



#MINORMATTERS



UNDERSTANDING PRESS COVERAGE ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

PERIOD COVERED : JANUARY 2019

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

1 G.H. Peiris, A reappraisal of evidence and claims. Emerging Buddhist – Muslim rivalry in Sri Lanka? The Island (2017). 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
- The freedom to not be discriminated or suffer any disability on the grounds of religion;⁶
- The freedom to not be subject to any restriction or condition with regard to access to places of public worship of one's own religion;⁷ and
- The freedom to be entitled to manifest one's religion or belief in worship, observance, practice or teaching.⁸

Press reports on religious freedom that appeared during the month of January 2019 were monitored. Accordingly, the following 13 daily and weekend newspapers in the three official languages – 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 based on readership data in the National Demographic and Media Survey produced by Kantar LMRB for the year 2017. Lankadeepa and Virakesari have the highest readership 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, a new alternative newspaper, was selected in spite of the readership data by taking into consideration the nature of its content, which can 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 selected in spite of the readership data, as it is a regional publication. As state-owned newspapers were included for both the English and Sinhala samples, Thinakaran was selected to represent a state-owned Tamil newspaper to maintain consistency, despite it having relatively low readership.

5 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.

In these newspapers, articles that have a bearing on religious freedom were selected for assessing the tonality of their reporting. These articles included:⁹

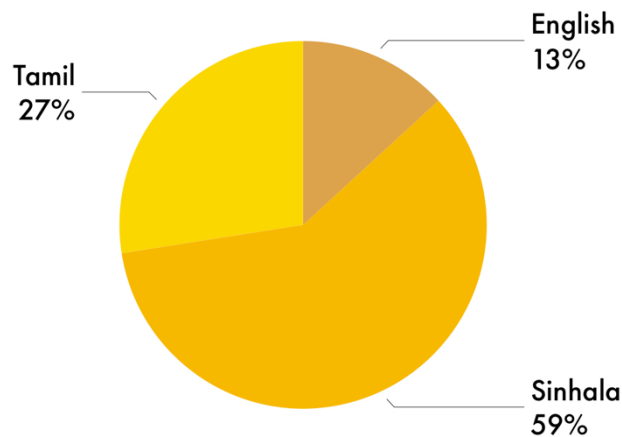
- Articles referring to instances of physical violence that are religiously motivated, or target religious communities/figures or sites;
- Articles referring to or containing speech prompting physical violence or threatening remarks targeted at religious institutions, its leaders and community;
- Articles 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
January 2019



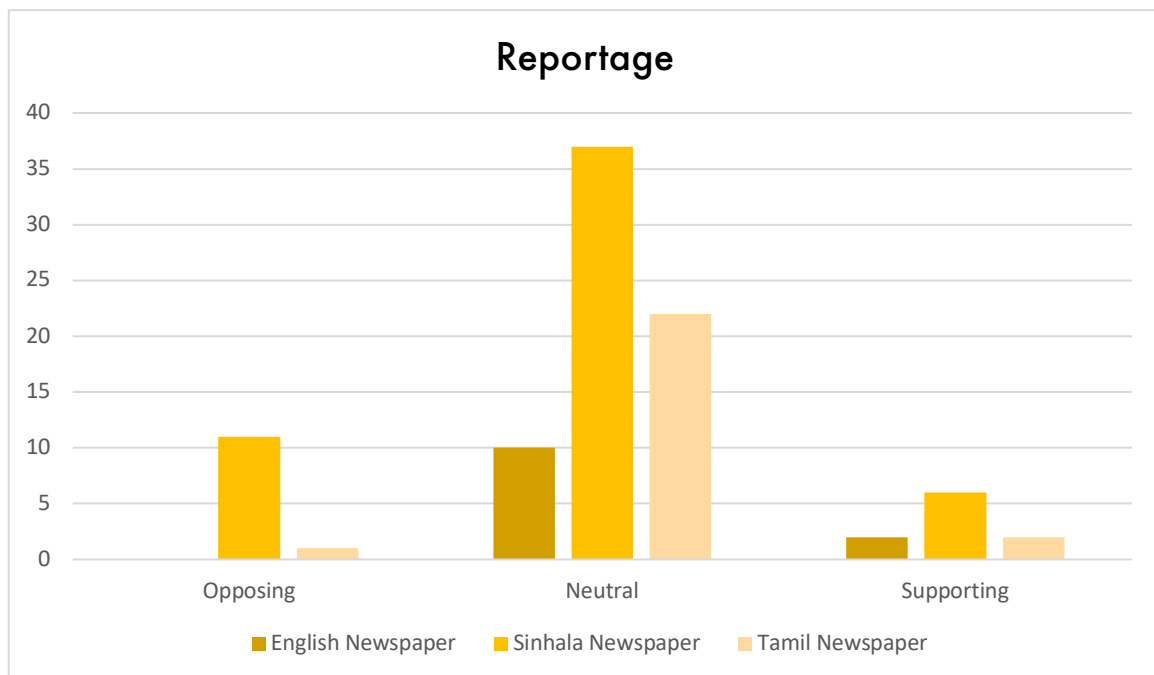
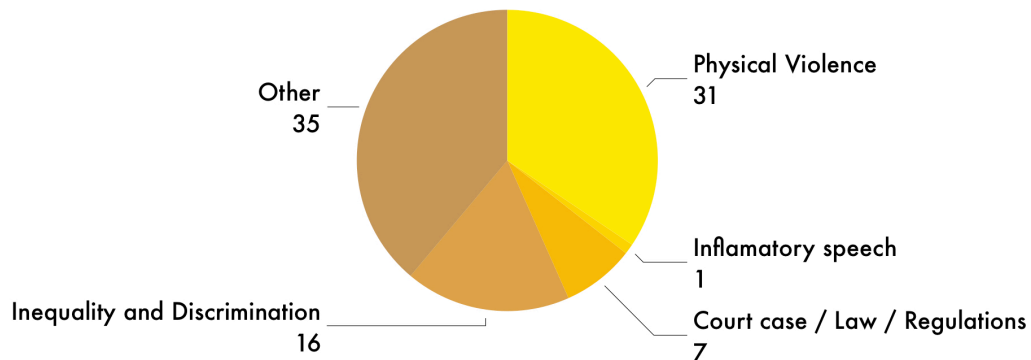
For the month of January 2019, a total of 91 articles relating to religious freedom were carried in the English, Sinhala and Tamil press. The Sinhala newspapers carried 54 of these articles, constituting 59 percent of the total coverage. Meanwhile, Tamil and English newspapers accounted for 28 percent and 13 percent of the coverage respectively – i.e. 25 and 12 articles.

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

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

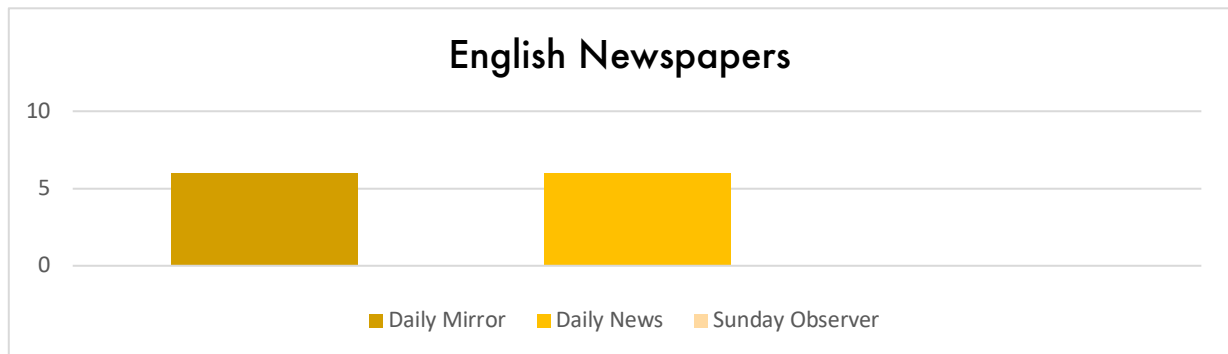
OVERARCHING THEMES PERTAINING TO RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

January 2019



- Of the 12 articles in the English newspapers, 10 were neutral and 2 were supporting religious freedom.
- There were 54 articles in the Sinhala newspapers for the month of January 2019 – 37 were neutral, 11 were opposing and 6 were supporting religious freedom.
- Tamil newspapers carried 22 neutral, 2 supporting and 1 opposing article on religious freedom.

Coverage in English Newspapers



English Newspapers	No. of Articles	Reportage		
		Supporting	Neutral	Opposing
Daily Mirror	6	1	5	-
Daily News	6	1	5	-
Sunday Observer	-	-	-	-
Total	12	2	10	

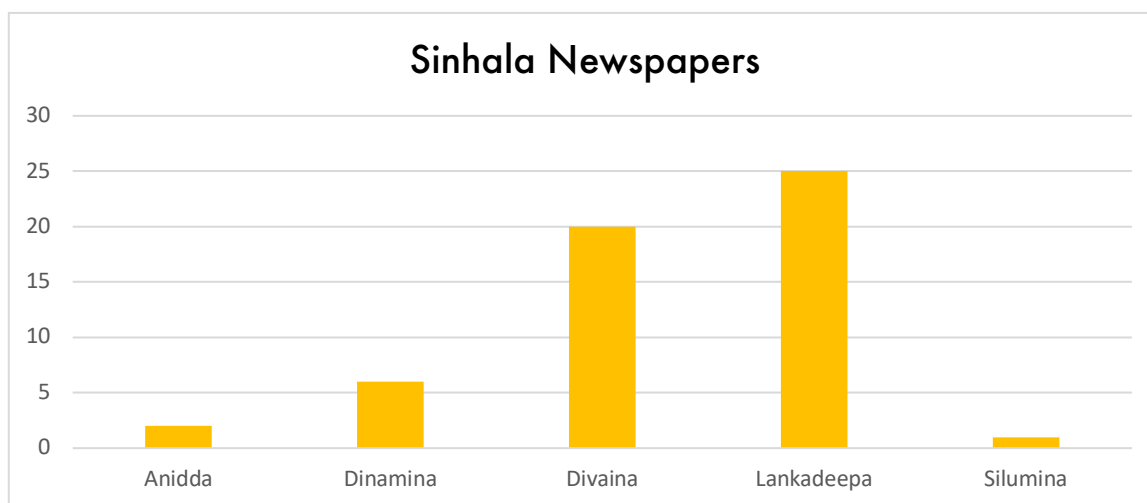
- English newspapers carried 12 articles that had a bearing on religious freedom, of which 10 were neutral and 2 were supporting religious freedom.
- The 2 supporting articles included coverage of the following events:
 - The construction of the tallest Buddha statue in Batticaloa – this event was reported as evidence of reconciliation between communities. The article notes that Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim people live in harmony in Batticaloa.¹⁰
 - Vandalism of Buddha statues in Mawanella in December last year – this event was discussed in an article in the Daily Mirror. Notably, the article highlighted the importance of respecting other religions.¹¹

¹⁰ Daily News, 31 January, p. 8.

¹¹ Daily Mirror, January 4, p. 11.



