing ethno-religious tensions among the Sinhalese and Tamils. The sentiment that emerged within this discussion focused on a pro-Sinhala-Buddhist cause.

The first strand was framed around the question of whether or not the University administration violated the students' right to expression. The students, who were framed as Sinhala-Buddhists, claimed that the University administration had allowed the Maha Viru commemorations that are perceived as sympathetic to the LTTE and other commemorations to be held within the University while only imposing a ban on them.⁴⁹ Moreover, Sarath Dharmasena in Divaina voiced in favour of the student's right to expression, solely viewing the petition in light of a Sinhala- Buddhist perspective. He highlighted that the majority of the students attending the University were Sinhala-Buddhists and had to walk seven kilometres to reach a temple in the Vavuniya town in order to engage in religious activities.⁵⁰ The Sinhala-Buddhist students were thereby portrayed as victims of religious suppression.

⁴⁸ Daily Mirror, October 3, p. 1; Daily News, October 4, p. 3; Lankadeepa, October 3, p. 1; Divaina, October 3, p. 1; Virakesari, October 4, p. 2; Daily News, October 5, p. 2; Daily News, October 11, p. 1; Divaina, October 11, p. 1; Thinakaran, October 11, p. 3; Thinakaran, October 12, p. 17.

⁴⁹ Daily Mirror, October 3, p. 1; Lankadeepa, October 3, p. 1.

⁵⁰ Divaina, October 3, p. 1; Divaina, October 11, p. 1.

The second strand, voiced by Minister of Higher Education, Wijeyadasa Rajapakshe was featured exclusively in the state press. Minister Rajapakshe did not engage in a rights-based discussion, but instead viewed the event as part of a larger ethno- religious and geographical problem. In his address in parliament, he pointed to past attempts to instigate religious tensions between Sinhalese and Tamils in the North. He further pointed out the possibility of these acts being carried out by the Sinhalese from the South, who travel to the North, in order to blame the Tamils.⁵¹ This indicates that he did not view the petition of the students' as a mere violation of the students' right to expression, rather as a 'move to instigate religious tensions'.

A petition to remove a Hindu temple within the Kalmunai Divisional Secretariat

Press reportage featured two non-related incidents with respect to the Pillaiyar (Lord Ganesh) temple built within the premises of the Kalmunai Divisional Secretariat. The first incident featured the vandalism of the fence surrounding the Pillaiyar temple, which took place on 17 October.⁵² The second featured a petition filed at the Kalmunai Magistrate's Court by the Mayor of Kalmunai, A. M. Rakeeb. He sought an Order to demolish the temple, claiming it was built without the approval of the Urban Development Authority.⁵³

The Order to demolish the Hindu temple dominated Tamil press coverage, whereas the vandalism of the fence did not gain significant traction. Accordingly, the Order was depicted as an 'act to suppress the freedom of religion'.⁵⁴ Press discussion on the Order viewed the issue from two main angles: (1) the consequence of the suppression of religious freedom, and (2) the causes of the suppression.

The first angle focused on the reported consequence of the suppression of religious freedom. This was advanced by political actors such as Secretary of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) V. Anandasangaree, former Tamil National Alliance (TNA) Parliamentarian P. Ariyanenthiran, and TNA member of the Kalmunai Council A. Wijeratnam.⁵⁵ These voices indicated that such acts of suppression would trigger anti-communal sentiments between Tamils and Muslims. This sentiment adds currency to the argument that religion and ethnicity in Sri Lanka are often linked together. Therefore, in this instance the Muslims were viewed as an ethno-religious threat to the Tamil minority in the Kalmunai area.

⁵¹ Thinakaran, October 11, p. 3.

⁵² Thinakaran, October 18, p. 12; Virakesari, October 18, p. 11.

⁵³ Virakesari, October 18, p. 22.

⁵⁴ Uthayan, October 20, p. 3.

⁵⁵ Thinakaran, October 25, p. 17; Uthayan, October 20, p. 3; Virakesari, October 19, p. 8; Virakesari, October 26, p. 16.

The causes of the suppression of religious freedom were reported along two lines: (1) the actions of the Mayor, and (2) the affiliations of the Mayor. In terms of action, the filing of the petition was perceived as the Mayor having acted in an 'arbitrary' manner and potentially resulting in triggering anti-communal sentiments.⁵⁶ In terms of the affiliations of the Mayor, the causal relationship linked the Mayor with the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC). In doing so, political actors accused the SLMC of conspiring to create disharmony among the ethnicities and the Mayor as being a part of that agenda.

Notably, Tamil press coverage was partisan, limiting its focus on featuring voices of political actors affiliated to Tamil political parties. For instance, Virakesari highlighted statements made by TNA member A. Wijeratnam, who sympathised with the Tamils for not being allowed to attend religious observances during work hours unlike the Muslims. Such partisan views in coverage could fuel anti-Muslim sentiments.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Thinakaran, October 25, p. 17; Thinakaran, October 26, p. 18; Virakesari, October 26, p. 16.

⁵⁷ Virakesari, October 24, p. 7; Virakesari, October 26, p. 16.

Inequality and discrimination

This theme covers instances of any form of discrimination on religious grounds. These include instances of religious land being occupied, advocacy for anti- conversion laws, and denial of construction permits for places of worship.⁵⁸ During the months of October and November in 2018, this theme was mainly highlighted in relation to the restrictive acts against Hindu places of worship, threatening the religious freedom of the Hindus. Press coverage on the issue perceived the acts of the state to be discriminatory and aligned towards a pro-Sinhala Buddhist agenda.

Threats to Hindu places of worship

During the months of October and November reports of acts targeting Hindu places of worship were prevalent among the articles that were scouted for having a bearing on religious freedom. These acts include: preventing poojas performed by Tamil devotees, constructing Buddha statues within the premises of Hindu temples, obstructing renovations of Hindu temples, taking over land belonging to places of Hindu worship, and renaming of Hindu temples.⁵⁹ These incidents were predominantly covered in the Tamil press, with only two articles featured in the Sinhala press. Coverage of the incidents was absent in the English press.

Tamil press commentary remained largely neutral in reporting these incidents. However, Tamil reportage also included underlying tones of empathy-based support towards the religious rights of the Hindus. The rising sentiment that emerged from this reportage was the perceived targeted acts of religious discrimination against the Hindus. The aforementioned incidents were viewed as demonstrative of the state- sponsored systematic Sinhalisation taking place in historically Tamil areas, in post- war Sri Lanka. Press sensitivity on this issue is also better understood when located within the broader historical concerns of the Tamil community such as the loss of land and their collective rights.⁶⁰

Criticism on this front was largely levelled at the Department of Archaeology. The Department of Archaeology was widely criticised as the direct enforcer of the

⁵⁸ Uthayan, October 3, p. 2; Thinakaran, October 1, p. 3; Thinakaran, October 24, p. 14; Thinakaran, October 2, p. 3; Thinakaran, October 16, p. 10.

⁵⁹ Uthayan, October 7, p. 7; Uthayan, October 8, p. 9; Uthayan, October 10, p. 9; Uthayan, October 11, p. 1; Uthayan, November 3, p. 8; Virakesari, November 4, p. 1; Virakesari, November 7, p. 16; Thinakaran, November 8, p. 14; Uthayan, November 9, p. 10; Virakesari, November 18, p. 10; Uthayan, November 19, p. 8.

⁶⁰ A monograph by the Social Architects, Salt on old wounds: The systematic Sinhalization of Sri Lanka's North, East and Hill Country (2012). Accessed 12 January 2019.

https://www.scribd.com/fullscreen/86205026-Salt-on-Old-Wounds-by-TSA-The-Systematic-Sinhalization-of-Sri-Lanka-s-North-East-and-Hill-Country?access_key=key-3szuxcd2ta360nmijl

discriminatory acts through systematically targeting Hindu places of worship.⁶¹ While condemning these acts of the department, Northern Provincial Council Member, T. Ravikaran remarked that the state department was 'forcibly imposing Buddhism' in the area and questioned whether it is an attempt to create communal friction.⁶² Notably, this criticism drew on the pervasive sentiment that there exists tacit patronage by the state in promoting Sinhala-Buddhist ethno-nationalism.

By contrast, the narrative rendered by the Sinhala press is different from the Tamil press. The Sinhala press featured the incident related to the reconstruction of Buddhist archaeological ruins within the premises of the Samankulam Kallumalai Vinayagar Temple in Vavuniya. Divaina carried a headline stating: 'A Hindu Kovil was built forcefully in places of worship in Samankulana'. Thus, press reportage presented Buddhists as a victimised population who were deprived of land bearing an archaeological value to Buddhism.⁶³

⁶¹ Uthayan, October 7, p. 7; Uthayan, October 8, p. 9; Uthayan, October 10, p. 9, Uthayan, October 11, p. 1; Uthayan, November 3. p. 8; Virakesari, November 7, p. 16; Thinakaran, November 8, p. 14; Uthayan, November 9, p. 10.

⁶² Uthayan, October 8, p. 9.

⁶³ Divaina, November 19, p. 12.

CONCLUSION

This study was based on monitoring the media for its coverage on religious freedom over a period of three months. It accordingly analysed 116 articles dealing with religious freedom. What emerged through the coverage was an underlying sympathy, based on the local language press, towards one of the ethno-religious groups discussed. The underlying sympathetic tendency has in turn affected the portrayal of the protagonists and antagonists in the reportage.

This report analysed the reportage on five overarching themes across all three language newspapers during the period of October to December 2018. The analysis was based on the lens of media sentiment. Through this lens, the analysis sought to identify sentiment in relation to content, tone and perspective. Meanwhile, a qualitative analysis of the reported content led to several key findings:

1. The vandalism of several Buddha statues in Mawanella received significant coverage within Sinhala press reportage. Some segments of the Sinhala press placed the incident in the context of a resurgence of Buddhist- Muslim tensions. The style of reporting in the editorials, and opinion articles of the Sinhala press – particularly the way the suspects were described, had the potential effect to instigate further religious and communal tensions.
2. The attempted assault and verbal abuse of a divisional secretary of Eravur, Chenkaladi in Batticaloa by a Buddhist monk was perceived as an example of exceptionalism and impunity allowed to the Buddhist clergy. This sentiment emerged largely from the Tamil press. This sentiment added currency to the existing perception among minorities that the government provides tacit patronage towards Sinhala-Buddhists.
3. The fundamental rights petition filed by five students of the Vavuniya Campus of Jaffna University and the petition to remove a Hindu temple within the Kalmunai Divisional Secretariat gave heed to two distinct anti-religious sentiment. The former was perceived as a continuing ethno-religious tension among the Sinhalese and Tamils. The latter was viewed in light of triggering anti-communal sentiments between Tamils and Muslims. These sentiments too were largely found in the Tamil press.
4. Threats to Hindu places of worship hinted that acts targeting Hindu temples strategically promoted state-sponsored Sinhalisation. This too emerged from the Tamil press, and can be understood within the larger context of the post- war insecurity of Tamils.