Coverage in Sinhala Newspapers



Sinhala Newspapers	No. of Articles	Reportage		
		Supporting	Neutral	Opposing
Anidda	2	2	-	-
Dinamina	6	1	5	-
Divaina	20	1	13	6
Lankadeepa	25	2	18	5
Silumina	1	-	1	-
Total	54	6	37	11

- The Sinhala press featured 54 articles that have a bearing on religious freedom, with 37 neutral, 11 opposing and 6 supporting.
- Lankadeepa had comparatively higher coverage on religious freedom with 25 articles, followed by Divaina with 20 articles.
- The 6 supporting articles included the following:
 - A statement made by the Secretary of the All-Island Muslim Intellectuals Convention, Ahmed Mubarak, in relation to the vandalism of the Buddha statues in Mawanella. He commented that such incidents threaten the peaceful co-existence and understanding between communities. He further stated that legal action should be taken against such individuals, irrespective of religious differences.¹²
 - An opinion article in Dinamina claimed that if proper measures were not taken and false information was spread via social media with regard to the vandalism of the Buddha statues in Mawanella, a tragedy similar to the Sinhala-Muslim clashes in Mawanella, in 2002, might take place again. The article also noted that all

¹² Lankadeepa, January 1, p. 16.



communities should get together to defeat activities carried out with the motive of achieving narrow political objectives.¹³

- In a statement made by MP M. A. Sumanthiran, he opined that he did not object to Buddhism being given priority in the new constitution. However, he called for other religions to be treated equally.¹⁴
- An article in Anidda scrutinised media reporting, especially nationalist leaning papers such as Divaina, for seemingly inciting further violence.¹⁵
- An opinion article that featured in Anidda and Divaina commended society's reaction to the scene involving the destruction of Buddha statues in Mawanella. The article noted that cultural identities should nurture and exalt human values instead of inducing their decline. It further stated that the positive changes prompted by such interventions in the Muslim society should be visible to the Sinhalese.¹⁶

In comparison, the 11 articles that were opposing in tone included the following:

- An article in Lankadeepa stated that Northern Provincial Council Chief Minister C.V. Wigneswaran and Northern Provincial Councillor and former Tamil National Alliance MP K. Sivajilingam are against placing Buddha statues in the North and East, and a minority of extremists are destroying Buddhist relics. The article further noted that the North and East should be made a secular region.¹⁷
- Lankadeepa and Divaina articles stated that the vandalism of the Buddha statues in Mawanella was carried out by a group of Muslim extremists with the intention of creating conflict.¹⁸
- A feature article in Divaina stated that extremism in the North, against the Sinhala-Buddhists, has reached its highest point. It further stated that if the extremist politicians of the North and East get police and land powers via federalism, massive destruction would be caused. The article also identified the group of individuals who forcibly entered a Buddhist temple to place a foundation stone for a Hindu kovil as 'Pongu' (Tamil gangs).¹⁹

¹³ Dinamina, January 4, p. 18.

¹⁴ Lankadeepa, January 6, p. 6.

¹⁵ Anidda, January 6, p. 4.

¹⁶ Anidda, January 13, p. 12; Divaina, January 19, p. 8.

¹⁷ Lankadeepa, January 1, p. 3.

¹⁸ Lankadeepa, January 5, p. 4; Divaina, January 22, p. 8.

¹⁹ Divaina, January 20, p. 3.



- On the incidents of vandalism of Buddha statues in Mawanella and Kurunegala, and the recovery of explosives in Wanathawilluwa, an article that appeared in Divaina stated that Muslim terrorism has become a huge issue in Muslim countries and non-Muslim countries. In addition to the LTTE, ISIS, Al-Qaeda, and Hamas, the article remarked that the Wahhabis are a dangerous ‘terrorist group’ with extremist views. Accordingly, the article hinted at a rise in Islamic extremism within the country, reflecting anti-Muslim sentiments.²⁰
- An article in Divaina carried a headline stating ‘Raviharan grows at the Nay Aru Temple of Mullaitivu again’. The terminology used to describe Tamil National Alliance member T. Raviharan’s statements, which were largely against Buddhism, suggested antagonism towards Hindus in the North.²¹
- Commenting on the Nay Aru, Gurukanda archaeological site, Prof. Ven. Madagoda Abhayatissa Thera commented that all Muslims and Hindus should be allowed to listen to Dhamma, but they should not be allowed to build a Hindu temple on Buddhist temple premises.²²
- An editorial in Lankadeepa condemned students who climbed the Kiralagala Stupa, took photos and shared them on social media. The article did not explicitly identify the students as Muslims but indicated that there is an ‘uncivilised minority’ and that these youths were ‘cynics’. The editorial further questioned the expected outcomes of this ‘disgraceful’ act. It stated that these students have announced that ‘this is our way, do whatever you want.’²³
- An article in Divaina claimed that the government was paying ransom to separatist and extremist powers. This claim was made in relation to a statement made by National Freedom Front member Jayantha Samaraweera. He called on the Inspector General of Police to reveal the name of the Muslim politician who promised to hand over the suspects who vandalised the Buddha statues. This article, too, reflects anti-Muslim sentiments.²⁴
- An article in Lankadeepa referred to an incident in which some individuals tried to set up a Hindu temple by forcefully entering a Buddhist temple. The article stated that the leaders of the North interpreted the incident as ‘an act of our boys.’ The article also hinted at anti-communal sentiments between the people in the northern and southern parts of Sri Lanka.²⁵

²⁰ Divaina, January 27, p. 5.

²¹ Divaina, January 25, p. 9.

²² Lankadeepa, January 30, p. 12.

²³ Lankadeepa, January 25, p. 4.

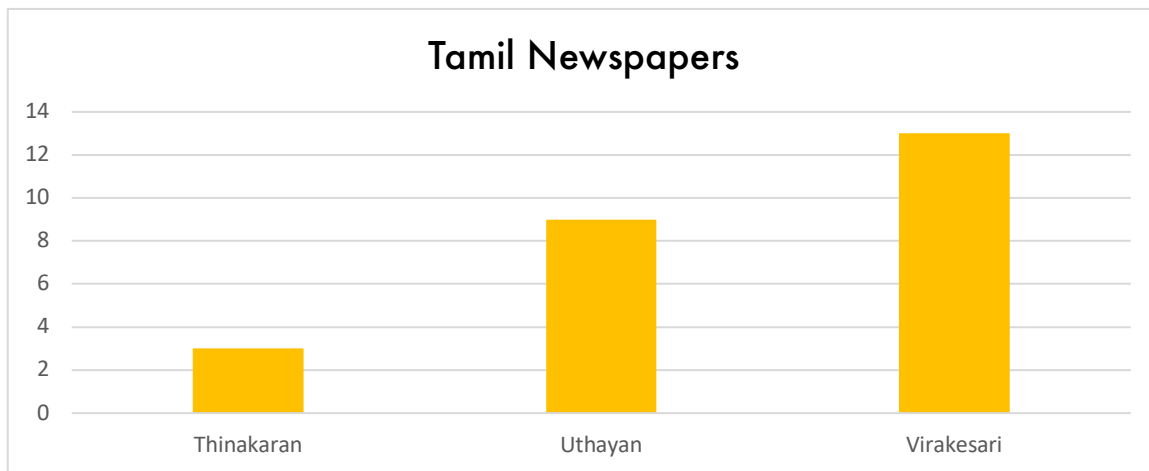
²⁴ Divaina, January 22, p. 7.

²⁵ Lankadeepa, January 20, p. 22.



- An editorial in Divaina condemned Muslims in the East, and the founder and former leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) Prabhakaran in the North, for ‘bulldozing’ ancient Buddhist religious sites. The article further featured the alleged extremist activities of Hindus, such as setting fire to Catholic churches located around the country and vandalising Muslim religious sites. In both of these instances, the reportage conveys a sense of Buddhist antagonism towards religious minorities.

Coverage in Tamil Newspapers



Tamil Newspapers	No. of Articles	Reportage		
		Supporting	Neutral	Opposing
Thinakaran	3	-	3	-
Uthayan	9	2	6	1
Virakesari	13	-	13	-
Total	25	2	22	1

- There were 25 articles relating to religious freedom in the Tamil press, with 22 neutral, two supporting and one opposing.
- The two supporting articles included coverage of the following:
 - Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims took part in the Tamil Pongal festival held in Hatton.²⁶
 - Minister Rishad Bathiudeen, speaking at an event, pointed out that other communities had the wrong perception of Islam. He claimed that actions of Muslims should reflect the good qualities of their religion.²⁷
- In comparison, the editorial that was opposing in tone discussed the incidents at the Neeraviyadi Pillayar Temple in Mullaitivu, and the opening of the Buddha statue within the temple premises on 23 January. The editorial also claimed that certain monks were attempting to claim ownership and take over the said land and building. It further reports these instances as part of a forced spread of Buddhism and claims that nothing has been done to curb this spread.²⁸

²⁶ Uthayan, 16 January, p. 2.

²⁷ Uthayan, 28 January, p.5.

²⁸ Uthayan, 24 January, p. 18.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

During the month of January 2019, 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 these themes, the most prominent articles with a bearing on religious freedom included coverage of the following events in Sri Lanka; 1) follow up on the vandalism of several Buddha statues in Mawanella; and 2) threats to places of religious worship.

The first event relates to physical violence, whereas the second topic is classified under 'inequality and discrimination', which includes any form of discrimination on religious grounds. Notably, reportage under the other three themes, i.e. inflammatory speech; court cases, laws and regulations pertaining to religious freedom; and other related reporting included isolated events that did not qualify for an in-depth qualitative analysis.

Overarching Theme	Event
Physical Violence	(1) Follow up on the vandalism of several Buddha statues in Mawanella
Inequality and Discrimination	(2) Threats to places of religious worship

Physical violence

Physical violence is defined as violence or attempted violence, which is religiously motivated, and perpetrated against a person or property. Under this theme, religious freedom continued to be discussed in relation to one main event during the month of January. This was the vandalism of several Buddha statues in Mawanella.

Follow up: Vandalism of several Buddha statues in Mawanella

Developments following the aftermath of the vandalism of several Buddha statues in Mawanella triggered continued press discussion of the incident in the month of January 2019. These developments included the investigation of the two key absconding suspects behind the vandalism and the discovery of explosives in their house in Puttalam. Press commentary featured condemnation of religious extremism and placed a spotlight on perceived extremism among Muslims.²⁹ Therefore, similar to December 2018, the Sinhala press continued to be dominated by renewed concerns over the resurgence of Buddhist- Muslim tensions. By contrast, the issue gained marginal traction in the English and Tamil press, which remained neutral in its coverage of religious freedom pertaining to this issue.

Overall, Sinhala press discourse on the Mawanella incident and subsequent developments were explained using: (1) a **prejudicial narrative**, and (2) a **political narrative**.