RELATED REPORTING

No one has the right to convert students – State Minister of Education, Velusamy Radhakrishnan said that no one has the right to covert students and warned that steps would be taken against those who attempted to convert students. He made this statement following the suicide of a male student in Rakwana a few days earlier due to alleged pressure on him to convert to another religion. He stressed that no one should attempt to force anyone, especially students, to convert to another religion for any reason. He said that students should not be forced to convert as they could have a psychological mindset where they are unable to take crucial decisions.⁶⁴

Regional Conference on religious harmony in Ampara – The Regional Conference on Religious Harmony was held at Monty Hotel in Ampara, on 1 October, under the patronage of Speaker Karu Jayasuriya. The conference saw the participation of several Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic religious leaders. The conference also saw the participation of several ministers and parliamentarians. Ministers Rishad Bathiudeen, D.M. Swaminathan, M.H.A. Haleem, A.H.M. Fowzie, Deputy Minister Muthu Sivalingam, Parliamentarians M.A. Sumanthiran, Douglas Devananda, Mansoor, Ali Zahir Moulana, S.M.M. Ismail and Nazeer were notable participants at the conference.⁶⁵

Lands belonging to India's Chidambaram temple in Karaveddy occupied – Several people have taken over and occupied lands belonging to Indian temples within the Karaveddy Divisional Secretariat (DS). Land belonging to India's Chidambaram temple is located within the limits of the Karaveddy DS. A letter is reported to have been sent by Karaveddy DS members of the Tamil National People's Front (TNPf) to the Indian High Commission. The letter requests the Indian High Commission to intervene into the matter and to hand over the lands back to the temple. The said letter had been signed by Sivarasa. However, Sivarasa denied drafting said letter.⁶⁶

Five students suspended over Buddha statue (by Thilini de Silva and Ranjan Katugampola) – Five students, four Sinhalese Buddhists and a Tamil Hindu of the Jaffna University filed a fundamental rights petition in the Supreme Court complaining that the university did not allow the students to conduct religious observances within the campus premises. The students attached to the business studies faculty at the Vavuniya campus of the Jaffna University complained that the university administration had continuously penalised them and had barred them from campus premises for their suspected involvement in bringing a wooden

⁶⁴ Thinakaran, October 1, p. 3.

⁶⁵ Thinakaran, October 2, p. 3.

⁶⁶ Uthayan, October 3, p. 2.

structure for the placement of a Buddha statue to the campus premises for Wesak commemoration.⁶⁷

A petition against the ban to enter the premises of the University of Jaffna by the five students who tried to bring a Buddha statue to the university premises (by Sarath Dharmasena) – Five students filed a fundamental rights petition against the decision of Jaffna University administration banning them from entering the university premises, claiming that charges have been levelled against them for attempting to place a Buddha statue. The news article denotes that the Sinhala Buddhist students were banned from engaging in religious activities within the university premises. Further, this article indicates that the majority of students in the university are Buddhist. The article reports, 'In the Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce, 350 of 500 students are Sinhala, 100 students are Tamil and 50 students are Muslim, and in the Faculty of Science, of 600, 400 students are Sinhala, 140 students are Tamil, 60 students are Muslim and 70 students Catholic. The report also mentions that the security officials of the Vavuniya campus prevented the students from placing a Budhu Kutuya (wooden structure for the placement of a Buddha statue), which was brought from Anuradhapura on April 21, near the hostel. ⁶⁸

Five students suspended over a Buddha statue (by Thilini de Silva and Ranjan Katugampola) – Five students filed a fundamental rights petition against Jaffna University administration claiming that charges were levelled against them on account of having attempted to place a Buddha statue in a hostel of the university and for the action taken by the administration against them in banning them from entering the university. Nine individuals including the Vice Chancellor of the Jaffna University Prof. Ratnam Vigneswaran, Rector of the Vavuniya campus Dr. T. Mangaleswaran, the chairman of the university grants commission, the minister of higher education, and the attorney general were named as the respondents. This article reports that the petitioners have requested to take legal measures, stating that their fundamental right to profess any religion of their choice, as guaranteed by the Constitution, has been violated by the decision taken by the university authorities. Furthermore, the article states that the university administration did not obstruct the celebration of Maha Viru commemorations. ⁶⁹

Five Jaffna University students file FR claiming religious rights (by Lakmal Sooriyagoda) – Five students, four Sinhalese Buddhists and a Tamil Hindu of the Jaffna University filed a fundamental rights petition in the Supreme Court complaining that the university did not allow the students to conduct religious observances within the campus premises. The students attached to the business studies faculty at the Vavuniya campus of the Jaffna University complained that

⁶⁷ Daily Mirror, October 3, p. 1.

⁶⁸ Divaina, October 3, p. 1.

⁶⁹ Lankadeepa, October 3, p. 1.

the university administration had continuously penalised them and had barred them from campus premises for their suspected involvement in bringing a wooden structure for the placement of a Buddha statue to the campus premises for Wesak commemoration.⁷⁰

Five students of the Jaffna University file a case at the Supreme Court (by M.F.M. Fazeer) – Five students, four Sinhalese Buddhists and a Tamil Hindu of the Jaffna University filed a fundamental rights petition in the Supreme Court complaining that the university did not allow the students to conduct religious observances within campus premises. The students attached to the business studies faculty at the Vavuniya campus of Jaffna University complained that the university administration had continuously penalised them and had barred them from campus premises for their suspected involvement in bringing a wooden structure for the placement of a Buddha statue to the campus premises for Wesak commemoration.⁷¹

Religious worship at Vavuniya Campus: Ministry clarifies reason for student suspension – In a statement made on October 4, the Higher Education and Cultural Affairs Ministry and the University Grants Commission clarified the incident where five students were barred from the premises of the Vavuniya Campus affiliated with Jaffna University. A place of worship for students of all religious denominations has already been established on campus premises. The statement says that all students have been given freedom to observe the religion of their choice, subject to university rules and regulations. The statement, however, said that a minor group of students had made an attempt to build a Budu Medura opposite the student hostel by surreptitiously placing a mandapa (wooden structure) for placing a Buddha statue without the sanction of the Dean of the Faculty and Chief Administrative Officer.⁷²

Aid for places of religious worship (by Navaratna Bandara) – The Ministry of National Policies and Economic Affairs will spend Rs. 155,000 to develop places of religious worship in Hali-Ela, Haputale, Lunugala, Uva Paranagama, Passara, Soranathota, and Welimada. The places of worship will be developed under the Religious Centres Development Programme 2018 by the ministry. Eleven projects will be carried out in Badulla, Hali-Ela, and Soranathota. Sixteen projects will **be carried out in Haputale, Lunugala, Passara, Uva Paranagama, and Welimada.**⁷³

⁷⁰ Daily News, October 4, p. 3.

⁷¹ Virakesari, October 4, p. 2.

⁷² Daily News, October 5, p. 2.

⁷³ Daily News, October 8, p. 7.



Police call Vedukkunari Sivan temple administrative members for inquiry – Police called members of the administrative board of the Adhilingeswarar temple in the Vedukkunari area, Nedunkerni, Vavuniya over attempts to fix an iron ladder for the devotees. The temple was amidst controversy before, when the Department of Archaeology attempted to take over the land and permitted a Buddhist temple to be built at the location. The department stopped poojas in the temple and permitted the building of the Buddhist temple in the said location. The move was thwarted following protests by members of the administrative board and the public. The public also organised a protest against the directive issued by the police to the administration preventing the public and administration from entering the temple premises. The directive was later withdrawn.⁷⁴

Is the Department of Archaeology creating communal friction in the North? – Provincial Councilor Ravikaran questions – Northern Provincial Council Member, T. Ravikaran, expressed doubts as to whether the Department of Archaeology was creating communal friction in the North. He said the department had targeted Hindu temples, destroyed them and established Buddhist symbols in those areas. He pointed out that instead of doing its job, the department was forcibly imposing Buddhism on the area. While condemning the acts in question, he further stated that the issue should also be conveyed to President Maithripala Sirisena.⁷⁵

Some of the Buddhist monks spread myths and destroy Buddha Sasana- Ven. Hegoda Wipassi Thera. (by Bernard Chandrasekara) – Ven. Hegoda Wipassi Thera stated that some individuals destroy the basics of Buddhism and it should be stopped. On a special note, he stated that if the ideology of the Anagarika Dharmapala has been followed, these incidents would not happen. The news report also mentions that Buddhism and the Sinhalese race would be invaded by other forces in the future, if the monks continue to spread myths.⁷⁶

New ladder should not be fixed at Vedukkunari malai temple without permission from Archaeology Department – Police issue stern order – The police have stated that even if the existing ladder breaks, a new one should not be fixed without written permission from the Department of Archaeology. The department stopped the poojas performed by Tamil devotees at the temple and gave permission to those who wanted a Buddhist temple built in the location. However, the move was thwarted by the temple administration and the public. The existing ladder was damaged as many people, including politicians, had visited the temple recently, and steps were taken by the administration to fix the

⁷⁴ Uthayan, October 7, p. 7.

⁷⁵ Uthayan, October 8, p. 9.

⁷⁶ Divaina, October 9, p. 18.

iron ladder. Members of the administration were called for police inquiry following the move to fix the ladder.⁷⁷

Shrine room matter: SC orders Jaffna VC and others to be noticed – On 10 October the Supreme Court directed the five university students of Jaffna University to send notices to the Vice Chancellor of the University and several others to appear in court on 5 December. The court direction was made with regard to the fundamental rights filed by the five students for having been allegedly penalised for bringing a Budu Kutiya to the Vavuniya Campus. The students on the petition complained that university administration has continuously penalised them and barred them from campus premises for their suspected involvement in bringing a wooden structure for the placement of a Buddha statue (Budu Kutiya) to the campus.⁷⁸

The incident of contention on the placing of the Budhu kutiya – the petition filed by the students to be considered on December 5th. (by Sarath Dharmasena) – The fundamental rights petition filed by the five students of the Jaffna University has been postponed until 5 December. These students were banned from entering the university premises as they had tried to place a Buddhist statue on the premises of the university hostel. The article mentions that of 1100 students from the two faculties, 700 are Sinhala Buddhist. The article reports that these students have to walk seven kilometers to come to a temple in Vavuniya town to engage in religious activities. Earlier, when the students tried to bring a Budhu Kutiya (wooden structure for the placement of a Buddha statue) worth Rs. 6000, they were not allowed to enter the university gates.⁷⁹

Students barred from university as they forcibly attempted to place a Buddha statue in premises (by Lawrence Selvanayagam and Maheswaran Pirasath) – Minister of Higher Education, Wijeyadasa Rajapakshe says the five students of the Vavuniya Campus of Jaffna University were barred from campus as they had forcibly attempted to place a Buddha Statue within the campus premises. The minister, speaking in parliament on 10 October, explained that this was a move by the students to show that they are not given the freedom to worship in the North. He pointed out several instances where perpetrators had dashed tar on certain Buddha statues in the North, thereby attempting to instigate religious tensions between Sinhalese and Tamils in the North. He also mentioned the possibility of these acts being carried out by Sinhalese from the South, who often travel back and forth to the North, in order to blame the Tamils.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Uthayan, October 10, p. 9.

⁷⁸ Daily News, October 11, p. 1.

⁷⁹ Divaina, October 11, p. 1.

⁸⁰ Thinakaran, October 11, p. 3.