1. Prejudicial narrative – Sinhala press reporting was largely unsympathetic towards Muslims and continued to echo anti-Muslim stereotypes and sentiments in the local Sri Lankan context. Last month's report revealed that the press apportioned blame to 'Muslim extremists' for having carried out the vandalism of the Buddha statues in Mawanella. It further revealed that the motive of Muslim extremists for their involvement in the vandalism was to spread and foster Wahhabism within the country.³⁰ By contrast, this month's press commentary featured a departure from the previous month's commentary on the motive attributed to the Muslim 'extremists'. These 'extremists' were perceived to create intentional communal unrest within the Sinhala-Buddhist community.³¹ This strand of commentary shows the potential for prejudice within the press in interpreting events. Despite the predominance of this narrative, some reports acknowledged that the reported rise in Islamic extremism was limited to a 'miniscule segment' of the Muslim community. Moreover, Sinhala press coverage on the incident – especially in the Divaina – was scrutinised for seemingly inciting

²⁹ Lankadeepa, January 5, p. 4; Divaina, January 18, p. 1; Lankadeepa, January 20, p. 1; Divaina, January 21, p. 1; Lankadeepa, January 21, p. 6; Divaina, January 22, p. 8; Divaina, January 27, p. 5; Lankadeepa, January 27, p. 3.

³⁰ Verité Research, Understanding Press Coverage on Religious Freedom: October – December 2018, p. 14.

³¹ Lankadeepa, January 5, p. 4; Divaina, January 21, p. 1.

further violence. For instance, the Divaina disclosed the suspects' postal addresses prior to proving that the suspected men were linked to the vandalism.³²

(2) Political narrative – the Sinhala press discussed the possible links between the incident and political actors/groups that exploited ethno-religious fault lines for political gains. For instance, an article in Dinamina argued that a group of people who wanted to undermine the UNP's political position committed the vandalism to achieve their own political objectives.³³ In addition, an article in Lankadeepa claimed that both the Tamil diaspora and National Freedom Front MP Wimal Weerawansa were capitalising on the incident for their own political advantage.³⁴

Meanwhile, the discovery of hidden explosives at the residence of the chief suspect of the Mawanella incident was interpreted as evidence of the LTTE's revival, despite the suspect being identified as a Muslim.³⁵ Thus extremist activities carried out by religious minorities are often associated with unjustified violence or 'terrorism' in the Sinhala press.³⁶ By contrast, actions of Sinhala-Buddhist extremists have largely been framed in the Sinhala press as a response to 'threats' from members of the Muslim minority.³⁷

³² Anidda, January 6, p. 4.

³³ Dinamina, January 4, p. 18.

³⁴ Lankadeepa, January 5, p. 4.

³⁵ Lankadeepa, January 20, p. 3; Silumina, January 20, p. 5; Divainia, January 20, p. 3.

³⁶ Divania, January 1, p. 4; Divaina, January 27, p. 5.

³⁷ The Media Analysis Vol. 4, No. 25.

Inequality and discrimination

This theme covers instances of any form of discrimination on religious grounds. During January 2019, this theme was highlighted mainly in relation to the reportedly discriminatory acts against places of religious worship in Nay Aru in Mullaitivu, and threats to the religious freedom of the Buddhists and Hindus. The discriminatory acts that were reported included the forcible entrance of a group of individuals into the Gurukanda Raja Maha Viharaya to place a foundation stone for the construction of a Hindu kovil, the obstruction of devotees conducting Pongal rituals by a group of Buddhist monks, and the construction of a Buddha statue within the Semmalai Neeraviyadi Pillayar Temple premises. Press coverage on the issue interpreted the acts as promoting Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism. Moreover, the coverage suggested growing antagonism between Sinhala-Buddhists and the Hindus in the North. The following analysis will focus on the divergence in press reporting in the Sinhala and Tamil press. The issue gained marginal traction in the English press, with the limited reportage reflecting similar positions to those taken by the Sinhala press.

Threats to places of religious worship

Sinhala and Tamil press reportage on the series of reportedly discriminatory events that ensued in Nay Aru, Mullaitivu diverged on three counts.

First, Sinhala and Tamil reportage diverged in terms of sympathy or support shown towards a particular ethno-religious group (that was also associated with a particular local language press). For instance, the Sinhala press cited the temple as Gurukanda Raja Maha Viharaya – a Buddhist place of worship.³⁸ Meanwhile, the Tamil press referred to the same religious site as Semmalai Neeraviyadi Pillayar Temple – a Hindu place of worship.³⁹ Furthermore, the Sinhala press reported solely on the ‘forcible’ entrance of the ‘Pongu Tamil gangs’ that tried to place a foundation stone for the construction of a Hindu kovil within the Buddhist temple premises.⁴⁰ By contrast, the Tamil press reported only on the group of Buddhist monks who obstructed devotees attempting to conduct Pongal rituals, and the construction of a Buddha statue within the Semmalai Neeraviyadi Pillayar Temple premises.⁴¹

³⁸ Divainia, January 20, p. 3; Diviana, January 25, p. 9; Divaina, January 27, p. 3; Lankadeepa, January 30, p. 12

³⁹ Virakesari, 15 January, p. 6; Virakesari, 23 January, p. 9; Virakesari, 23 January, p. 9; Virakesari, 24 January, p. 1; Uthayan, 15 January, p. 1; Uthayan, 24 January, p. 1; Uthayan, 24 January, p.18; Uthayan, 25 January, p.; Uthayan, 25 January, p. 1.

⁴⁰ Divainia, January 20, p. 3; Divaina, January 27, p. 3.

⁴¹ Virakesari, 15 January, p. 6; Virakesari, 23 January, p. 9; Virakesari, 23 January, p. 9; Virakesari, 24 January, p. 1; Uthayan, 15 January, p. 1; Uthayan, 24 January, p. 1; Uthayan, 24 January, p.18; Uthayan, 25 January, p.; Uthayan, 25 January, p. 1.

Second, the local language press diverged on the portrayal of the actors behind the alleged discrimination. Unlike the Sinhala press, the Tamil press clearly identified the actors who were perceived as responsible for the discriminatory actions. The Tamil press identified a group of Buddhist monks who were ‘forcibly imposing Buddhism’ in the area, with the help of the Police and the Department of Archaeology.⁴² Similar to last month’s report, the Tamil press continued to reflect the prevailing sentiment that there exists tacit state patronage for the promotion of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism.⁴³ They also hinted at the exceptionalism enjoyed by state actors and the clergy in promoting the majority status of Sinhala-Buddhists. The Sinhala press, in one instance, passed judgment on the actors who forcibly entered the temple, by using terminology such as ‘Pongu Tamil gangs’.⁴⁴

Third, press commentary diverged on the anti-religious sentiments that emerged in the Sinhala and Tamil press. On the one hand, the Sinhala press framed the forcible entrance of individuals to place a foundation stone for the construction of a Hindu kovil as a threat to Buddhism. It was viewed as challenging the foremost place of Buddhism as enshrined in the constitution, and Sinhala-Buddhists as the dominant community.⁴⁵ For instance, this sentiment was evident in an article in the Divaina, which expressed fear for what may follow if ‘extremist’ politicians of the North and East attain federalism.⁴⁶ In the Sinhala press, ‘federalism’ is associated with a separatist agenda and the promotion of Tamil ‘extremist’ interests. Thus federalism is often viewed as a threat to the ‘foremost place’ given to Buddhism in the present constitution.⁴⁷ On the other hand, the Tamil press viewed the allegedly continuing threat of Sinhala nationalism in predominately minority- populated areas as a scheme to forcibly introduce a Sinhala-Buddhist identity.⁴⁸ These continuing threats include the prevention of poojas performed by Tamil devotees, and the construction of Buddha statues within the premises of Hindu temples.

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⁴² Virakesari, 23 January, p. 9; Virakesari, 24 January, p. 1; Uthayan, 24 January, p. 1.

⁴³ Verité Research, Understanding Press Coverage on Religious Freedom: October – December 2018, p. 22.

⁴⁴ Divaina, January 20, p. 3.

⁴⁵ Centre for Policy Alternatives, Attacks on places of religious worship in post-war Sri Lanka (2013).

Accessed 11 February 2019

<http://f.cl.ly/items/3L2T1z0A1G1f3o0m2H3g/Attacks%20on%20Religious%20Places.pdf>.

⁴⁶ Divaina, January 20, p. 3.

⁴⁷ The Media Analysis, Vol. 9, No. 2.

⁴⁸ Uthayan, 24 January, p. 18.

⁴⁹ Uthayan, January 15, p. 1; Virakesari, January 22, p. 9; Virakesari, January 24, p. 1; Uthayan, January 24, p. 1.

CONCLUSION

This study was based on media coverage of religious freedom for the month of January 2019. Accordingly, it analysed 91 articles dealing with religious freedom. Similar to last month's report, the coverage consisted of sympathetic reporting towards one of the three ethno-religious groups discussed. This differed according to the language of the newspaper, i.e. Sinhala, Tamil or English. This trend in reporting affected how the protagonists and antagonists were portrayed in the reportage.⁵⁰

This report analysed the reportage under five overarching themes across all three language newspapers during January 2019. The most prominent reportage relating to religious freedom related to two out of these five themes: physical violence, and religious inequality and discrimination. The analysis was based on the lens of media sentiment derived from the English, Sinhala and Tamil press. 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 continued to receive significant coverage within Sinhala press reportage. Sinhala press reporting was largely unsympathetic towards Muslims and continued to echo anti-Muslim stereotypes and sentiments in the local Sri Lankan context. This prevailing anti-Muslim sentiment was observed outside the vandalism issue as well. For instance, the Sinhala press blamed a Muslim security guard for not having intervened when seven students of South Eastern University climbed the Kiralagala Stupa of Horowpathana.⁵¹ Furthermore, some Sinhala reportage went on to identify the students as Muslims.⁵²

(2) Sentiments that emerged within the context of threats to places of religious worship differed according to the ethno-religious group discussed. The Sinhala press, reporting on the attack on the Buddhist temple, discussed a possible challenge to the foremost place of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Meanwhile, the Tamil press continued to interpret the attacks on the Hindu temples as part of a Sinhalese scheme – that had the tacit support of the state – to colonise minority (Tamil) dominated areas.

⁵⁰ Verité Research, *Understanding Press Coverage on Religious Freedom: October – December 2018*, p. 23.

⁵¹ Divaina, January 24, p. 1.

⁵² Divaina, January 22, p. 7; Lankadeepa, January 25, p. 1; Divaina, January 25, p. 1.

RELATED REPORTING

Condemn the damages caused to Buddha Statues - Please Punish the Perpetrators – All Island Muslim Intellectuals Convention – They have stated that vandalising Buddha statues in Mawanella is an insult to religion. Vandalising Buddha statues which are worshiped by the majority of the country threatens the peaceful coexistence and understanding between communities. Secretary of the All Island Muslim Intellectuals Convention Ahmed Mubarak stated that legal action should be taken against such individuals, irrespective of religious differences. Furthermore, the All Island Muslim Intellectuals Convention also requested the president and prime minister to take measures to prevent the reoccurrence of such violent incidents.⁵³

An electoral system is needed to prevent ethnic and religious conflicts (by Pathmarani Nandathilake) – This article stated that each political party comprises of individuals of various ethnic groups. Therefore, the ethnicity of the candidate who contests from that area is of importance. Furthermore, Wigneswaran and Sivajilingam are against placing Buddha statues in the North and East and a minority of extremists are destroying Buddhist relics. The article further noted that the North and East should be made a secular region. Those who follow other religions and live in Sinhalese majority areas follow their religion peacefully and build places of worship.⁵⁴

What is the foundation of a ‘new year’? – Vandalising Buddha statues 2 – Destruction of Buddhist religious sites in the North and East by Prabhakaran was a wretched act. We know that ancient Buddhist ruins in the Eastern Province, where the majority of the people are Muslim, are being bulldozed from time to time. Rishad Bathiudeen also knows that. A.H.M. Ashroff who died of a helicopter crash also knew that. This is a result of the intensification of religious extremism. With the intensification of extremist ideas, they take revenge from things that belong to Buddha Sasana. Sometime back, Hindu extremists in India began to set fire to Catholic churches located in different places in the country. They vandalised religious sites of Muslims. Then, the affected Muslims counter- attacked and those attacks were three to four-fold ruthless. The religion is not a national asset. At first, it is a spiritual asset. As time passes when it spreads over to the majority of the country, it becomes a national asset. Then, the devotees begin to expect the government to get involved in protecting the religion. The government is responsible for the protection of Catholic, Hindu and Islamic religious places in the Southern part of Sri Lanka. Likewise, the protection of Buddhist religious sites in the North is the responsibility of the government. The real New Year dawns when this responsibility is properly fulfilled and when the protection of people who belong to all ethnic groups is ensured.⁵⁵

⁵³ Lankadeepa, January 1, p. 16.

⁵⁴ Lankadeepa, January 1, p. 3.

⁵⁵ Divania, January 1, p. 4.

A council of intellectuals under the regulations of Chief monks (by Nimala Kodithuwakku) – Minister of Buddha Sasana and Wayamba Development Gamini Jayawickrema Perera stated that steps will be taken to form a council of intellectuals to take measures against dramas, songs, poems and films which distort Buddhism. Furthermore, measures will be taken to pass a special act to address these issues. ⁵⁶

Seven youth who destroyed Buddha statues in Mawanella remanded- Mawanella U.R Jayantha –Mawanella Magistrate Upul Rajakaruna stated that the seven youth who were arrested on suspicion of attacking and destroying Buddha statues in Mawanella have been remanded until 16 January. The courts they will be presented to will be decided based on their area of residence. ⁵⁷

Tripitaka declared a national heritage – The Tripitaka, the holy scriptures of Buddhism, will be made a national heritage at a special national event to be held on 5 January in Aluwihare, Matale, Minister of Buddha Sasana and North Western Development, Gamini Jayawickrama Perera said. A proposal to declare Tripitaka as a national heritage was presented to the cabinet in September last year (2018). ⁵⁸

Seven suspects remanded for destroying Buddha Statues – Mawanella Magistrate Upul Rajakaruna stated that the seven youth who were arrested on suspicion of attacking and destroying Buddha statues in Mawanella have been remanded until 16 January after they were produced before the Mawanella Magistrate's Courts on 2 January. It was reported that three suspects including the two main suspects were arrested, and they are Mohammed Siddiqui Abdullah and Mohammed Ibrahim Shahid, who are two brothers of the same family. It was also reported that there are individuals below the age of 25 among those who were arrested. Furthermore, the article describes how they were summoned to the courts and about those came to meet them. ⁵⁹

Tripitaka declared a National Heritage (by Irangika Range) – Secretary to the President Udaya R. Seneviratne said yesterday the national ceremony to declare the Tripitaka, which is the foremost compilation containing the basics in Theravada Buddhist philosophy, a national heritage of Sri Lanka will be held under the patronage of President Maithripala Sirisena at the historic Aluwihare Temple in Matale on 5 January. The cabinet has already approved the proposal made by President Maithripala Sirisena in this regard, with the aim of spreading Buddhist ideas among the people and thereby trying to establish a noble society in the country. Accordingly, the Buddha Sasana Ministry was vested with the power to oversee the reprinting of the Tripitaka and its related issues. ⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Lankadeepa, January 3, p. 2.

⁵⁷ Divaina, January 3, p. 1.

⁵⁸ Virakesari, January 3, p. 11.

⁵⁹ Dinamina, January 3, p. 1.

⁶⁰ Daily News, January 3, p. 12

Tripitakaya to be declared a national heritage tomorrow (5 January) (by Sandun Jayasekera) – The Tripitaka, the holy scriptures of Buddhism will be made a national heritage at a special national event to be held on 5 January in Aluwihare, Matale. The ceremony will be held under the patronage of President Maithripala Sirisena. A proposal to declare the Tripitaka as a national heritage was presented to cabinet in September last year (2018). ⁶¹

The true story behind vandalising Buddha statues in Mawanella (by Saman Vijaya Bandara) – Suspects who were responsible for vandalising Buddha statues have not been arrested still, and this has caught the attention of every Sinhalese and Muslim. They have urged authorities to take legal action against the perpetrators. If proper measures are not taken and because of the spreading of false information via social media, a tragedy similar to the 2002 Mawanella Sinhala-Muslim clashes might take place again. According to several members of the United National Party (UNP) many Muslims denounced the incidents that took place on 24 December and said a group of people who could not bear the political journey of the UNP committed this act to achieve narrow political objectives. The views of villagers have also been highlighted. The article also noted that all communities should get together to defeat activities carried out with the motive of achieving narrow political objectives. ⁶²

“You have your religion and I have mine” (by M.S.M. Ayub) – This commentary discusses the incident when Buddha statues were vandalised in Mawanella in December last year. The commentary, while discussing the incident, also states the importance of respecting other religions. ⁶³

Tripitaka declared a national heritage – The Tripitaka, the holy scriptures of Buddhism, will be made a national heritage at a special national event to be held on 5 January in Aluwihare, Matale. The ceremony will be held under the patronage of President Maithripala Sirisena. ⁶⁴

Tripitaka declared a national heritage – The Tripitaka, the holy scriptures of Buddhism, will be made a national heritage at a special national event to be held tomorrow (5 January) at the Aloka Vihara in Aluwihare, Matale. The ceremony will be held under the patronage of President Maithripala Sirisena. ⁶⁵

Tripitaka declared a national heritage: Hoist Buddhist flags today – The Tripitaka, the holy scriptures of Buddhism, will be made a national heritage at a special national event to be held in Aluwihare, Matale today (5 January). The declaration of the Tripitaka as a national heritage will be done on the instructions of the Maha Sangha to preserve Buddhism. ⁶⁶

⁶¹ Daily Mirror, January 4, p. 1.

⁶² Dinamina, January 4, p. 18.

⁶³ Daily Mirror, January 4, p. 11.

⁶⁴ Thinakaran, January 4, p. 5.

⁶⁵ Virakesari, January 4, p. 14.

⁶⁶ Daily Mirror, January 5, p. 1.

Declaration of Tripitaka a ‘National Heritage’ today – The public was requested to hoist Buddhist flags on 5 January, to coincide with the event to mark the declaration of the Tripitaka, the holy scriptures of Buddhism, as a national heritage. The event is scheduled to be held at the Matale Aluwihare Temple. ⁶⁷

Rascals who added cow dung to milk (by M. S.M Ayub) – Recently, a Sinhalese-Muslim clash has been reported by the press. This article stated details about the riots that broke out in Teldeniya and Ampara areas, the root causes that led to these conflicts. Buddhist monks, Muslim religious leaders, and the police intervened to settle these disputes. The article questioned as to who is responsible for vandalising the Buddha statues in Mawanella and their motives. The article stated that the vandalism was carried out by a group of Muslim extremists with the intention of creating conflict. While politicians such as S.M. Marikkar and Mujibur have stated that those who are responsible should be arrested irrespective of their ethnicity, the Tamil diaspora and Wimal Weerawansa are trying to achieve political advantages. The article concluded by giving steps taken by the state and religious leaders by highlighting verses in the Quran. ⁶⁸

Koneswarar Temple Shops issue: People have no faith in government departments – Trincomalee Parliamentarian K. Thurairetnasingam says that the people do not have faith in government departments on the issue of the shops that have been set up within the premises of the Thirukkoneswarar temple. He made this observation at a discussion held on 3 January where it was discussed to remove the shops and relocate them at the foot of the hill. ⁶⁹

Shops in the premises of Thirukkoneswarar Temple do not have approval, should be removed – says Head of Urban Council Rasanayagam – Head of the Trincomalee Urban Council N. Rasanayagam said the shops within the premises of the Thirukkoneswarar Temple were set up without approval. He said the shops are affecting the purity of the temple and also affecting the ecological balance. He also pointed out instances where shops were not allowed within the premises of other places of worship such as the Temple of the Tooth Relic in Kandy, and some worship places in Anuradhapura. ⁷⁰

Koneswarara Temple Shops issue: People have no faith over government departments – Trincomalee Parliamentarian K. Thurairetnasingam says that the people do not have faith in government departments on the issue of the shops that have been set up within the premises of the Thirukkoneswarar Temple. He made this observation at a discussion held on 3 January where it was discussed to remove the shops and relocate them to the foot of the hill. ⁷¹

⁶⁶ Daily Mirror, January 5, p. 1.

⁶⁷ Daily News, January 5, p. 1.

⁶⁸ Lankadeepa, January 5, p. 4.

⁶⁹ Uthayan, January 5, p. 13.

⁷⁰ Virakesari, January 5, p. 11.

⁷¹ Virakesari, January 6, p. 19.

"Should treat other religions equally" – M.A. Sumanthiran – The prime minister stated that Buddhism should be given priority when he met with the chief prelates. That is stated in the report issued by the interim committee. We don't have a problem if Buddhism is given priority. However, other religions should be treated equally. The Mahinda Rajapaksa faction accused us saying that that we supported changing the government to obstruct the constitutional draft which was supposed to be presented to parliament on 7 November. Though we wanted to support a national government, we opposed the 26 October incident because we felt that it was against the fundamental principles of democracy and constitutional law.⁷²

"A different story about vandalising Buddha statues" (by Rekha Nilukshi Herath) – It is true that attacking a Buddha statue is an act that alarms a Buddhist. It is true that nationalist newspapers like Divaina had used this incident to link it to the attack on the Buddha statues in Nalanda. It is true that they used this as an opportunity to prove that what they have said earlier about extremist groups in Sri Lanka is accurate. Apart from Divaina, nationalist organisations had also used this as an opportunity. Many media organisations had reported this incident without understanding their responsibility. We saw media outlets that do not know that they have the power to set a fire as well as to extinguish it. It should be appreciated that even though a lot of reports that could set fire were reported the general public did not resort to violence. It can be assumed that the police acted responsibly while the media did not. It is good that the police reported all the facts without hiding anything. When the police hide facts like these what happens is that they come out from other sources in a more dangerous manner. On the other hand, the police had taken action to take a magistrate order against the demonstration that was organised against the vandalising of Buddha statues. At this moment, such a demonstration can develop into a violent outbreak. The Divaina which even reported the addresses of the arrested suspects could not have done that without knowing such an act can result in violent attacks on the houses of the suspects. It is unfortunate that Divaina engages in such irresponsible journalism when it has not yet been proven that these suspected young men are linked to the vandalising of Buddha statues.⁷³

Tripitaka declared as National Heritage: Now it is legally protected – President Maithripala Sirisena during his speech at the declaration of Tripitaka as national heritage explains the importance of the event. He said the Tripitaka has now got protection legally. He also said the declaration will allow people to understand the teachings of Lord Buddha easily.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Virakesari, January 6, p. 19.