Archaeology department takes over land in the East as well – Attempts have been made by the Department of Archaeology to take over land belonging to the Kuchchaveli Sithi Vinayagar temple. The department also attempted to take over lands belonging to Vedukkunaari Malai and Kurunthur Malai, where devotees have been worshipping for generations.⁸¹

Vavuniya campus premises Buddha statue issue: FR petition filed by five students to be inquired on December 5 – The Supreme Court issued a notice to the vice chancellor of Jaffna University and several others to appear before court on 5 December. The notice was issued when the fundamental rights petition filed by five students of the Vavuniya campus of Jaffna University was taken up for hearing. The students complained that the university administration had barred them from entering campus premises for their alleged involvement in bringing a wooden structure to place a Buddha statue within the premises. They stated that their right to expression, as mentioned in Article 14(1) of the Constitution, was violated by the university administration.⁸²

Solution reached for issue on archaeological artefacts within Kuchchaveli Sithi Vinayagar temple (by Anbuvalipuram Thinakaran correspondent) - The administration of the Kuchchaveli Sithi Vinayagar temple solved the issue pertaining to attempts made by the Department of Archaeology to take over part of the land belonging to the temple by submitting relevant documents to the authorities. According to this, the department attempted to take over the land following reports that artefacts belonging to the department were on the premises. However, the issue was resolved after officials visited the site and discovered that the reports they had received information from were of different land and not of the temple.⁸³

Attempts to take over Kuchchaveli Sithi Vinayagar temple thwarted (by Senaiyur correspondent) – The administration of the Kuchchaveli Sithi Vinayagar temple solved the issue pertaining to attempts made by the Department of Archaeology to take over part of the land belonging to the temple by submitting relevant documents to the authorities. According to this, the department attempted to take over the land following reports that artefacts belonging to the department were on the premises. However, the issue was resolved after officials visited the site and discovered that the reports they had received information from were of different land and not of the temple.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Uthayan, October 11, p. 1.

⁸² Thinakaran, October 12, p. 17.

⁸³ Thinakaran, October 13, p. 16.

⁸⁴ Virakesari, October 14, p. 8.

Powerful person linked to the government behind vandalising Valli Matha Devale (by K.D. Devapriya) – Chief Sanganayake of the Ramanna Nikaya, Dr. Ven. Omalpe Sobitha Thera, said the ancient Valli Matha Devale in Kataragama, a sacred site revered by Buddhists and Hindus, was vandalized. He said excavations had been done at the site and earth had been trucked away. He said this was an affront to religious cohabitation. He stated there was a powerful person linked to the government behind the incident. He added that treasure hunting had been going on since 2017, but nothing was done despite villagers making a complaint about it.

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Taking part in religious programs of all ethnicities will pave way for reconciliation – Speech at Vani Vizha function (by Rotawewa group correspondent) - Trincomalee District Government Agent, N.A.A Pushpakumara, says conducting religious functions at the District Secretariat where members of all communities take part will pave way for reconciliation. He stated this at the Vaani Vizha (Saraswathi pooja) function held at the District Secretariat yesterday (15 October). He stated that since he took office in 2015, religious functions of all religions have been held at the secretariat. He said this was crucial for national solidarity. He stated that instead of focusing on differences based on religion and ethnicity, people should focus on the positive aspects preached by the religions. ⁸⁶

President stresses need to share values of Theravada Buddhism to the world

(by Sandun Jayasekera) – President Maithripala Sirisena pledged to deliver values of Theravada Buddhism to the world while protecting its philosophy, joining hands with all countries in the region. He was speaking at a ceremony at Sri Chandananda Buddhist Vidyalaya, Asgiriya, Kandy, on Monday (15 October), organised to felicitate Ven. Dr. Godagama Mangala Nayaka Thera for being honoured with the Dhamma Chakka Royal Award from the Government of Thailand in recognition of his great service to the nation, to the Buddha Sasana, and for his contribution to spreading Theravada Buddhism internationally. ⁸⁷

President dedicated to spreading values of Theravada Buddhism – President Maithripala Sirisena pledged to deliver values of Theravada Buddhism to the world while protecting its philosophy, joining hands with all countries in the region. He was speaking at a ceremony at Sri Chandananda Buddhist Vidyalaya, Asgiriya, Kandy, on Monday (15 October), organised to felicitate Ven. Dr. Godagama Mangala Nayaka Thera for being honoured with the Dhamma Chakka Royal Award from the Government of Thailand in recognition of his great service

⁸⁵ Daily Mirror, October 15, p. 6.

⁸⁶ Thinakaran, October 16, p. 10.

⁸⁷ Daily Mirror, October 17. p. 4.

to the nation, to the Buddha Sasana, and for his contribution to spreading Theravada Buddhism internationally.⁸⁸

Religious leaders should respect all religions and languages – Bishop of Mannar, Rt. Rev. Fidelis Fernando says that in every religion, those who belong to their respective religions should be respected and be loved. He said that if such respect is given regardless of religion and language, it would be a great example for the future generation. He made this observation at an event held at the Mannar Education Zone.⁸⁹

Temple fence vandalised (by Karaitivu Group Correspondent) – Several persons vandalised a fence surrounding the Pillaiyar Temple on the premises of the Kalmunai Tamil Pradeshiya Sabha office. The incident took place on 17 October, Wednesday morning. The incident was reported to the Ampara District Secretary and a complaint has been lodged at the Kalmunai Police.⁹⁰

Temple fence vandalised (by Karaitivu Group Correspondent) – Several persons vandalised a fence surrounding the Pillaiyar Temple on the premises of the Kalmunai Tamil Pradeshiya Sabha office. The incident took place on 17 October, Wednesday morning. The incident was reported to the Ampara District Secretary and a complaint has been lodged at the Kalmunai Police.⁹¹

Petition filed to remove temple within Kalmunai Divisional Secretariat (by Karaitivu Correspondent) – A petition was filed at the Kalmunai Magistrate's Court by Mayor of Kalmunai A.M. Rakeeb, seeking an order to demolish a Hindu temple that is being built on the premises of the Kalmunai Divisional Secretariat within the Tamil Division. The mayor claims that the temple was built without the approval of the urban development authority. In his petition, the mayor claims that he has the right to request the demolition of the temple based on the powers vested in local government bodies by the urban development authority.⁹²

Important to respect and protect worship places of other religions – Anandasangaree on Kalmunai issue (by Virakesari Correspondent) - Secretary of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) V. Anandasangaree called upon all who believe in god to respect places of worship belonging to other religions. He made this comment following the unrest at the Kalmunai Municipal Council over the controversy surrounding the building of a Hindu temple. He pointed out that such attitudes would only affect the cordial relationship between communities. He

⁸⁸ Daily News, October 17, p. 3.

⁸⁹ Uthayan, October 17, p. 6.

⁹⁰ Thinakaran, October 18, p. 12.

⁹¹ Virakesari, October 18, p. 11.

⁹² Virakesari, October 18, p. 22.

pointed out that Tamils and Muslims are united through the language they speak. ⁹³

Request to remove temple will trigger communal conflict- Former MP condemns act of Kalmunai Mayor – Former Tamil National Alliance (TNA) Parliamentarian, P. Ariyanenthiran said attempts to remove the Pillaiyar Temple within the Kalmunai North Divisional Secretariat premises would create communal unrest. He made this observation following a petition filed by the mayor of Kalmunai in court for the removal of said temple. He said acts to suppress freedom of worship and attempts to remove places of worship would trigger anti- communal sentiments among the people. ⁹⁴

Ulamas party leader questioned by OCPD (by M.F.M. Fazeer) – Leader of Sri Lanka Ulamas Muslim Party Mubarak Abdul Majeed was questioned by the Organised Crime Prevention Division (OCPD) yesterday (22 October). Abdul Majeed was questioned based on complaints received by the police headquarters that he had attempted to create rifts between Muslims and Sinhalese people through his views on websites and social media, which stated that Lord Buddha was a ‘Muslim Prophet’. ⁹⁵

We need a Provincial Council which will formulate law to ban religious conversion – Maravanpulavu Sachchithananthan says (Jaffna special correspondent) – Shivsena Organiser Maravanpulavu Sachchithananthan called upon those who stand for the protection of Hinduism to work towards electing a Provincial Council that would formulate a law to ban religious conversion. He stressed that an anti-conversion law was to preserve religious and cultural landmarks and values for the benefit of the future generation. ⁹⁶

Monk attempts to assault Tamil Divisional Secretary; tension in Eravur yesterday – An incident was reported where a Buddhist monk had attempted to assault a divisional secretary of Eravur, Chenkaladi in Batticaloa. The incident took place when the divisional secretary was taken to resettled land in Mylampavedi, stating that permission had been obtained to cut off branches of a Bo tree within said land. Chief Priest of Mangalarama Temple, Ven. Ampitiye Sumanarathana Thera verbally abused the official and also attempted to assault him. ⁹⁷

⁹³ Virakesari, October 19, p. 8.

⁹⁴ Uthayan, October 20, p. 3.

⁹⁵ Virakesari, October 21, p. 7.

⁹⁶ Thinakaran, October 24, p. 14. ⁹⁷ Uthayan, October 24, p. 4.

Tense situation after branches from a Bo-tree are cut off – A tense situation arose after the owner of private land cut branches off a Bo tree on said land. The incident took place on 23 October in Mylampaveli, situated within the Eravur police division. Chief Priest of the Mangalaramaya Temple Ven. Ampitiye Sumanarathana Thera expressed his opposition to the cutting of branches and attempted to assault the divisional secretary who arrived at the location to calm the situation. It is reported that the land was part of an army camp during the war. A Bo tree was planted on the land and a Buddha statue was kept for Buddhist religious activities. However, the statue was removed along with the military camp after the war and the land was given back to the original owners.⁹⁸

Kalmunai Mayor should respect the rights of Tamils to worship - Request to remove temple not ethical – Kalmunai Municipal Councilor Wijeratnam (by Manalsenai correspondent) – Tamil National Alliance (TNA) member of Kalmunai Municipal Council, A. Wijeratnam, remarked that the move by the mayor of Kalmunai to file a petition to remove the Pillaiyar (Lord Ganesha) Temple was an obstruction of the worshipping rights of Tamils. He said Muslims are allowed to go for religious observances every Friday, but it was not possible for Tamils to do so during work hours, and therefore, they had constructed a temple within the premises of Kalmunai North Divisional Secretariat. Wijeratnam accused the mayor of acting arbitrarily by filing a petition to remove the temple and warned that this act would create divisions among Tamil and Muslim people.⁹⁹

Protest at Eravur Pattu Divisional Secretariat condemning outrageous behavior of Buddhist monk (Vavunathivu correspondent) – A protest is to be held today (25 October) against the unruly behavior of Mangalaramaya Chief Priest, Ven. Ampitiye Sumanarathana Thera. The monk expressed his opposition when the owner of private land in Mylampaveli, Batticaloa cut off branches of a Bo tree on his land on Tuesday, 23 October. The monk also was involved in an argument with Divisional Secretary of Eravur Pattu-Chenkaladi N. Vilvaretnam and subsequently attempted to assault the official.¹⁰⁰

Kalmunai Ganesha temple controversy: Support will be withdrawn if case is not taken back – Four women councilors present petition to Kalmunai Mayor (Karaithivu Group correspondent) – Four women councillors belonging to the ruling party of the Kalmunai Municipal Council have warned that they will withdraw their support for the mayor if the case filed in court to remove the Temple of Lord Ganesha built within the premises of the Kalmunai North Divisional Secretariat is not withdrawn.