⁷² Lankadeepa, January 6, p. 6.

⁷³ Anidda, January 6, p. 4.

⁷⁴ Virakesari, January 7, p. 9.

The politician who promised that he will hand over the two suspects have failed to do so – Though a member of the Colombo Municipal Council called a senior police officer in Kegalle several times and promised to hand over the main suspect and his brother involved in vandalising Buddha statues, he has failed to do so yet. The police suspect that the two suspects are being protected by politicians. Seven individuals were arrested with regard to this incident and the main suspects have still not been arrested. Katunayake and Mattala airports have been informed to prevent them from leaving the country.⁷⁵

Tripitaka declared national heritage: President to seek UN assistance to help make Tripitaka a world heritage – President Maithripala Sirisena who declared the sacred Tripitaka of Theravada Buddhism as a national heritage on Saturday (5 January), said he would request the assistance of the United Nations General Secretary to get it recognised as a world heritage by UNESCO. The president was addressing the national ceremony to mark the declaration of the Tripitaka as a national heritage held at Aluwihare in Matale. ⁷⁶

President declares Tripitaka a national heritage – President Maithripala Sirisena who declared the sacred Tripitaka of Theravada Buddhism as a national heritage on Saturday (5 January), said he would request the assistance of the United Nations General Secretary to get it recognised as a world heritage by UNESCO. The president was addressing the national ceremony to mark the declaration of the Tripitaka as a national heritage held at Aluwihare in Matale.⁷⁷

Protest march calling for removal of teachers who disrupt communal harmony between Tamils and Muslims – A protest was held in Kaluvankeni, Batticaloa, calling for removal of teachers who disrupt the harmony between Tamils and Muslims in the region. The protest was organized by the development group of the Kaluvankeni Vivekanantha school. The protest was organized after a female Tamil student studying Advanced Levels in a school in Kaluvankeni converted to Islam on the advice of a teacher who follows Islam. ⁷⁸

Mawanella will not become another Digana (by Tharaka Warapitiya) – A sense of relief exuded when the scene involving the destruction of Buddha statues in Mawanella was resolved through the legal intervention without erupting into a major cataclysmic event. This also reflects the fact that our society has matured enough to withstand these scenarios. It should be borne in mind that this incident was a conduct carried out by a vicious group operating beneath the open space as opposed to an organised conduct. The majority in the Muslim community deems that it is important to work in cooperation with the Sinhala society. They have understood that their economic prowess is based on the cooperation between them and the Sinhalese. Though a miniscule segment of the Muslim community are extremists, they can have a tremendous influence on the society. We expect more vigilance from the Muslim community in this regard. The profound task of identifying the extremist elements within their community while being attentive to the emergence of such extremist forces lies on their shoulder.

⁷⁵Lankadeepa, January 7, p. 19.

⁷⁶ Daily News, January 7, p. 1.

⁷⁷ Daily Mirror, January 7, p. 1.

⁷⁸ Virakesari, January 9, p. 15

There is also the need to refrain from indulging in conduct that attracts social ostracism such as wearing burka. It is required to subject such conduct to modernist –humanist transformation to prevent the emergence of cultural barriers between diverse communities living in a nation. Cultural identities should nurture and exalt human values instead of inducing their decline. After a racial conflict we envisage the proactive interventions that can successfully handle the conduct of extremist forces instead of holding talk shops on reconciliation. The positive changes prompted by such interventions in the Muslim society should be visible to the Sinhalese. In a backdrop where the leaders of the country are providing incentives to the regress of the society as, opposed to furthering intellectual discourses, it must be understood that blind beliefs distance communities rather than integrating them. ⁷⁹

Buddhist monks stop worship at Semmalai Neeraviyadi Pillayar Temple - Devotees conduct worship despite obstructions (by K. Kumanan) – A tense situation arose at the Neeraviyadi Pillayar Temple located in Nay Aru in old Semmalai, Mullaitivu on 14 January when a group of Buddhist monks obstructed devotees from conducting Pongal rituals at the temple. The issue was solved upon intervention by the police and the security forces, following which the devotees continued their worship. Tamil National Alliance Parliamentarians Shanthi Sriskandarasa and Charles Nirmalanathan were in attendance for the worship. ⁸⁰

Cabinet approval to make Tripitaka a National Heritage – The president’s proposal to make the tripitaka of Theravada Buddhism a world heritage has received the approval of the cabinet, stated the President’s Media Division. On 5 January 2019, the Tripitaka was declared a national heritage. President Maithripala Sirisena, at the ceremony to proclaim the Tripitaka a national heritage, stated that the next step would be to declare it a world heritage. The Theravada Pitaka, composed of the Sutra Pitaka, the Vinaya Pitaka and the Abhidhamma Pitaka of third Dhamma Sangayana, was inherited by the island as a heritage in the 3rd century B.C. and Buddhism was inherited and nourished throughout centuries with the full patronage of the state. ⁸¹

Worship activities banned in Neeraviyadi Pilayar temple – A tense situation arose on 14 January when a group headed by a Buddhist monk obstructed Hindu devotees from conducting poojas for the Pongal festival. The issue was resolved upon intervention by the police and the security forces, following which the devotees continued their worship. ⁸²

⁷⁹ Anidda, January 13, p. 12.

⁸⁰ Virakesari, January 15, p. 6.

⁸¹ Thinakaran, January 15, p. 12.

⁸² Uthayan, January 15, p. 1.

A group charge in to build a kovil at the temple premises (by Madukanda Sithum Chathuranga) – A tense situation arose when a group of Tamil National Alliance MPs and local politicians arrived at the Mullaitivu Madukanda Raja Maha Vihara premises to celebrate Thai Pongal and began to lay the foundation stone to construct a Hindu kovil. The congregation stated that they misbehaved by broadcasting loud Tamil songs using speakers. They carried out this activity by taking advantage of the permission given by the chief incumbent monk to conduct Thai Pongal celebrations at the temple premises. The secretary of the congregation noted that this temple received numerous threats and the constructing of a Buddha statue at the temple premises was postponed due to objections from a group of provincial council members.⁸³

A group carrying swords attacked the Thai Pongal celebrations at the Nachchimalar Kovil (by Dinasena Rathugamage) – A group carrying swords attacked a Thai Pongal ceremony held at the Nachchimalar Kovil in Charnappanai, Jaffna. The people gathered there ran away in fear. They chopped a youth who tried to stop the fight. The injured was taken to the Jaffna base hospital with the help of an ambulance. The attackers arrived on five bikes. The frightened people fled the scene leaving their helmets and slippers and later came to collect them. The Jaffna Police are conducting further investigations.⁸⁴

Members of all three religions take part in Pongal festival in Hatton – Members of all three religions took part in the Tamil Pongal festival held in Hatton. The event was organised by the traders in Hatton.⁸⁵

Nine individuals who vandalised Buddha Statues were remanded (by U.R. Jayantha Senanayake) – The nine suspected individuals who were accused of vandalising Buddha statues in Mawanella were presented before Magistrate Upul Rajakaruna and were further remanded until 30 January. Seven suspects from the Kegalle prison were presented before court for the third time. The suspects who were arrested on 15 January, 2019 by the Mawanella police were also presented before the court. The complaint was led by Mawanella Police, and Attorney-at-Law Nimal Jayasinghe appeared before the court representing the party who support the rights of the Buddha statues.⁸⁶

Mawanella Statue vandalism: Seven suspects remanded further – The seven suspects who were arrested in connection with the vandalism of Buddha statues in Mawanella have been remanded further till 30 January. The order was given when they were produced before the Mawanella Magistrate's Court on 16 January. However, two brothers who are believed to be the main suspects behind the incident are still absconding.⁸⁷

⁸³ Lankadeepa, January 16, p. 1. ⁸⁴ Divania, January 16, p. 3.

⁸⁵ Uthayan, January 16, p. 2.

⁸⁶ Divaina, January 17, p. 2.

⁸⁷ Virakesari, January 17, p. 11.



A gang who create bombs nabbed in Puttlam - There are doubts that they had a plan to vandalise Buddha statues (by Hemantha Randunu Silva) – The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) arrested four individuals who were identified as members of an organised gang along with 100kg of explosives, detonators and other illegal equipment on 17 January, 2019. These explosives are used to produce bombs and were recovered on a coconut estate in Wanathawilluwa, Puttlam. Religious extremists who engaged in vandalising the Buddha statues in Mawanella were arrested and this recent discovery was found following information revealed by questioning them. Police suspect that these groups were trying to vandalise Buddha statues by producing small bombs in order to create racial conflict. The police investigations were initiated with the participation of the Deputy Inspector of Police of the CID, Ravi Senewiratne and Director of the CID Shani Abeysekara.⁸⁸

Retention orders for the individuals who were nabbed with the explosives (by Shrinath Prasanna and Nimanthi Ranasinghe) – The court gave permission to question the four individuals arrested with explosives and detonators detained by the Criminal Investigation Department. These explosives and detonators were hidden in a deserted house in Wanathawilluwa, Puttlam. They were recovered following information given by the suspects arrested in Mawanella for vandalising six Buddha statues. The police were unable to find the individual who pioneered the act of vandalising the Buddha statues, even though they got information that this individual is a resident of Wanathawilluwa and he and his brother are hiding in the area. Further investigations will be carried out in search of these two individuals. It was also revealed that the two brothers conducted classes for youth at the house where the explosives were found.⁸⁹

Not turning Mawanella to a ‘Digana’ and Sinhala – Muslim socialisation (by Tharaka Warapitiya) - A sense of relief exuded when the scene involving the destruction of Buddha statues in Mawanella was resolved through the legal intervention without erupting into a major cataclysmic event. This also reflects the fact that our society has matured enough to withstand these scenarios. It should be borne in mind that this incident was a conduct carried out by a vicious group operating beneath the open space as opposed to an organised conduct. The majority in the Muslim community deems that it is important to work in cooperation with the Sinhala society. They have understood that their economic prowess is based on the cooperation between them and the Sinhalese. Though a miniscule segment of the Muslim community are extremists, they can have a tremendous influence on the society. We expect more vigilance from the Muslim community in this regard. The profound task of identifying the extremist elements within their community while being attentive to the emergence of such extremist forces lies on their shoulder. There is also the need to refrain from indulging in conduct that attracts social ostracism such as wearing burka. It is required to subject such conduct to modernist –humanist transformation to prevent the emergence of cultural barriers between diverse

⁸⁸ Divaina, January 18, p. 1.