⁹⁸ Virakesari, October 24, p. 7

⁹⁹ Thinakaran, October 25, p. 17. ¹

¹⁰⁰ Thinakaran, October 25, p.17.

The four women, Mrs. V. Puvaneswari (United National Party), Mrs. Nadarasa (United National Party), Mrs. Sumithra Jegatheesan (Tamil United Liberation Front) and Independent member Mrs. Celentina Ragal have handed over a petition stating their position. ¹⁰¹

If temple is removed, I will resign from my position the very next moment! (by Karaithivu Group correspondent) – Deputy Mayor of the Kalmunai Municipal Council Kaththamuthu Ganesh has warned that he will resign from his position if the case to remove the Pillaiyar (Lord Ganesh) Temple, built within the Kalmunai North Divisional Secretariat, is not withdrawn. He stated that his view was not against Muslims. He said that the mayor should have consulted them before going to court, and the matter would have been resolved amicably. He urged the mayor to withdraw the case before 30 October, on which date the case will be taken up. ¹⁰²

Protest against the Chief Priest – A protest organised by employees of the Eravur Pattu Divisional Secretariat was staged at Chenkaladi town on 25 October, 2018. The protest saw the participation of employees of the secretariat, samurdhi officials, and representatives of civil society organisations. The protest was organised against the unruly behaviour of Mangalaramaya Chief Priest, Ven. Ampitiye Sumanarathana Thera. The monk had expressed his opposition when the owner of private land in Mylampaveli, Batticaloa had cut off branches of a Bo tree on his land on Tuesday, 23 October. ¹⁰³

Attempts to remove temple in Kalmunai DS premises will disrupt communal harmony – Kalmunai Municipal Council member Wijeratnam (Report by Vellaveli Correspondent) - Tamil National Alliance (TNA) Kalmunai Municipal Council Member A. Wijeratnam says that attempts to remove the Pillaiyar (Lord Ganesh) Temple built within the Kalmunai North Divisional Secretariat premises would disrupt communal harmony between Tamils and Muslims. In a statement, he accused the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) of conspiring to create disharmony among the people, adding that the mayor of Kalmunai was also party to this conspiracy. Wijeratnam says the mayor of Kalmunai had acted arbitrarily by filing a petition at court to remove said temple. ¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Thinakaran, October 26, p. 3.

¹⁰² Thinakaran, October 26, p. 18.

¹⁰³ Uthayan, October 26, p. 10.

¹⁰⁴ Virakesari, October 26, p. 16.

Condemnation over activities of Mangalaramaya Chief Priest

1. Protest in Chenkaladi town (by Chenkaladi Mamangam Correspondents) – A protest organised by employees of the Eravur Pattu Divisional Secretariat was staged at Chenkaladi town on 25 October, 2018. The protest saw the participation of employees of the secretariat, samurdhi officials, and representatives of civil society organisations. The protest was organised against the unruly behaviour of Mangalaramaya Chief Priest, Ven. Ampitiye Sumanarathana Thera. The monk had expressed his opposition when the owner of private land in Mylampaveli, Batticaloa had cut off branches of a Bo tree on his land on Tuesday, 23 October. The monk was also involved in an argument with the Divisional Secretary of Eravur Pattu-Chenkaladi N. Vilvaretnam and subsequently attempted to assault the official.
2. Protest outside Batticaloa District Secretariat (by Kangeyanodai, Mamangam Correspondents) - Administrative officers of Batticaloa attached to the Sri Lanka Administrative Service Association protested outside the Batticaloa District Secretariat against the attack on Chenkaladi- Eravur Pattu Divisional Secretary by a Buddhist priest of the Mangalaramaya temple. The protestors demanded that government officers be allowed to perform their duties freely. They also called on the ‘good governance’ government and the law and order ministry take action against the monk.¹⁰⁵

SLASA Batticaloa branch urges legal action against Thera (by Disna Mudalige) – The Sri Lanka Administrative Service Association (SLASA) Batticaloa branch held a demonstration on Thursday urging legal action against Ven. Ampitiye Sumanarathana Thera of the Mangalaramaya Temple in Batticaloa for allegedly trying to assault Eravurpattu Divisional Secretary N.Vilvaratnam. SLASA Batticaloa branch officer Al Ameen speaking to the Daily News strongly condemned the attempted assault by the monk on the Eravurpattu (Chenkalady) Divisional Secretary. He further commented that it was not the first time Sumanarathana Thera had behaved violently. The association has tolerated his aggressive behaviour for a long time in order to protect social harmony. The article further reports that the monk had objected against the cutting of the branches on the grounds that the tree has a religious value.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Virakesari, October 26, p. 19

¹⁰⁶ Daily News, October 27, p. <http://www.dailynews.lk/2018/10/27/local/166711/slasa-batticaloa-branch-urges-legal-action-against-thera>.

Four Buddhist stupas damaged in Tampitiya (by Eravur correspondent) – Unidentified persons caused damage to four Buddhist stupas located in Tampitiya within the Batticaloa,

Karadiyanaru police division. The police stated that the incident took place Saturday (27 October) midnight. Buddhists who gathered in the area soon after the incident occurred also filed a complaint at the Karadiyanaru police station. Tampitiya is a village consisting of predominantly Sinhalese and is situated along the Chenkaladi-Badulla road. The village is adjacent to Koppaveli which consists of predominantly Tamils.¹⁰⁷

Protest outside Chenkaladi Divisional Secretariat - Private persons alleged to have claimed ownership of Vantharumullai temple (Eravur group correspondent) – Members of the public staged a protest yesterday (31 October) alleging that private individuals were attempting to claim ownership of the Neermugappillaiyar temple situated in Ambalathadi, Vantharumullai, Batticaloa. They say that the temple was managed by the people for the past 80 years, adding that the temple had recently been renovated. They alleged that a few individuals were attempting to claim ownership. A petition with regard to the allegation was handed over to the divisional secretary by the temple administration.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Virakesari, October 28, p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ Thinakaran, November 1, p. 13.

Vedukkunaari malai Aadhilingeswarar – Renovation activities of the temple halted as permission not granted despite receiving funds – A huge controversy was created over worshipping at Nedunkerni Aadhilingeswarar temple being stopped, and was later resolved after permission was granted. However, the renovation of the temple has been put on hold as the Department of Archaeology is continuously preventing renovation activities by not granting permission to do so. ¹⁰⁹

Tension as Buddha Statue erected at the premises of Old Semmalai Pillaiyar temple (by M. Newton) – Unrest was reported following a Buddha statue being erected at the premises of the Old Semmalai, Nayaru, Neeraviyadi Pillaiyar temple in Mullaitivu. Residents say that the statue was placed at the premises with the help of officers from the military on Thursday (1 November). It was reported that in 2013, during the tenure of President Mahinda Rajapaksa, the premises were declared as property belonging to the Archaeology Department, and attempts were made to construct a Buddhist temple. However, the people protested and filed a petition in court regarding the matter. Nevertheless, the Buddha statue was erected, disregarding the ban imposed by court, following the appointment of Mahinda Rajapaksa as prime minister. ¹¹⁰

Unrest in Samankulam Kallumalai Vinayagar temple – Unrest was reported among the people due to unlawful actions of the Department of Archaeology within the premises of the Vavuniya Samankulam Kallumalai Vinayagar temple. The temple, which was built in 1952, was open for worshippers till now. Several archaeological artefacts such as ancient stone pillars and buildings could be found in the hill where the temple is situated. The unrest was reported a few days ago when the Archaeological Department brought in sand, bricks, and other materials and started work on constructing a Buddhist temple within the premises. The people protested the move, which resulted in the unrest. Residents say that they had been worshipping at the temple for generations and the Archaeological Department claimed ownership of the land and attempted to construct a Buddhist statue. However, the regional manager of the department said the artefacts within the temple premises belonged to the Anuradhapura era, and they were attempting to preserve the items. ¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Uthayan, November 3. p. 8.

¹¹⁰ Virakesari, November 4, p. 1.

¹¹¹ Virakesari, November 7, p. 16.



Unrest in Vavuniya Kallumalai temple due to activities of Archaeology Department (Vavuniya Special Correspondent) – Unrest was reported among the people due to unlawful actions of the Department of Archaeology within the premises of the Vavuniya Samankulam Kallumalai Vinayagar Temple. The temple, which was built in 1952, was open for worshippers till now. Several archaeological artefacts such as ancient stone pillars and buildings could be found in the hill where the temple is situated. The unrest was reported a few days ago when the Archaeological Department brought in sand, bricks, and other materials and started work on constructing a Buddhist temple within the premises. The people protested the move, which resulted in the unrest. Residents say that they had been worshipping at the temple for generations and the Archaeological Department claimed ownership of the land and attempted to construct a Buddhist statue. ¹¹²

Vedukkunaari malai Sivan Temple – Obstructions by the police is a violation of the Constitution - CVK (Chairman of Northern Provincial Council, CVK Sivagnanam) writes second letter to Governor to take appropriate steps – A second letter has been sent to Northern Province Governor by Chairman of the Northern Provincial Council, C.V.K. Sivagnanam, stating that police have been causing hindrance to devotees of Vavuniya North, Vadakkunaari Aadhisivan Temple. The letter stated that the existing ladder to the temple was damaged and setting up a new ladder has been delayed. The letter claims that the Department of Archaeology has continuously stopped the setting up of the new ladder through police interference. The letter questions why the department was causing such an obstruction to the process. ¹¹³

Deputy Inspector General asked me to go to Digana – Amith Weerasinghe speaks to Divaina (by Samanthi Weerasekara) – The following report is on the interview with Amith Weerasinghe, founder of the Mahason Balakaya, an organisation initiated on 26 June, 2016. This report especially mentions that he is an accused of 23 court cases since he spoke on behalf of the rights of the Sinhala ethnicity. Allegations have also been levelled against him creating communal unrest under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Further he was arrested by the Terrorism Investigation Division (TID) and imprisoned for seven months and 20 days in the Anuradhapura prison. The newspaper reports states that he stated that it was baseless to arrest him. During the interview, he covered the following topics / events: his meeting with Dan Priyasad and Galagododaadbe Gnanasara Thera, the influence of Muslim leaders on Mahason Balakaya and the mission which was organized by the Mahason Balakaya as small groups, meeting with Namal Kumara, Digana Teldeniya incident and also about Nalaka Silva. Amith Weerasinghe also stated that he travelled to Teldeniya following the request by the DIG of Kandy. He also asserted that his is

¹¹² Thinakaran, November 8, p. 14.

¹¹³ Uthayan, November 9, p. 10.

similar to the case against Vijayakala Maheshwaran, but the law was implemented for the two individuals differently. ¹¹⁴

If students of all three communities study together, there will be permanent peace – Deputy Education Director Kiyas at Zonal Deepavali celebration – Deputy Education Director for Sammanthurai, Ahmed Kiyas, says that if students of all three communities study together, there will be a permanent solution. He pointed out that all religions teach good aspects and added that students should learn about other religions and communities starting from their childhood. He pointed out that both Hinduism and Islam have been practiced for centuries in various countries because they contain good teachings and values. ¹¹⁵

Without imposing the uniqueness, we should live harmoniously with other communities (Attalachenai group correspondent) – Sri Lanka Jamaate Islami's Ameer Ish Sheik said that no one should impose the uniqueness of one's religion on others and they should live harmoniously with people of other communities and religions, at an event named 'Akkaraippatruorin Muththukkalin Snehapurva Santhipu' (friendly meeting of Akkaraippatru pearls), held in Akkaraippatru. Specifically addressing the Muslims, he pointed out that all Muslims should respect the religious sentiments of other religious people and act with caution when indulging in Islamic religious rituals so that they do not harm or cause them mental stress through their activities. ¹¹⁶

Stiff opposition for changing Pillaiyar kovil name to 'Ganagadevi' – Frustration expressed claiming act prevents right of worship of Tamils (Kandavalai correspondent) – Member of Parliament Shanthi Sriskantharajah condemned the change to the name board of the Mullaitivu-Semmalai Neeraviyadi Temple to 'Ganagadevi' and added that there have been attempts to set up a Buddha statue within the temple premises. Construction of a Buddhist temple was halted following protests by the Divisional Secretariat, the public, representatives, and the temple administration. However, construction activities have recommenced within the premises, and the ancient name 'Neeraviyadi Pillaiyar – Old Semmalai' has been changed to 'Ganadevi Devalayam'. The parliamentarian who said the temple was an ancient place of worship also said building a Buddhist temple was a move to prevent the Tamils' right to worship. ¹¹⁷

A Hindu Kovil was built forcefully in the places of worship in Samankulama (by Dinasena Rathugamage) – Some Hindu priests and villagers of Samankulma who seized the place forcefully have tried to attack the officials of the Archaeological Department who visited the archaeological site of Samankulama, Vavuniya.

¹¹⁴ Divaina, November 11, p. 13.

¹¹⁵ Virakesari, November 12, p. 18.

¹¹⁶ Thinakaran, November 14, p. 8

¹¹⁷ Virakesari, November 18, p. 10.

Samankulama is an archaeological Buddhist place of worship. As the army officers were unable to visit the place during the wartime, Hindus captured this place and established a Hindu temple in 1985. Some politicians representing the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) visited the premises on 3 November and provided financial aid to reconstruct the Hindu temple and after that, the ruins of the Buddhist temple were removed from the place. Equipment including sand and stones were brought for the new construction work. The officers of the archaeological department visited the premises as they were informed that an ancient stupa and ruins had been destroyed by some individuals. The Hindu priests and villagers tried to attack the officials and chased them away from the premises.¹¹⁸

Steps taken to set up a Buddha Statue within Semmalai Neeraviyadi Pillaiyar temple – MP Santhi Sriskantharajaha condemns (Mankulam Group Correspondent) – Member of Parliament Shanthi Sriskantharajah condemned the change to the name board of the Mullaitivu-Semmalai Neeraviyadi Temple to ‘Ganagadevi’ and added that there have been attempts to set up a Buddha statue within the temple premises. Construction of a Buddhist temple was halted following protests by the Divisional Secretariat, the public, representatives, and the temple administration. However, construction activities have recommenced within the premises, and the ancient name ‘Neeraviyadi Pillaiyar – Old Semmalai’ has been changed to ‘Ganadevi Devalayam’. The parliamentarian who said the temple was an ancient place of worship also said building a Buddhist temple was a move to prevent the Tamils' right to worship.¹¹⁹

Steps to build Buddha statue in Semmalai halted – Steps to build a Buddha statue by destroying a Hindu temple in Semmalai, Mullaitivu were temporarily halted yesterday (18 November). The steps were halted after a police complaint was given to Mulliyavalai Police, stating that a Buddhist monk was acting in a way that triggered communal tension. After the final phase of the war, a military camp was situated on the premises which included the Hindu temple. The monk who was at the camp planted a Bo tree on the premises of the temple and also built a statue. The statue was to be opened yesterday but was halted after residents complained to the police.¹²⁰

The bricks and sand which were brought for archaeological purposes were destroyed. The politicians of the TNA protested against the conservation of the stupa (by Madukanda- Sithum Chathuranga) – Officers of the Archaeological Department stated that some individuals have destroyed the bricks and sand brought for conservation to the archaeological site situated near the Samankulama Ganeswara

¹¹⁸ Divaina, November 19, p. 12.

¹¹⁹ Thinakaran, November 19, p. 14.

¹²⁰ Uthayan, November 19, p. 8.

Hindu temple. The bricks were brought to reconstruct several places on the archaeological site, including a ruined stupa and several ruins with archaeological value. The villagers protested on 6 November, stating that the officers are trying to construct a Buddha statue. Members of the Pradeshiya Sabha from the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and former MP of the Northern Province and Vavuniya District, P. Sathyalingham also said that officials of the archaeological department are trying to build a Buddha statue invading the Hindu temple premise.¹²¹

Attack on Calvary Church: AG pulls back appeal against HC order (by S.S. Selvanayagam) – The Attorney General on 23 December withdrew his appeal against the High Court judgment wherein Ven. Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara Thero and two Buddhist monks, as well as 10 other laymen were acquitted on the indictment against them for the alleged attack on the Calvary Church at Araliya Uyana in Talahena. The bench comprised Justices P. Padman Surasena (President/CA) and Arjuna Obeysekera. The Attorney General had, in his appeal, cited S.A. Athula Seneviratne, W.M. Sudu Banda, H. Thamara Beatrice, A.K. Denzil Premakumara Perera, D.S.P. Kandana Arachchi, T.K. Somadasa, E.M. Victor Ratnayake, K.W. Karunananda, E.M.H. Ratnayake, Aththaragama Gnanawimala Himi, Galgoda Aththe Gnanasara Himi, Angulagalle Siri Jinananda Himi and Dhanuska Sanjeeva as accused respondents. The accused respondents were indicted in the Colombo High Court for having committed offences of being members of an unlawful assembly to attack said Calvary Church; for causing trouble for the said church and causing injuries to Sydney Roshan Anderson and John Anton Anderson, as well as for the robbery of two gold chains. In its judgment on 2 April 2014, the High Court acquitted all the accused.¹²²

Skeletal remains of cows thrown near Hindu temple in Karaitivu – police commence probe (Karaitivu group correspondent) – Unidentified persons had thrown skeletal remains of cows near Badrakali Amman Temple situated in Karaitivu within Sammanthurai Police Division. The incident took place on 22 November during ‘Thirukkarthigai Vilakkeedu’, a sacred day of the Hindus, which had caused shock among the Hindus.¹²³

I did not ask Amith to go to Digana - former DIG Mahinda Ekanayake (by Samanthi Weerasekara) – Former DIG Mahinda Ekanayake stated that the Digana- Theldeniya series of events was temporarily halted due to the arrest of the founder of Mahason Balakaya, Amith Weerasinghe, by the Terrorism Investigation Unit, and the Digana incident was broadcast to such an extent as the law was not implemented at the appropriate time. He also said that the situation got worse as stones had been thrown at a Muslim stall.

¹²¹ Lankadeepa, November 20, p. 7.

¹²² Daily Mirror, November 24, p. 6.

¹²³ Thinakaran, November 24, p. 3.

The Kandy District Moulavi (chief Muslim cleric), gave a great deal of support to control the situation. Even though Muslim shops and mosques were destroyed, Muslims acted in patience. They received foreign assistance for their loss. The article also stated that the statement made by Amith Weerasinghe to control the situation by heading to Digana is totally false.¹²⁴

Sri Lanka propagating Theravada Buddhism to world (by Dharma Sri Abeyratne) – Minister of Higher Education Wijeyadasa Rajapakshe says Sri Lanka has become a centre for propagating Theravada Buddhism to the world. The minister was addressing the 5th International Conference of the International Association of Theravada Buddhist Universities (IATBU) in Colombo. He stated that Buddhism is the only teaching where you can deal with your consent. He further stated that Sri Lanka is the only country which had been blessed with the arrival of the Buddha thrice. ‘The Buddha decided to visit our island on three occasions because we preserve, protect, propagate, and promote Buddhism to the world in its pristine glory. After 2,600 years it has been demonstrated that Buddhism was disseminated to the world by Sri Lanka,’ he added.¹²⁵

Compensation for worship places affected by war (New Kathankudi Thinakaran Correspondent) – Steps have commenced to provide compensation to places of worship affected by war in the Eastern Province. Accordingly, Minister M.L.A.M. Hizbullah handed over LKR 1,000,000 compensation to two mosques and LKR 300,000 to one mosque in Kaththankudy. The funds were given by the rehabilitation authority.¹²⁶

Religious leaders should play an important role for religious reconciliation

(by M.A. Ameenulla) – Nuwara Eliya District Coordinator for the Human Rights Commission (HRC), Viranjana Sumanasekara, said that religious leaders should play an important role in establishing religious reconciliation in the country. He said this at an event themed ‘peace and coexistence’ held in Kandy. He said religious leaders, government officials, and civil activists should conduct awareness programs on religious reconciliation and urged the public to support such initiatives.¹²⁷

Religious reconciliation exhibition in Mannar (Thalaimannar correspondent) – An exhibition themed ‘reconciliation through religions’ has been organised by the Caritas organisation in Mannar. The exhibition was organised to create understanding among people and to prevent unrest following several incidents of religious symbols being damaged in the area.

¹²⁴ Divaina, November 25, p. 33.

¹²⁵ Daily News, November 28, p. 12.

¹²⁶ Thinakaran, December 2, p. 8.

¹²⁷ Thinakaran, December 11, p. 6.

The exhibition consists of exhibits designed by young men and women belonging to several villages, including Alavakkai, Semmanthivu, Vattakkandal, Andankulam, and Adampan. ¹²⁸

Remnants of dead cow along pathway of Shiva devotees in Trincomalee – Body parts of a cow have been strewn along the pathway near the Trincomalee Vinayagar temple. The pathway is used by the devotees to go to the Lord Nadesa Temple for the Aruthra Dharisanam. The head and other body parts of the cow were seen along the pathway. The devotees claimed that the act was an insult to Hinduism. ¹²⁹

Vandalising two Buddha statues in two places of Mawanella (by Saman Wijaya Bandara) – Mawanella Police stated that two Buddha statues placed at the Randiwela and Mahattegama junctions were damaged by a group of individuals on 23 December. The police further mentioned that the faces and heads of the Buddha statues were damaged. The Mawanella Police, responding to an inquiry made by Lankadeepa, stated that the officer in charge of the Mawanella police station, Chief Inspector D.D. Damith Nilanga, and a team of police officers are carrying out investigations into this. ¹³⁰

Build up for racial violence in Kandy, Mawanella? – Four individuals were arrested over incidents where Buddha statues were vandalised in Yatinuwara, Wellamboda, and Mawanella. The incidents are reported to have occurred at 3am on 26 December. A tense situation had prevailed in the four areas where Buddha statues were vandalised. Inspector General of Police, Pujith Jayadundara, instructed that special measures be taken to prevent communal unrest in these areas following the incident. It is reported that two Buddha statues along the roadside in Mawanella had also been vandalised the previous week. ¹³¹

¹²⁸ Thinakaran, December 20, p. 14.

¹²⁹ Uthayan, December 24, p.3.

¹³⁰ Lankadeepa, December 25, p. 6.