⁸⁹ Lankadeepa, January 19, p. 1.

communities living in a nation. Cultural identities should nurture and exalt human values instead of inducing their decline. After a racial conflict we envisage the proactive interventions that can successfully handle the conduct of extremist forces instead of holding talk shops on reconciliation. The positive changes prompted by such interventions in the Muslim society should be visible to the Sinhalese. In a backdrop where the leaders of the country are providing incentives to the regress of the society as, opposed to furthering intellectual discourses, it must be understood that blind beliefs distance communities rather than integrating them.⁹⁰

Religious extremist group brought the explosives to Wanathawilluwa (by Shrinath Jayasuriya)

— A senior police officer stated that there is information with regard to an extremist group who are hiding explosives and detonators in a coconut estate in Wanathawilluwa, Puttlam. Information has revealed that an individual, who is a leader of this extremist group, has conducted classes in the house situated in the coconut estate for the youth in the area. The police stated that the leader was excommunicated since he believed in extremist views. The police also stated that this individual was involved in the vandalism of Buddha statues in Mawanella. It was reported that they left the area since police are looking for them and their family.⁹¹

Discovery of the weapons in the North; do not look at in a political angle - Lankadeepa reported that the firearms and explosives recovered recently were new and were not used during war time. It also stated that the reason for keeping these weapons were unknown. The media reported that the incident occurred when some individuals tried to establish a Hindu temple by forcefully entering a Buddhist temple. As the police interfered, it did extend to a crisis. However, the public got to know how these extremists reacted through the media. This news report also stated that the public and the leaders fear that there will be another war. Because of the minor reaction, the leaders of the North interpreted this as ‘an act of our boys.’ Lankadeepa also stated the politicians only see political advantages.⁹²

Weapon storage of Wanathawilluwa is a rehearsal for LTTE act? (by Shrinath Prasanna Jayasundara)

- Information was revealed by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) about the leader of the vandalism of six Buddha statues in Mawanella and his brother. Seven have been arrested so far, and even though a powerful politician promised that he will hand over the suspect to a senior police officer, he has evaded it. However, hidden explosives were recovered during the investigation at the residence of the chief suspect. The individual known as the leader of the religious extremist group conducted classes for youth for a period of time. The police also stated that since he was a religious extremist, he was excommunicated. The police also stated that they were involved in vandalising the Buddha statues in Mawanella. It was also reported that they had left the area with their families since the police were searching for them.⁹³

⁹⁰ Divaina, January 19, p. 8.

⁹¹ Lankadeepa, January 20, p. 1.

⁹² Lankadeepa, January 20, p. 22.

⁹³ Lankadeepa, January 20, p. 3.

‘Pongu’ Tamil gangs try to replace Garukanda Raja Maha Viharaya to a Hindu temple (by Tharanga Ranaweera) – The extremism in the North against the Sinhala Buddhists has reached its highest point. It was clear from how the extremists behaved in the Gurukanda Temple. They created a tense situation inside the temple. This report also states how the Divaina reporter was treated by the head monk of the temple and his services for the development of Buddhism. The head monk stated that in 2014, provincial council members disrupted establishing a Buddha statue. However, the court gave permission for the establishment. The head monk also stated that he scolded the individuals who tried to place a foundation stone on Thai Pongal day. This report described the meaning of the word ‘pongala’. It further stated that if the extremist politicians of the North and East get police and land powers (federalism), massive destruction would be caused.⁹⁴

Who owns the Wanathawilluwa weapon store? (by Tharaka Wickramasekara) – Explosives were recovered after checking the mobile phones of suspects who were accused of vandalising six Buddha statues in Mawanella. The news report detailed the weapons that were recovered. It also stated that it is problematic that a number of weapons were recovered ten years after the end of the war. The article also described the discovery of guns and other equipment in Puliyankulama, Vavuniya and the murders committed by the suspects who were arrested. It also criticised the diaspora and its support to revive the LTTE and their attempt to act like a welfare organisation.⁹⁵

CID focuses on the 50 individuals who attempted to bomb Buddhist temples (by Hemantha Randunu) – The Criminal Investigation Department received information regarding 50 individuals who attempted to create communal unrest by bombing Buddhist temples. This information has been revealed from the suspects who were arrested with explosives and detonators in Wanathawilluwa. Seven individuals were already detained and another four were arrested following the information provided by the suspects arrested previously. The police also stated that the chief suspects have not been arrested yet.⁹⁶

Explosive store: politician is closely related to the two suspected brothers (by Shrinath Prasanna Jayasuriya) – A senior police officer stated that there is a close connection between the suspected brothers accused of vandalising Buddha statues in Mawanella and hiding 100kg of explosives and 700 detonators and a politician. This politician frequently called a senior police officer in Kegalle and promised to hand over the suspects, but he has not handed over them yet. The police have searched a house in Wanathawilluwa but they could not find the suspects. The news report also stated that former Minister of Justice Wijeyadasa Rajapaksa’s stated that 30 Sri Lankan extremists had gone to Syria to get ISIS military training.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Divaina, January 20, p. 3.

⁹⁵ Silumina, January 20, p. 5.

⁹⁶ Divaina, January 21, p. 1.

⁹⁷ Lankadeepa, January 21, p. 6.

“Even though a month has passed, the name of the Muslim politician who promised to hand over the suspects who vandalised the Buddha statues has not been revealed yet” - Jayantha Samaraweera (by Sujeewa Thathsara) - Member of the National Freedom Front Jayantha Samaraweera stated that Inspector General of Police should reveal the name of the Muslim politician who promised to hand over the suspects who vandalised the Buddha statues. He also stated that the government is paying ransom to separatist and extremist powers. The article reported that the Wanathawilluwa raid was conducted following a statement from the Muslim youths who were arrested for vandalising the Buddha statues in Mawanella.⁹⁸

Do not allow room for the extremists - The news article reported on the vandalism of Buddha statues in Mawanella on 26 December, 2018. The reporter appreciated the neutral attitude of the public towards the act done by a religious fanatic. It also stated that the intention of these extremists was to create unrest among the Buddhist community. Information revealed that the explosives found in Wanathawilluwa on 18 January were brought to bomb Buddhist temples. The report also stated that Prabhakaran, the fanatic, made a bloodbath and it was the politicians and soldiers that brought peace to the country. Furthermore, the news report stated that the names of individuals who commit crimes in the name of the religion should be revealed, and religious leaders should work together towards reconciliation.⁹⁹

Solution for Shanmuga’s Abaya issue (Karaithivu correspondent) – The problem of five teachers wearing Abaya in Trincomalee Shanmuga Hindu Ladies College created controversy last year. These teachers were posted temporarily at Kinniya and Trincomalee Zahira Vithyalayam. Since it is a national school, it comes under the purview of the ministry of education. The ministry of education, which intervened in the matter, suggested that the teachers be appointed to provincial schools, if they agreed. Accordingly, the teachers agreed to be transferred to provincial schools and will start work on 21 January.¹⁰⁰

Mullaitivu Neeraviyadi Pillayar Temple issue in court: Court issues warrant on temple administration and Buddhist monk – A case was filed in court regarding an incident where a group of people headed by a Buddhist monk obstructed Hindu devotees from worshipping at the Neeraviyadi Pillayar Temple in Nay Aru, Mullaitivu. The case was pertaining to an incident that occurred on 14 January when devotees were involved in poojas for the Pongal festival. In addition, the court was also informed that the Buddhist monk renamed the ancient temple ‘Ganadevi’ and that police had not conducted proper investigations into the complaint made regarding the name change. The case was postponed till 24 January.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Divaina, January 22, p. 7.

⁹⁹ Divaina, January 22, p. 8.

¹⁰⁰ Virakesari, January 22, p. 16.

¹⁰¹ Virakesari, January 22, p. 9.

Vandalising the Buddha statues: explosives recovered at the father's house of the fugitives (by Shrinath Prasanna Jayasuriya) – Mawanella police and the Kegalle Unsolved Crime Investigations Unit recovered explosives, masks, communication devices, air rifles, stocks of ammunition, and list of 13 names at the house of the father of the two suspected brothers who were arrested for vandalising Buddha statues in Mawanella.¹⁰²

The Buddhist temple built in the Semmalai Neeraviyadi temple is illegal: Revealed through Right to Information (by K. Kumanan) – According to information obtained through the Right to Information, it was revealed that the building of a Buddhist temple within the premises of Neeraviyadi Pillayar Temple, in Nayaru, Mullaitivu is illegal. The request for information was submitted on 14 September 2018 (Application number MU/MPP/DS/EB/Info/24). According to the information received, it was revealed that the Buddhist temple is not being built according to proper procedure.¹⁰³

Buddhist statue opened in haste in Mullaitivu (by K. Kumanan) – The Buddhist statue being built within the Neeraviyadi Pillayar Temple in Nayaru, Mullaitivu was opened in haste with the help of police and the Department of Archaeology. A tense situation arose on 14 January when a group headed by a Buddhist monk obstructed Hindu devotees from conducting poojas for the Pongal festival. However, the situation eased after the intervention of the police and security forces.¹⁰⁴

Mawanella Buddha statue vandalism issue: Father of main suspects detained – The father of the main suspects behind the vandalism of Buddha statues in Mawanella, Kandy, 50-year-old Rashid Mohammed Ibrahim was arrested by the Kegalle Unresolved Crimes Investigations Unit. The father of the suspects was taken to the Kegalle Police Station and questioned and then arrested for abetting the vandalism. In addition, four suspects connected with the incident continue to be interrogated.¹⁰⁵

“Broader investigations for vandalising the Buddha Statues in Mawanella” – Lakshman Kiriella (by Swarna Wijekon, Roshana Thushara, Subhashini Senanayake) – Responding to a question raised by MP Wimal Weerawansa, Leader of the House Lakshman Kiriella stated on 23 January that the investigation regarding the explosives recovered at the house of the suspected youths who were arrested for vandalising the Buddha statues in Mawanella will be expedited. He also stated that the investigations will be done transparently. MPs of the United National Party requested not to create a tense situation in the country by politicising the issue.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Lankadeepa, January 23, p. 1.

¹⁰³ Virakesari, January 23, p. 9.

¹⁰⁴ Virakesari, January 24, p. 1.

¹⁰⁵ Virakesari, January 24, p. 2.

¹⁰⁶ Divaina, January 24, p. 7.

Vandalism of Buddha statues in Mawanella – Extensive inquiry related to seized weapons - Leader of the House Lakshman Kiriella (by Shams Fahim and Maheswaran Prasad) – Leader of the House Minister Lakshman Kiriella stated that an extensive inquiry is being carried out into weapons that were seized from the homes of the youth who were arrested for vandalising Buddha statues in Mawanella. He also stated that it was possible for police to find these weapons because of the investigations related to this incident continuously carried out by the police. He stated in parliament that the inquiries were being carried out fairly, without concealing any information. United Peoples Freedom Alliance (UPFA) Parliamentarian Wimal Weerawansa leveled accusations in parliament that weapons were seized from the house of a Muslim in the Mawanella area and before those, in the Puttalam area. He also said that there was suspicion that these weapons were brought through international backing and requested that an inquiry be held into this and announced in parliament. It was in response to this that Minister Lakshman Kiriella said the above. In the meantime, Deputy Minister Nalin Bandara said that Wimal Weerawansa had put forward views amounting to racism, and went on to say that it is wrong for anyone to be in possession of arms. ¹⁰⁷

Buddhist statue opened in Nayaru, Neeraviyadi area yesterday (23 January) – The Buddhist statue being built within the Neeraviyadi Pillayar Temple in Nayaru, Mullaitivu was opened on 23 January. The statue was opened with the help of the Department of Archaeology. A tense situation arose on 14 January when a group headed by a Buddhist monk obstructed Hindu devotees from conducting poojas for the Pongal festival. ¹⁰⁸

Steps to convert popular Hindu temples as sacred areas – Minister of Hindu Affairs Mano Ganesan said that he will submit a proposal to the cabinet to declare popular Hindu temples island-wide as sacred areas. He made this statement when he visited the Thiruketheeswaram Temple in Mannar on 23 January. ¹⁰⁹

Seven arrested for capturing photos while standing on the Kiralagala Stupa (by Rakshana Shriyantha) – The police arrested seven students of the South Eastern University for capturing photographs while standing on the ruined stupa at the archaeological site of Kiralagala, Horowpathana. They shared these photos on social media. The officers of the archaeology department complained to the police. Director General of the department of the archaeology stated that he received information that students of the South Eastern University were involved in this. According to the Antiquities Ordinance, it is a criminal act. This temple situated in Kiralagala, Horowpathana is an archaeological site. It is believed to belong to the 4th and 5th centuries. ¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Thinakaran, January 24, p. 1.