¹³¹ Virakesari, December 27, p. 1

The sinner who vandalised Buddha statues in Mawanella was tied on to a tree and later handed over to the Police (by Saman Gamage and U.R. Jayantha Senanayake) – One youth belonging to another religious group was suspected of vandalising Buddha statues in Mawanella and suburban areas was arrested by the Mawanella Police on 26 December. Four Buddha statues were vandalised in the Liyanagahawela area of the Kadugannawa-Mawanella police division at dawn on 26 December. Amidst this, two youths on a motor bicycle were caught by a group of youths from that area while they were trying to destroy a Buddha statue situated in the Mawanella Lindulawatte junction at 4:00a.m. One suspect fled the scene on a motor bicycle. The other youth who was caught was handed over to the Mawanella Police after he was tied to a tree. The police stated that the youth who was arrested is a resident of Hingula Dellahagoda, Mawanella and belongs to another religious community. The security forces suspect these Buddha statues were attacked and damaged by those who are conspiring to create religious conflict in the country. ¹³²

Destroying Buddha statues – Several violent beggars, who lack ideology and were banished from the mosque, were arrested in Mawanella and remanded. They are between the ages of 20 and 30, and allegations were levelled against them for destroying Buddha statues. There is a photo of one such individual who was tied to a tree circulating on the internet these days. It is necessary to inquire whether the Mawanella incident is an extension of the Digana incident and whether these violent beggars who lack ideology are responsible for that. As history states, destroying Buddha statues and destroying places of worship are ruthless acts. Individuals from other religions who are not Buddhists engaged in such acts to give priority to their religion. Former Foreign Minister of the Taliban Government Wakil Ahmed Muttawakil stated that Buddha statues carved into the side of a cliff in the Bamiyan Valley were destroyed in 2001 based on the need of Islamic law. However, no mosque had accepted this statement. It is true that worshipping statues is not a part of the Islamic religion. But Islamic preachers never teach that statues of other religions should be destroyed. There is no legal and religious fact to justify that. The destruction of the Bamiyan Buddha statues were the biggest destruction of Buddha statues in the world. A war criminal of Taliban named Abdul Waheed proposed destroying the Bamiyan Buddha statues in the Hazarajat region in 1997. The power of the Hazarajat region resides in Taliban, therefore, they were unable to destroy the Buddha statues until 2001. ¹³³

¹³² Divaina, December 27, p. 1.

¹³³ Divaina, December 27, p. 8.

Punish the individuals who destroyed the Buddha statues in Mawanella – Ven. Budugala Jinawansha Thera requests from the President (by Samanthi Weerasekara) – Sending a letter to President Maithripala Sirisena, the organisation ‘Hela Bodhu Saviya’ requested the punishment of the individuals who destroyed the Buddha statues in Mawanella immediately. The following is the letter which was sent to the president by Ven. Budugala Jinawansha Thera: ‘There were media reports that an individual who destroyed Buddha statues was handed over to the police when he was trying to destroy other Buddha statues. However, the residents and the Buddhist monks stated that the police have been trying to release this youth. We believe that you, who holds the responsibility of the authorities and the justice and peace of the country, will punish individuals who are responsible for these acts considering the recent incidents of unrest among the ethnicities of the country. We are living in a time when everyone should live in harmony.’¹³⁴

It is clear from the incidents of Mawanella that the Muslim extremist incidents have immersed – Ven. Omalpe Sobhitha Thera (by Chathura Pamunuwa) – Speaking to Divaina, Ven. Omalpe Sobhitha Thera stated that incidents like the destruction of Buddhist statues in Mawanella occurred because of inaction against incidents of Muslim extremism. The police did not take action

against certain Muslim extremist incidents that occurred in the recent past. He stated that even though the extremists were arrested, it was concealed because of Muslim politicians. He also stated that H. Ashraf, who was the individual who destroyed the Buddhist statues in Mawanella, was arrested and officials had received all the information from him. Furthermore, he stated that Buddhists acted peacefully, and no attempt was made to create religious divisions.¹³⁵

Suspect arrested for damaging Buddha statue (by Dharshana Sanjeewa) – Mawanella Police arrested a man today at Hingula, Mawanella for allegedly damaging a Buddha statue, police said. They said two men were reported to have been involved in the incident, and one of the suspects was arrested after he was captured by the villagers. The suspect, Mohammad Ashfar (30), will be presented in court and police investigations are underway to ascertain whether there was any move to provoke religious tension among the Sinhalese and Muslim communities.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Divaina, December 27, p. 10.

¹³⁵ Divaina, December 27, p. 7.

¹³⁶ Daily Mirror, December 27, p. 1.

Kabir Hashim condemns attacks – Minister Kabir Hashim said he condemned the recent acts of violence involving places of worship in Mawanella. ‘As soon as I heard about the recent attacks, I instructed the police to investigate and arrest those responsible. The two suspects have been apprehended by the authorities and will be subject to the full extent of the law,’ he said. ¹³⁷

A plan is being implemented to bring a peace keeping army to the country (by Eric Gamini Janapriya) – Convenor of the National Organisations Collective Sahithya Shoori Gunadasa Amarasekara said that they would request the government conduct an efficient investigation into the destruction of Buddha statues in Mawanella. He said that this step would be taken as there was a plan being implemented to bring a peacekeeping force into the country by creating religious extremism and racial conflict. He further stated that the destruction of the Buddha statues in Mawanella was not an isolated incident and that similar incidents have taken place in Kandy, Kadugannawa and other similar areas as well. He said that the Ava gang was once again active in the North, and two police officers were murdered by rehabilitated LTTE cadres. He added that these incidents were created to fulfil the ideas of imperialists. Gunadasa Amarasekara further said that this was the third step by the imperialists to enter the country, with the LTTE being the first step and the Constitution being the second. ¹³⁸

Vandalising Buddha statues in Mawanella: Seven suspects in custody (by Dharshana Sanjeewa) – Six of the seven suspects have been arrested over the incidents pertaining to Buddha statues being vandalised in Mawanella, Kandy recently and have been remanded till 2 January, 2019. Police are on the lookout for two more individuals suspected to be linked to these incidents. One suspect was caught by the residents of Mawanella and handed over to police. The police arrested six others based on the inquiry. ¹³⁹

Muslims should reconstruct damaged Buddha statues: Marikkar (by Yohan Perera) – Muslims should reconstruct the Buddha statues vandalised in Mawanella recently to prove their sincerity and innocence, Parliamentarian S.M. Marikkar said today. ‘The Muslims should do so as a gesture of goodwill and to show their willingness to coexist in peace and harmony with other ethnic groups,’ he said at a media briefing last morning (27 December). ‘I am also willing to attend to any repairs if I get a chance to do so,’ the MP said and denied allegations that he had influenced the police not to investigate this incident. ‘However, I did speak to the IGP and ask him to carry out investigations on the hate speech that is being spread via social media and arrest those who are behind it and also to arrest those who are behind the incident in Mawanella,’ he said. ¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Daily Mirror, December 27, p. 1.

¹³⁸ Divaina, December 28, p. 13.

¹³⁹ Daily Mirror, December 28, p. 1.

¹⁴⁰ Daily Mirror, December 28, p. 4.

Seven arrested for damaging Buddha statues (by Upali Karunaratne , Anura Premalal) – Seven suspects were arrested by the police for damaging Buddha statues in Mawanella. The office of the police media spokesperson stated that six of them were presented to the Mawanella Magistrate's Court and further remanded until 2 January. Other suspects will be presented to the court today (28 December), and the Inspector General of Police informed the relevant officials that the law should be strictly enforced against these suspects. Furthermore, it stated that there is a peaceful atmosphere and the police have been deployed to ensure the security of the area. Two suspects are yet to be arrested. Investigations are underway, following the instructions of the Inspector General of Police (IGP), and soon after the incident, officials of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) were sent to the area to probe into the matter. Residents of the Mawanella area caught one of the suspects while he was damaging a Buddha statue and he was handed over to the police. Five suspects were arrested on Wednesday (26 December) and another suspect was arrested yesterday (27 December).¹⁴¹

Police investigations on mud campaign on social media (by Kamani Alwis) – MP of the United National Party (UNP) S.M. Marikkar informed the Inspector General of Police (IGP) yesterday (27 December), both in writing and verbally, to reveal the true information regarding the destruction of the Buddha statues in the

Mawanella area by conducting Financial Crimes Investigation Division (FCID) investigations and arresting suspects and to take action against the mud-slinging campaign carried out on social media. MP Marikkar stated that there are rumours that two suspects were arrested yesterday regarding this. Furthermore, MP Marikkar stated that some media carried out a mud-slinging campaign, stating that he is connected to the destruction of the Buddha statues and has interfered with police investigations. He stated that he challenges the thugs who spread false rumours to prove their accusations. He also stated that he will resign from his post if anyone proves that he is guilty. He also requests the Muslims who value reconciliation to help with the construction of the Buddha statues as a gesture of establishing reconciliation, and if somebody asks him to mediate the process of the reconstruction of the Buddhist statues, he is also willing to attend to any repairs if he gets a chance to do so. MP Marikkar stated this during a media briefing of the 'voice of justice' which took place yesterday.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Dinamina, December 28, p. 1.

¹⁴² Dinamina, December 28, p. 1.

Six people are remanded for vandalising Buddhist statues (by Indika Ramanayake and Shrinath Prasanna Jayasooriya) – Media spokesperson Ruwan Gunasekara said that the yesterday (27 December), Mawanella Magistrate's Court ordered further remanding the six of seven suspects arrested for vandalising the Buddha statues in Mawanella and surrounding areas until 2 January. Mawanella police stated that it was revealed that the main suspect they are looking for vandalising the Buddha statues is a religious activist in an organisation and that later he was banished from that organisation because of his extremist ideologies. Furthermore, it was revealed that he conducted instruction classes with six other individuals at his residence in Mawanella.¹⁴³

Spreading racism, creating a blood bath and try to point a finger to the government (by Anjula Mahika Weeraratne) – MP S.M. Marikkar stated that there is a mud-slinging campaign conducted by the media, stating that he is interfering with police investigations of the incident of vandalising Buddha statues. He also stated that there is an organised programme to spread racism in order to create a bloodbath. He further stated that he condemns the incident which occurred in Mawanella. He also stated that the Muslim community also condemns the extremists' acts, and if the Muslim community joins to reconstruct the Buddha statues, it would help to establish reconciliation.¹⁴⁴

Archaeology officers were deployed to look into the incident of vandalising the Buddha statues. – Releasing a statement, Minister of Housing, Construction and Cultural Affairs Sajith Premadasa stated that officers of the Archaeology Department have been deployed to probe into the incident of vandalism of the Buddha statues. The statement mentions that officials of the Department of Cultural Affairs will be deployed to probe the unfortunate incident of vandalism of the Buddha statues at the Randeniwala Junction, Miriskudu Junction Mahanthegama Road, Hinnagala Junction, Pahala Kadugannawa, and Indula Junction. It also states that it is advisable, regardless of the hidden intentions of these unfortunate incidents, for the sensitive public to remain calm without creating unnecessary disturbances.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Lankadeepa, December 28, p. 1.

¹⁴⁴ Lankadeepa, December 28, p. 5.

¹⁴⁵ Lankadeepa, December 28, p. 7.