¹⁰⁸ Uthayan, January 24, p. 1.

¹⁰⁹ Uthayan, January 24, p. 2.

¹¹⁰ Dinamina, January 24, p. 13.

Group of police officers to capture the seven students who climbed Kiralagala stupa (by Chaminda Silva) – A senior police officer stated that seven students of South Eastern University who climbed the Kiralagala Stupa of Horowpathana were identified. He also stated that a group of police officers have been sent to Ampara to arrest them, following a statement from an archaeological officer of the Kiralagala site in the Anuradhapura Archaeological zone on 24 January. The news report also stated that there is no name board for this archaeological site and the security guard is a Muslim person. The second largest pond and ruins of an ancient hospital are situated at this site. The senior officer also stated that there is report that these students damaged the site. Investigations have started, following the orders of the Assistant Superintendent of Police of Horowpathana Senaka B. Jayasinghe, under the guidance of the officer in-charge Inspector Roshan Sanjeewa.¹¹¹

“Broader investigations for vandalising the Buddha Statues in Mawanella” – Lakshman Kiriella (by Kushan Subhasinghe and Akitha Perera) - Responding to a question raised by MP Wimal Weerawansa, Leader of the House Lakshman Kiriella stated on 23 January that the investigation regarding the explosives recovered at the house of the suspected youths who were arrested for vandalising the Buddha statues in Mawanella will be expedited. When Weerawansa pointed out that this was a serious incident, Kiriella stated that Muslims and Sinhala people want to work in a coexistence, and he too condemned the extremist’s acts. He added that the investigations will be conducted fairly. ¹¹²

Eight engineering students who climbed the stupa arrested (by Pathum Darshna, Horowpathana) - The police stated that they have arrested eight individuals who shared photos while standing on a stupa after entering the Kiralagala archaeological site in Horowpathana. They were arrested in Ampara and Akkareipaththuwa on 23 January. These students are final year students of the faculty of engineering at the South Eastern University. The archaeological officer of Kiralagala, Sumith Bandara, filed a complaint with the Horowpathana police. The suspects informed the police that they visited their friend’s house in Horowpathana and visited the archaeological site of Kiralagala on 5 January, 2019. The suspects stated that they did not realise the seriousness of the situation and if they had understood it before, they would never have uploaded the pictures to social media. The suspects will be presented before the Magistrate's court of Kabathigollawa on 25 January, 2019.¹¹³

Vandalising the Buddha statues: 72-hour retention orders for the father of the suspects (by Nimanthi Ranasinghe) - Mawanella Magistrate Upul Rajakaruna granted permission to the Criminal Investigation Department of the Kegalle Unsolved Crime Unit to detain and question the father of the suspect who vandalise the Buddha statues in Mawanella, as per the Prevention of Terrorism Act. It was also reported that a rifle and other equipment were recovered at the suspects’ house.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Divaina, January 24, p. 1.

¹¹² Dinamina, January 24, p. 1.

¹¹³ Lankadeepa, January 24, p. 1.

¹¹⁴ Lankadeepa, January 24, p. 12.

“Broader investigations on the weapons recovered at the houses of the suspected who were involved in vandalising the Buddha Statues” – Lakshman Kiriella speaks at the parliament (By Ariyaratna Ranabhahu and Sujith Hewa Julige) – Responding to a question raised by MP Wimal Weerawansa, Leader of the House Lakshman Kiriella stated on 23 January that the investigation regarding the explosives recovered at the house of the suspected youths who were arrested for vandalising the Buddha statues in Mawanella will be expedited. He also stated that the investigations will be done transparently. MPs of the United National Party requested not to create a tense situation in the country by politicising the issue.¹¹⁵

No one to stop the spread of Buddhism – The editorial discusses the incidents at the Neeraviyadi Pillayar Temple in Mullaitivu and the opening of the Buddha statue within the temple premises on 23 January. The editorial alleges that the Department of Archaeology also played a role in this development. In addition, it also highlights other instances such as the opening of a pilgrims resting place in Iluppaiyadi named Buddhist Youth Organisation. The editorial also claims that monks are attempting to claim ownership and take over said land and building. The editorial mentions these instances as forcible Buddhistisation and points out that nothing has been done to curb the spread. ¹¹⁶

Mullaitivu Court orders Archaeology Department Director to appear in court – The Mullaitivu Court ordered the Director of the Department of Archaeology to appear before court over the case of building a Buddha statue within the premises of Mullaitivu, Neeraviyadi Pillayar Temple. The court also ordered that no work be done within the temple premises until 12 February. The court was informed that according to information received through the Right to Information, the building of the statue was illegal. ¹¹⁷

Neeraviyadi Buddhist statue hurts the Tamils – condemns Thavarasa – Former Opposition Leader of the Northern Provincial Council S. Thavarasa condemned the building of a Buddhist statue within the Neeraviyadi Pillayar Temple premises in Mullaitivu and stated that the act hurts the Tamil people. He stated that the act was another dimension of the invasive actions of the Department of Archaeology in the North. ¹¹⁸

A politician behind the vandalising Buddha statues – broader investigations are in progress (by Wijayani Edirisinghe) – The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) suspects that there is a powerful politician from the Colombo District and several others behind the vandalism of Buddha statues incidents. A list of 13 names were found at the residence of the chief suspect and seven of the individuals were identified and arrested. The CID has attempted to identify whether there is a connection between these individuals and foreign or any other organisation. The article also reported on the vandalism incident that took place in Mawanella and stated that there was a similar incident that took place in Kurunegala. It also reported that the main suspects are brothers. Descriptions of the equipment recovered in Wanathawilluwa was also described in the article.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Lankadeepa, January 24, p. 14.

¹¹⁶ Uthayan, January 24, p. 18.

¹¹⁷ Uthayan, January 25, p. 1.

¹¹⁸ Uthayan, January 25, p. 1.

¹¹⁹ Dinamina, January 25, p. 10.

Eight South Eastern University students who climbed the stupa remanded (by Pathum Darshana and Upali Ananda) – The police stated that they arrested eight Muslim students of the South Eastern University who shared photos while standing on a stupa after entering the Kiralagala archaeological site in Horowpathana. The attorney who represents the students requested the release of the university students as they needed to sit for an exam. The request was rejected, and they were arrested. However, they were promised that they would be allowed to sit the exam.¹²⁰

Cynics who disrespect the heritage of the country – This editorial describes the incident of seven youths who climbed up the Kiralagala Stupa and captured photos and shared them on social media. It states that since it was an archaeological site, these students were arrested. It further states that these students are residents of Ampara and Trincomalee. It adds that there is an uncivilised minority, even though there are no religious and ethnic divisions in the country. The youths who committed this crime should be banished after punishing them for the shameful act they committed. This is not an act of ignorance. The editorial further questioned the expectations of this disgraceful act. It stated that these students have spread the message that ‘this is our way, do whatever you want.’¹²¹

Eight students of the South Eastern University who climbed the Kiralagala stupa remanded (by Ranga Chathu) - The police stated that they arrested eight Muslim students of the South Eastern University who shared photos while standing on a stupa after entering the Kiralagala archaeological site in Horowpathana. The attorney who represents the students requested the release of the university students as they needed to sit for an exam. The request was rejected, and they were arrested. However, they were promised that they would be allowed to sit the exam.¹²²

Raviharan growls at the Nayaru Temple of Mullaitivu again (by Dinasena Rathugamage) – A crisis situation was created again over the Buddha statues and sacred Bo trees in the Northern Province. Member of the Northern Provincial Council of the Tamil National Alliance T. Raviharan stated that the Buddha statue and the temple of Nayaru Gurukanda should be removed from its place since it was not a temple in Mullaitivu before. He stated that he would file a court case against the head of the temple and the authorities, including the archaeological department, if they do not remove the newly placed Buddha statue. He also stated that this Buddha statue was placed in the way of a Hindu temple, and that devotees were inconvenienced by it. He also stated that there are Buddha statues and structures to place the Buddha statues constructed on the recently released lands in Mullaitivu. These lands were handed over to the public by President Maithripala Sirisena recently.¹²³

¹²⁰ Lankadeepa, January 25, p. 1.

¹²¹ Lankadeepa, January 25, p. 4.

¹²² Divaina, January 25, p. 1.

¹²³ Diviana, January 25, p. 9

Pictures taken on top of Kiralagala Cheithiya: Eight youths remanded – Eight youths, who posted photos taken on top of the ruins of Kiralagala Cheithiya in Horowpothana on social media, were remanded till 5 February by the Kebithigollewa Magistrate today, Police Spokesman SP Ruwan Gunasekara said. He said seven suspects were arrested by the Horowpothana Police last evening while another suspect was arrested this morning. He said the youths, who are final year students of the South Eastern University's engineering faculty, were arrested within university premises.¹²⁴

The construction of the ancient temple of Nayaru has been halted by the court (by Sithum Chathuranga) - Mullaitivu Magistrate Lenin Kumara ordered the halt of construction activities of the Nayaru Gurukanda Raja Maha Viharaya temporarily. He also ordered calling a report from the director general of the department of archaeology on the matter. This restriction order was implemented by the magistrate as there was a violation of peace because of the tense situation that occurred between the two parties who were involved in this. Even though the attorney representing the defendant stated that construction can be done as there is a legal right for construction activities, they was temporarily halted.¹²⁵

Construction of Gurukanda temple stopped on court order (by Romesh Madhushanka) – Mullaitivu Magistrate S. Lenin Kumara ordered that all construction work on the Gurukanda Purana Rajamaha Viharaya in Nay Aru, Mullaitivu be stopped till 12 February, 2019. The magistrate gave this order after considering the petition filed by the Mullaitivu Police stating that a mob forcibly entered the temple on 14 January and attempted to lay a foundation stone for the construction of a Kovil. This case was postponed to 12 February and the magistrate asked for a report issued by the commissioner general of archaeology and the relevant gazette notice on this date. Ven. Medhalankarakiththi Thera said the Sacred Tooth Relic was brought to the place where the present Nay Aru Temple is situated. "There are historic records with reference to this temple from 244 BC. There were about five dagobas here, but they were destroyed during the war," the Thera said. He said he had come to the temple about eight years ago.¹²⁶

Incident of vandalising the Buddha statues: Investigations to probe who deposited money in the bank accounts of the two brothers (by Shrinath Prasanna Jayasuriya) - Mawanella police stated that it was revealed that there is a hundred thousand in the bank accounts of the two suspected brothers involved in the vandalism of Buddha statues in Mawanella. Five receipts were recovered at the house of the suspects' father. Investigations were carried out to find who deposited the money in these bank accounts. This report also stated the weapons recovered in Wanathawilluwa. The article also stated that there were classes on religious principals conducted at this residence.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Daily Mirror, January 25, p. 6.