Jamiyyathul Ulama condemns damaging Buddha statues – urges culprits to be brought before law – The All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama (ACJU) condemned the recent acts of vandalism of Buddha statues in Mawanella and called for the culprits to be brought before law and punished appropriately. The ACJU also stated that indulging in that kind of acts of disrespecting other religions was against the preaching of Islam. ¹⁴⁶

Continuous vandalism of Buddha statues: Seven arrested by police, two more being searched – Seven suspects have been arrested over the incidents pertaining to Buddha statues being vandalised in Mawanella, Kandy recently. Police are on the lookout for two more individuals suspected to be linked to these incidents. One suspect was caught by the residents of Mawanella and handed over to police. The police arrested six others based on the inquiry. The suspects are members of the minority communities, residents of areas adjacent to Mawanella, Kandy. ¹⁴⁷

Those who vandalised Buddha statues should be brought before the law – Minister Kabir Hashim (by M.R.M. Waseem) – Minister Kabir Hashim called upon culprits involved in vandalising Buddha statues in Mawanella to be brought before the law. He stated that those kinds of activities could help racists trigger communal unrest in the country. The minister made this statement following a meeting with the police and religious leaders on the incident. ¹⁴⁸

Act of triggering unrest between communities – Parliamentarian Mujibu Rahman – Parliamentarian Mujibur Rahman says that the incident in Mawanella where Buddha statues were vandalised and damaged will trigger unrest between communities and will cause religious clashes. He pointed out the importance of identifying the force behind such activities. ¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Virakesari, December 28, p. 1.

¹⁴⁷ Virakesari, December 28, p. 1.

¹⁴⁸ Virakesari, December 28, p. 11.

¹⁴⁹ Virakesari, December 28, p. 11.

Organised gang mooting religious tension - Dr. Amarasekara (by Lahiru Fernando) – Foreign powers are planning to deploy an international peace keeping army into the country, to solve a tense situation among religions to be created artificially, and thereby divide the country, the Federation for National Organisations said on 27 December. They said damaging Buddha statues in different areas of the country is an attempt by an organised gang to create religious tension among the different religions. The members of the federation stated this, addressing media in Rajagiriya. Dr.Gunadasa Amarasekara addressing the press conference said the Ava Group functioning in the North is also an extension of the LTTE organisation, which fought for a separate state. It is led by a rehabilitated LTTE member. Therefore, Amarasekara urged the government to probe into the damaging of Buddha Statues and eliminate all possible ways leading to communal and religious tensions. Amarasekara also accused the government led by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe saying that his government was appointed in 2015 by the foreign powers to divide the country through a new Constitution. The international powers had taken this new initiative to divide the country when their plan to bring a new Constitution was defeated, he added.¹⁵⁰

A stop to the religious discrimination ...! – This editorial states that Sri Lanka can be described as a country battered by racism and religious discrimination. It means that the public knows the pain of racism and religious discrimination. We should reject incidents of racism and religious discrimination. Racism leaves us nothing but moving backward as a country and economic failure. The results of the religious discrimination are the same. No religious leader disrespects other religions. Only extremists disrespect religions, philosophies, and ideologies. There are occasional incidents that occurred in the areas of Mawanella, Beruwala, Aluthgama, and Kandy. These incidents are marked in history as black marks. When you observe these incidents carefully, they show that minor incidents have led to major incidents. Misunderstanding and suspicion are the main reasons for the conflicts. There are individuals who make existing situations worse. First, it is necessary to save society from the extremist views. Society should be taught that extremism is a mental condition. There are two places this could be implemented: Schools and places of worship. The Mawanella incident should be taken as a lesson. It is wrong to make decisions without observing this incident. It should be emphasised that a conflict has been evaded as the truth has been found. Perpetrators should be punished accordingly. No one should panic when giving such punishments. Everybody can accept the law, as it is above all. Our responsibility should be to create a society that respects all ethnicities and religions. Our leaders should also sacrifice something to achieve that.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Daily News, December 28, p. 7. 1

⁵¹ Dinamina, December 29, p. 8.

Enforce law against the religious extremists-instructions from the Prime Minister to the police (by Asela Kuruluwansa, Thilak Pushpakumara and Reporters from the Central Province) – Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe stated he gave instructions to the police that the law should be enforced against the extremists who engaged in vandalising religious places. He stated that he asked the senior deputy inspector general of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) not to give any kind of a relief to the suspects arrested because of the incident of vandalism of the Buddha statues in Mawanella. Furthermore, he stated that it has been reported that the extremists engaged in vandalising Hindu temples, therefore, the government will interfere to compensate for the damage incurred to these sacred places.¹⁵²

Travel ban for the two brothers who are the suspects of the incident of vandalising the Buddha statues (by Shrinath Prasanna Jasooriya) – Mawanella police officers stated that they have informed officers of the Department of Immigration and Emigration of the Katunayake and Mattala airports to arrest the suspects of the vandalism of the Buddha statues in Mawanella if they try to leave the country. The suspects have left the area with their family members and a senior police officer informed Lankadeepa that there have been reports that these suspects are trying to flee the country. Police also stated that the two of the six suspects who were arrested are connected to vandalism of the Ganeswara statue placed in the Pothuhara police division, Kosgolla.¹⁵³

Tamil diaspora is trying to take the advantage from the Mawanella incident (by Muditha Dayananda) – MP of the National Freedom Front, Wimal Weerawansa stated that there are groups of individuals behind the Digana and Mawanella incidents that are similar to the Tamil diaspora who are trying to fulfil their needs by arousing racism. He stated that there were programmes to destroy Buddha statues in Mawanella. He also stated that the occurrence of such incidents is common after a political storm, and there are suspicions that there are forces behind these incidents similar to the Tamil diaspora, and the suspicion has been confirmed as individuals with no connection to the incident have been arrested. Furthermore, the TNA and Tamil diaspora want to create communal unrest.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Dinamina, December 29, p. 1.

¹⁵³ Lankadeepa, December 29, p. 7.

¹⁵⁴ Lankadeepa, December 29, p. 8.

Do not indulge in violence against members of other communities – Bodu Bala Sena (by Rajadurai Rathan) – The Bodu Bala Sena has urged people to refrain from indulging violence against members of other communities. In a statement following the incident of Buddha statues being vandalised in Mawanella, the organisation stated that they were well aware about Muslim extremists and therefore, were not surprised or tense about the said incident. The Bodu Bala Sena therefore, urged the people to refrain from indulging in violence against other communities because of the acts of a handful of people. ¹⁵⁵

Severe punishment to those who vandalised Buddha statue – Prime Minister says – Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe says that severe action will be taken against those involved in the vandalism of Buddha statues in Mawanella. He stated this to the media during his visit to Kandy on 28 December, 2018. He also stated that the DIG of the Criminal Investigation Department is to launch immediate probe into the incident. ¹⁵⁶

Foremost place for Buddhism, unitary rule will prevail – Ranil pledges to the Mahanayakes – Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has said there will be no changes to the priority for Buddhism envisaged in the Constitution. In addition, he also said that unitary rule will prevail in the country. He made these statements when he met with the chief prelates of the Asgiriya and Malwatte Chapters during his visit to Kandy yesterday (28 December). ¹⁵⁷

Acts which trigger racial violence should be stopped – The editorial discusses the recent incidents where Buddhists statues were vandalised in Mawanella, Kandy and has expressed concerns about tensions among communities due to such acts. The editorial also discusses the importance of steps to be taken by the government and authorities to end such acts in order to prevent racial tensions being triggered. ¹⁵⁸

There will be no impact on the unity of the country and for Buddhism – Minister of Petroleum Resources Kabir Hashim has said that the United National Party (UNP) will not act in a way that will be detrimental for the unity of the country or for Buddhism. He made this statement at an event held at the auditorium of the Mawanella Divisional Secretariat. He said that there were allegations against the UNP that it was trying to divide the country. He said the UNP leader [Ranil Wickremesinghe] would never allow Sri Lanka to be divided and would ensure priority given to Buddhism is maintained. ¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ Virakesari, December 29, p. 1.

¹⁵⁶ Thinakaran, December 29, p. 1.

¹⁵⁷ Virakesari, December 29, p. 3.

¹⁵⁸ Virakesari, December 29, p. 4.

¹⁵⁹ Thinakaran, December 29, p. 4.

We should not allow for peace to be disrupted – The editorial discusses the violent history of the country as a result of the 30-year-old war. It emphasises the importance of ensuring that such a situation does not arise in future and calls for everyone to ensure peace. It also refers to the recent incidents in Mawanella where Buddha statues were vandalised and stresses the need to ensure that these incidents do not trigger bigger clashes.¹⁶⁰

Not a single letter will be changed on the foremost place given to Buddhism – Prime minister assures chief prelates – Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has said there will be no changes in the priority for Buddhism envisaged in the Constitution. In addition, he also said that unitary rule will prevail in the country. He made these statements when he met with the chief prelates of the Asgiriya and Malwatte Chapters during his visit to Kandy on 28 December.¹⁶¹

Probe on Buddha statue vandalism will be expedited – Sajith – Minister of Housing and Cultural Affairs Sajith Premadasa says that a team of officials from Cultural Affairs and Archaeology Department have been appointed to commence immediate investigations into the incident where Buddha statues were vandalised by a group of people in Mawanella, Kandy recently. It was reported that initial investigations revealed that the damaged statues were not of archaeological value. However, the statues need to be rebuilt for the people to worship.¹⁶²

Vandalising Buddha statues in Mawanella: Seven suspects in custody – Seven individuals have been arrested over vandalism of Buddha statues in Mawanella. Police are on the lookout for two more suspects in connection with the incident. A Muslim youth was initially arrested over the incident, following which, six others were also arrested.¹⁶³

Vandalising places of religious worship: Laws to be strictly implemented against extremists (by Amali Mallawarachchi) – Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has stated that strict laws will be implemented against extremists who vandalise places of religious worship. He made this statement during his meeting with the Chief Prelates of the Asigiriya and Malwatte Chapters during his visit to Kandy on 28 December. He also pledged that Buddhism will continue to be given the foremost place in the constitution.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ Thinakaran, December 29, p. 4.

¹⁶¹ Uthayan, December 29, p.1.

¹⁶² Uthayan, December 29, p.2.

¹⁶³ Uthayan, December 29, p.2.

¹⁶⁴ Daily News, December 29, p. 1.

Speaker urges religious leaders to act against racism (by Disna Mudalige) – Speaker Karu Jayasuriya made an earnest plea to religious leaders to raise their voices against racism and in support of the abolishing the executive presidency in the coming year. The Speaker's Media Division, in a press statement on 28 December, said that the speaker made this request during a special meeting with multi-religious representatives at the speaker's official residence on Wednesday. The speaker spearheaded a 'multi-religious conference' following the racial tensions in Kandy and Ampara early this year (2018). He held special meetings in Kandy and Ampara with the multi-religious representatives of this initiative to promote national harmony and reconciliation. Speaker Jayasuriya, meeting those multi-religious representatives on Thursday (27 December), requested their leadership to denounce the attempts to incite ethnic and religious hatred in the North and the South while observing that certain political figures were also behind such attempts. ¹⁶⁵

PM assures foremost place to Buddhism (by Yohan Perera and J.A.L. Jayasinghe) – Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe assured the Ven. Mahanayake Theras of Malwathu and Asgiriya Chapters that the government would give priority to Buddhism and that action would be taken against those who vandalised Buddha statues in Mawanella. He said this when he met the Asgiriya Mahanayaka Ven. Warakagoda Gnaratana Thera and the Malwathu Mahanayaka Ven. Tibatuwawe Sri Sidaratha Thera in Kandy. 'I informed the Mahanayaka Theras that I have already spoken to opposition political parties and have come to an agreement not to change the wording of article 9 of the Constitution which gives priority to Buddhism,' the Prime Minister said. ¹⁶⁶

Those behind Mawanella incident must be punished – Rahman (by Yohan Perera) – United National Party Parliamentarian Mujibur Rahman said that those behind vandalising Buddha statues in Mawanella should be punished, irrespective of the ethnic group they belong to. He also called upon everyone to unite to defeat this kind of people who are trying to disturb ethnic and religious harmony. ¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Daily News, December 29, p. 1.