¹²⁵ Lankadeepa, January 26, p. 1.

¹²⁶ Daily Mirror, January 26, p. 1.

¹²⁷ Lankadeepa, January 26, p. 6.

The incidents of Pidurangala, Kiralagala and our youth – This editorial explained about the three youths who took half naked photos while standing on Pidurangala in Sigiriya, and how these photos circulated on social media. It further explained the arrest of these youths and stated that it is similar to the situation that occurred in Kiralagala, Horowpathana. Comparing the two incidents, the editorial stated that some youths do not respect cultural aspects of the country. It pointed out that in both the situations, the youth involved are intelligent. However, the writer stated that there is religious and social deterioration in current society. It further stated that the youth should take all measures not to repeat those mistakes.¹²⁸

Extremist karma which destroys the Buddhist heritage of Mullaitivu (by Punya Ekanayake) - A tense situation was created on 23 January, as several individuals who called themselves politicians entered the temple premises of the Gurukanda Raja Maha Viharaya forcefully. This incident occurred when the opening ceremony unveiling the Buddha statue took place. It was a great regret that Tamil journalists were engaged in violating media ethics while reporting on the incident. The villagers are the ones who become helpless because of these acts. The writer noted that Mullaitivu Gurukanda Purana Rajamaha Viharaya is a fresh path to reconciliation.¹²⁹

The Wahab meadow which was scheduled to be established in Wanathawilluwa (by Udesha Sanjeewa Gamage) – This article quoted section four of the Dabiq magazine published by ISIS in November 2015. It stated that the International Police Intelligence found information about an individual called Abu Shurah Silani, who worked for ISIS. The Terrorism Prevention Force of India stated that there might be an ISIS agent of Sri Lanka. When questioning the executive officer of the IOC, who was arrested by the Indian Terrorism Prevention Agency, information was revealed about a 16-year-old Pune student involved with ISIS and the ISIS agent of Sri Lanka. The authorities disregarded these facts. These incidents were reported as isolated incidents with no connection to each other. This report further discussed the vandalism of the Buddha statues in Mawanella and Kurunegala and the recovery of explosives in Wanathawilluwa. It stated that Muslim terrorism has become a huge issue in Muslim countries as well as non- Muslim countries. In addition to the LTTE, ISIS, Al-Qaeda, Hamas, and Wahabis are considered the dangerous terrorist groups with extremist views.¹³⁰

The group of individuals of South Eastern University who stood on a stupa (by Ashika Jayaweera) - Kiralagala, Horowpathana is an archaeological site. This article criticised the act of the university students of the South Eastern University capturing photos while standing on the stupa and the circulation of pictures on social media. It stated that they uploaded these photos expecting likes and comments. The officer in charge of the archaeological site of Kiralagala, Anuradhapura complained about this. It also criticised the security guard who encouraged these individuals without taking action against them.¹³¹

¹²⁸ Divaina, January 26, p. 6.

¹²⁹ Divaina, January 27, p. 3.

¹³⁰ Divaina, January 27, p. 5.

¹³¹ Divaina, January 27, p. 19.

Cynics who disrespect the religion and culture (by Dhanu Wijeratne) – Before the heat faded on social media about the incident of three youths taking half naked photos climbing to the top of Pidurangala, the incident of the arrest of youth in Horowpathana was reported. It was reported that the two incidents are similar. Comparing the two incidents, the report stated that youth do not respect the culture of the country. It pointed out that in both the situations, the youth involved are intelligent. However, the writer stated that there is religious and social deterioration in current society. It further stated that the youth should take all measures not to repeat those mistakes.¹³²

Religious extremist group brought explosives to Wanathawilluwa (by Shrinath Prasanna Jayasuriya) – It was revealed that a religious extremist group is behind the incident of the recovery of explosives and detonators buried in a coconut estate in Wanathawilluwa. Information was revealed that the leader of the extremist group conducted classes for the youth in the area. The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) conducted broader investigations in order to arrest these perpetrators. It was revealed that these suspects left Mawanella with their families and lived on a coconut estate in Wanathawilluwa.¹³³

Sajith orders probe, renovation of vandalised temple (by I.A. Kumara) – Housing, Construction and Cultural Affairs Minister Sajith Premadasa instructed the Archaeological Department director to take appropriate action to inquire into the incident and renovate the Talgahagoda Raja Maha Viharaya which was vandalised with some Buddha statues removed. The temple is one of historical and archaeological value as it is claimed to be a temple that provided talpath needed to compose the Tripitakaya, or sacred writing of the Buddha, at the Aluvihare Temple in Matale. It is claimed that the temple was constructed during the reign of King Walagamba. Speaking to the media, the monk in charge of the Aluvihare Temple said that on the directive of Minister Premadasa, steps are being taken to do the needful.¹³⁴

Dangerous conspiracy to destroy Muslims – alleges Rishad Bathiudeen – Minister Rishad Bathiudeen said that a dangerous conspiracy was unfolding to link actions by a few Muslim individuals to ISIS. The minister, speaking at an event, stated that in over 50 Islamic countries, there was no peaceful environment in over 90 percent of them. He pointed out that other communities had the wrong perception of Islam. He pointed out that the actions of Muslims should reflect the good qualities of their religion.¹³⁵

¹³² Lankadeepa, January 27, p. 3.

¹³³ Lankadeepa, January 27, p. 16.

¹³⁴ Daily News, 27 January, p.2.

¹³⁵ Uthayan, January 28, p. 5.

The monks of the temple of Batticaloa protest against removing its security - Police security has been provided again (by Wasantha Chandrapala) - Ven. Sumanarathana Thera, head of the Mangalarama Viharaya, Batticaloa engaged in a protest against removing the police security entailed to the Batticaloa Temple. Several other monks also joined the protest. It took place on 27 January. A tense situation arose because of the claim of providing police security could not be performed that moment. Several monks including Ven. Sumanarathana Thera protested, sitting on the street. Officers of the Batticaloa Police reported the matter to senior officials. Therefore, Deputy Inspector General of Ampara-Batticaloa Nuwan Wedasighe informed the relevant authorities to provide security.¹³⁶

Sri Pada pilgrimages: Musical instruments banned (by Gamini Bandara Illanganthilake) – Nallathanni Police instructed a salesman to discontinue the sale of drums to pilgrims climbing the Sri Pada mountain recently. He was instead urged to sell items better suited for religious observances. Nallathanni Police OIC IP Laksiri Fernando said that people visiting the mountain with musical instruments were disturbing pilgrims.¹³⁷

“There is no need to construct Buddhist temples on ancient temple premises: The director general in charge of the Gurukanda archeological site is trying to cover up everything” – Prof. Madagoda Abhayatissa Thera (by Winatha M. Gamage) - Prof. Madagoda Abhayatissa Thera stated that the director general in charge of the Nayaru Gurukanda archaeological site has been trying to emphasise that the Gurukanda archaeological site is not an archaeological site. He also stated that it was claimed as an archaeological site by a gazette. Furthermore, he stated that he would take court action against it, if necessary. All the Muslims and Hindu should allow listening to Dhamma, but it should not be allowed to build a Hindu temple on Buddhist temple premises.¹³⁸

Incident of vandalising nine Buddha statues: 11 suspects remanded until the 13th (by Saman Wijaya Bandara and Aranayaka Pradeep Kumara Dharmaratne) – Mawanella Magistrate Upul Rajakaruna has ordered further remanding of the 11 suspects accused of vandalising nine Buddha statues in Mawanella until 13 February. However, the father of the chief suspect was arrested as the chief suspects could not be arrested. The information revealed the chief suspects at every court hearing, therefore the arrested individuals were remanded for 14 days after every hearing. Two Sinhala and Muslim attorneys, outside Mawanella, are representing the suspects and every attorney in Mawanella is representing against the suspects.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Lankadeepa, January 29, p. 1.

¹³⁷ Daily News, January 29, p. 12.

¹³⁸ Lankadeepa, January 30, p. 12.

¹³⁹ Dinamina, January 31, p. 3.

Incident of vandalising nine Buddha statues: the suspects had gained T-56 weapon training-CID informs the court (by Nimanthi Ranasinghe and Pradeep Kumara Dharmaratne) - Mawanella Magistrate Upul Rajakaruna has ordered further remanding the 11 suspects accused of vandalising nine Buddha statues in Mawanella until 13 February. However, the father of the chief suspect was arrested as the chief suspects could not be arrested. The information revealed the chief suspects at every court hearing, therefore the arrested individuals were remanded for 14 days after every hearing. Two Sinhala and Muslim attorneys who are from outside Mawanella are representing the suspects and every attorney in Mawanella is representing against the suspects. It was revealed that the attorneys representing the suspects spoke in favour of them.¹⁴⁰

Tallest Buddha statue in Batticaloa: Construction work commences (by Sivam Packiyathan) – Construction work on the tallest Buddha statue in the Batticaloa District at Mahindaramaya, Mayelankarachchi in the Koralai Pattu West, Valaichchenai has commenced. The 60-foot statue is the tallest in Batticaloa. Tamil, Sinhala, and Muslim people live in harmony in Batticaloa. This is evidence of reconciliation between communities, said Mahindaramaya Chief Incumbent Ven. Kaddukasthoda Mahindalangara Thera.¹⁴¹

TNA politicians threaten the Theras of the Mullaitivu Pemaduwa Temple (by Dinasena Rathugamage) - Politicians of Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and eight youths threatened the Theras of the Pemadu Viharaya, Mullaithivu on 31 January. There are three Theras residing at this temple. Some of the Buddhist devotees said that this temple is a place of worship of the Buddhists. There was only one Thera at the temple when the incident occurred. The tooth relic was also placed at this temple for some period of time. They explained to the members of the TNA that this was recognised as a Buddhist temple in 1955.¹⁴²

The suspects who attacked the Buddha statues of Mawanella remanded (by R. Jayantha Senanayake) - Mawanella Magistrate Upul Rajakaruna has ordered further remanding of the 11 suspects accused of vandalising nine Buddha statues in Mawanella until 13 February. However, the father of the chief suspect was arrested as the chief suspects could not be arrested. The information revealed the chief suspects at every court hearing, therefore the arrested individuals were remanded for 14 days after every hearing. Two Sinhala and Muslim attorneys who are from outside Mawanella are representing the suspects and every attorney in Mawanella is representing against the suspects.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Lankadeepa, January 31, p. 1.

¹⁴¹ Daily News, January 31, p. 8.

¹⁴² Diviana, January 31, p. 2.

¹⁴³ Divaina, January 31, p. 15.