¹⁶⁶ Daily Mirror, December 29, p. 1.

¹⁶⁷ Daily Mirror, December 29, p. 3.



Mawanella incident: CID probes monetary transactions (by Rajitha Jagoda Arachchi) – Money transactions among those who vandalised the Buddha statues in the Mawanella Police Division and any other person or parties affiliated with a political party are being investigated by the Criminal Investigations Department (CID), the Sunday Observer reliably learns. The CID launched an investigation into the incident that took place at dawn on Wednesday, 26 December, when a few youths on motorcycles damaged some Buddha statues in and around Mawanella. The police beefed up security in the area with the Special Task Force (STF). The seven suspects charged under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) Act, No. 56 of 2007, were remanded till January 2, 2019 after they were presented at the Magistrate's Court, Mawanella. The All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama (ACJU) deplored the incident and called upon authorities to take legal action against the perpetrators. Secretary of the Hela Bodu Saviya Society Ven. Budugala Jinawansa Thera, in a letter to the president, asked the government to bring the culprits before the law and to mete out the maximum punishment to them, to avoid such acts from developing into racial riots. Some social media sites speculated on the involvement of two politicians behind the incident, citing a monetary agreement between the vandals and politicians. It is alleged that two politicians were also involved in inciting the Sinhala Muslim riots in Kandy in March.¹⁶⁸

Muslim fanatics who vandalised Buddha statues (by Samanthi Weerasekara) – Fools who do not care about race, religion, and the country initiated more chaos in the country. There was a degrading incident recently done by individuals who have petty desires or want to fulfil someone else's petty desires, forgetting the fact that we are all humans. The chief magistrate of Kegalle ordered the suspects, Mohamed Alufar Ahmed Akbar who lives at No: 30/1, Delgahagoda, Mohomad Faizar Mohamed who lives at No. 33 Hingula Delgahagoda, Mohomad Akbar Mohamed Musammil who lives at No. 130, Hingula Delgahagoda, Mohamed Sufil Mohamed Sufier who lives at No. 130 Hingula Delgahagoda, Mohamed Aalar Abeek Ahamed who lives at No. 46/2 and Mohamed Kaleel Mohamed Akaer of Hingula Eluwatuwawe who lives at No. 22, Aluth Nuwara Road, Hingula Delgahagoda, be arrested. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe who worshiped at the Temple of Tooth in Kandy stated that the extremists who attacked the temples and the churches have been identified and he informed security officials to take stern action against them after they are proven guilty. Furthermore, he stated that he condemned the incident and the Criminal Investigation Department has already initiated special investigations. The crisis situation in a country was created because of geographical boundaries and standing up as one race or religious uprising.

¹⁶⁸ Sunday Observer, December 30, <http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2018/12/30/news/mawanella-incident-cid-probes-monetary-transactions>.



We suffered with war for thirty years as Sri Lankans. We suffered regardless of being Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic or Catholic. Good or bad, we saw the end of the war. Therefore, at a time of moving forward if we are moving backward, we will move backward as a nation as well. ¹⁶⁹

Who is Mulla Omar in Mawanella? (by Chathura Pamunuwa)– There are Taliban from Bamiyan to Mawanella. The Sinhala Buddhists in the Mawanella area are worried about the vandalism of the Buddhist statues in Mawanella. The Special Task Force was deployed in the area because of its effects on religious unity. One of the miscreants was arrested on Wednesday morning with the help of the Buddhist youth. He is a Muslim. His name is M. Ashfar and he is a follower of Mullah Omar. In every communal riot, the individuals who assault the Buddhists are not talked about. If there is an incident of stoning a mosque, the American Embassy will be agitated. But Buddhists do not engage in that kind of activities. Why are they trying to create a tense situation among the Buddhists by vandalising Buddha statues? To burn the mosques again? The mosques which were damaged because of the communal riots in March last year have not yet been constructed. This is because they need to gain more foreign aids. Countries such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar grant money to spread Wahhabism. A rebellion was initiated against the individuals who believe in Theravada Buddhism. This is common among Sri Lanka, Burma, and Thailand. The monks of Thailand are walking to receive alms under military protection. Police are deployed near the temples in the Mawanella area. What does this imply? Is this not the nature of common danger? This cannot be undermined. What do political reporters in the English newspapers, who accuse Buddhist organisations, write about the incident in Mawanella? They only attack the Buddhists. The individuals who were responsible for the burning of Nalanda were born again and vandalised the Buddha statues. But Buddhists cannot do Marananussathi meditation (meditation concentrating on death) like the monks of Nalanda. We must protect our Buddhist civilisation ourselves. ¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ Divaina, December 30, p. 5

¹⁷⁰ Divaina, December 30, p. 5.

Strict actions for the extremists (by Asela Kuruluwansha)– Meeting the chief prelates of the Malwatta and Asgiriya chapter, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe stated that the law will be strictly enforced for the individuals who are suspected of the incidents of vandalising the Buddha statues in Mawanella. He also stated that he informed the senior Deputy Inspector General of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) not to give any kind of relief to the suspects who are arrested over the incident of vandalism of Buddha statues in Mawanella. Furthermore, he stated that it was reported that the extremists engaged in vandalising Hindu temples. Therefore, the government will interfere to compensate for the damage incurred to these sacred places. ¹⁷¹

Cynics who get pleasure vandalising the Buddha statues (by Saman Wijaya Bandara) – Everybody has a religion and if someone has no religion, we call them animals. Every religion teaches being a perfect person with good qualities. For that, there are religious places in the country, and through schools and religious leaders teaching the importance of religious places, people learn about inculcating good behaviour and even about reconciliation. Everyone respects religious statues such as Buddha statues, statues of gods, paintings. Amidst this situation, Buddhist leaders paid special concern to the vandalism of Buddha statues incident in Mawanella. Many condemned the incident.¹⁷²

Vandalising Buddha Statues is an extremist plan (by Rekha Nilukshi Herath) – Police state that the incident that occurred in Mawanella of vandalism of Buddha statues is an attempt to create extremist unrest. This incident was reported in Divaina newspaper and on several other websites. It emphasised that individuals from other religions engaged in these acts. An organisation called Hela Bodhu Saviya sent a letter to the president and stated that Muslims are responsible for the vandalising the Buddha statues. However, the police report stated that the arrested individuals are not Muslims. ¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Silumina, December 30, p. 1.

¹⁷² Lankadeepa, December 30, p. 24.

¹⁷³ Anidda, December 30, p. 1.

No gimmicks, alternative is the general election – Vijitha Herath (by Menaka Gamage) – JVP Propaganda Secretary Vijitha Herath stated that all the governments failed to control the growth of nationalism and religious extremism in the country and it cannot be done by force with the use of the law. The government should take steps towards national peace and religious reconciliation. He further stated that the JVP has not seen any government that has taken such steps rather only seen the amplification of extremism. Meanwhile, bankrupted political parties use this excessively to fulfil their power needs. Therefore, they try to gain political benefits by intentionally creating organised incidents. It is an extremely dangerous situation as the general public becomes the prey of such incidents. He remarked that there are political forces behind some of these incidents and that these forces should be identified, revealed and defeated. Accordingly, he stated that the party viewed the Mawanella incident from that angle and thus condemn this matter with disgust. ¹⁷⁴

Act intelligently to defeat the aspirations of the Ranil-Sumanthiran coalition (by Lasitha Duminda) – NFF Leader Wimal Weerawansa claimed that Ranil Wickremesinghe's government wanted to cover up the humiliating defeat they faced recently. Therefore they drew the attention of the public towards a Sinhala- Muslim conflict and handed over the responsibility of suppressing it to the Terrorist Investigation Division, a division of the police. He further remarked that the government came out with clean hands that day by arresting and blaming the youths who were involved in the incident and those who were not involved alike. Weerawansa stated that the government had acted as the mastermind of the conflict and that there is a suspicion that the vandalising of Buddha statues in Mawanella is another violent attempt to spark off another conflict. He commented that the incumbent government, and its obedient pupil, the TNA, want is a Sinhala- Muslim conflict. Therefore, he requested the Sinhala masses not to act by taking the law into their own hands. Also, requested the Muslim public to stop these acts being committed due to the influence of someone without considering ethnic or religious beliefs. ¹⁷⁵

Mawanella Buddhist statue vandalism: Search for two suspects – The Criminal Investigation Department is on the lookout for two main suspects believed to be connected to the vandalism of Buddhist statues in Mawanella, Kandy. Seven suspects have been arrested so far and have been remanded till 2 January, 2019. ¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴Lankadeepa, December 31, p. 4.

¹⁷⁵Divaina, December 31, p. 10.

¹⁷⁶Virakesari, December 31, p. 2.

Investigation on Mawanella Buddha statue vandalism will commence – Minister of Housing and Cultural Affairs Sajith Premadasa says that a team of officials from Cultural Affairs and Archaeology Department have been appointed to commence immediate investigations into the incident where Buddha statues were vandalised by a group of people in Mawanella, Kandy recently. It was reported that initial investigations revealed that the damaged statues were not of archaeological value. However, the statues need to be rebuilt for the people to worship. ¹⁷⁷

Vandals will be brought to book – Sajith – Housing Construction and Cultural Affairs Minister Sajith Premadasa commended the public for remaining calm and acting in an exemplary manner in the face of the organised vandalism to certain places of Buddhist worship in Mawanella by some disruptive individuals. The minister, in a statement issued on 28 December, said Buddha statues erected at the Randiwela junction, Miriskudu junction, Pahala Kadugannawa and Indula junction were destroyed by this group of vandals, and he has deployed a team of officers from the Cultural Affairs and Archaeology Department to investigate the damage so that the statues can be restored within a week, as the necessary funds have been estimated for allocation towards the job. ¹⁷⁸

Vandalising Buddha statues in Mawanella: Ministry committee to probe (by Dharshana Sanjeewa) – Minister of Housing, Construction and Cultural Affairs Sajith Premadasa has appointed a committee to investigate into the incidents of vandalism of Buddha statues in the Mawanella area. The ministry said officials from the Cultural Affairs and Archaeology Department, headed by the Assistant Director of Kegalle Archaeology Department H.B.A.K. Nimalgoda, have been appointed to look into the incident. The ministry said four Buddha Statues at the Randiwela Junction, Mahanthegama Road, Hingula Junction and Idula Junction have been damaged. Though the initial investigation revealed that the vandalised Buddha statues have no archaeological value, it cannot be discarded from re- establishing those Buddha statues which were worshipped by the people, the ministry said. ¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ Thinakaran, December 31, p. 10.

¹⁷⁸ Daily News, December 31, p. <http://www.dailynews.lk/2018/12/31/local/172747/vandals-will-be-brought-book-sajith>.

¹⁷⁹ Daily Mirror, December 31 p. 1.