



#MINORMATTERS



UNDERSTANDING PRESS COVERAGE ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

PERIOD COVERED : JUNE 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 Digana (2018)⁴ and most recently in Kurunegala/Minuwangoda (May 2019)⁵ demonstrate the extent and frequency of this type of violence.

This report is the seventh 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 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>.

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

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

Press reports on religious freedom that appeared during the month of June 2019 were monitored. The following 13 daily and weekend newspapers in the two local languages—Sinhala and 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 of the daily Sinhala and Tamil newspapers respectively. *Divaina* has the second highest readership of the daily Sinhala newspapers. *Sunday Observer* and *Daily News* have the highest readership of the weekend and daily English newspapers respectively. *Daily Mirror* has the second highest readership of the daily English newspapers.

Anidda was selected, despite the absence of its readership data, as its content generally differs from coverage in the mainstream press, and therefore can be considered as providing alternative insights into events. Likewise, *Uthayan*, a Jaffna-based publication, was selected, despite the absence of its readership data, as it is a regional publication.

⁶ Article 10 of the Sri Lanka Constitution.

⁷ Article 12 (2) and article 27 (6) of the Sri Lanka Constitution. ⁸ Article 12 (3) of the Sri Lanka Constitution.

⁹ Article 14 (1) (e) of the Sri Lanka Constitution.



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.

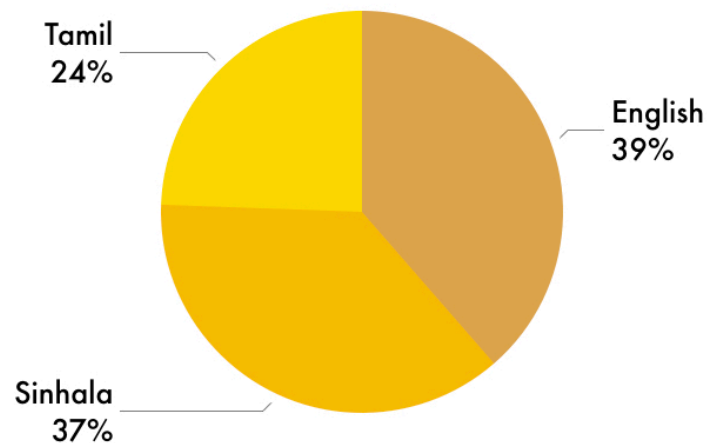
- In these newspapers, articles that had a bearing on religious freedom were selected for assessment of the tonality of the reporting. These articles included:¹⁰
- Articles that referred to instances of physical violence that were religiously motivated, or targeted religious communities, figures or sites;
- Articles that referred to or contained speech prompting physical violence or threatening remarks targeted at religious communities, leaders or institutions; and
- Articles that discussed court cases, laws or regulations pertaining to religious freedom.

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

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

NUMBER OF ARTICLES CARRIED IN PRESS

English | Sinhala | Tamil
June 2019



For the month of June 2019, a total of 438 articles relating to religious freedom were carried in the English, Sinhala and Tamil newspapers that were monitored. Of this total, 39 per cent (169 articles) were carried in the English newspapers. Meanwhile, Sinhala and Tamil newspapers accounted for 37 per cent (162 articles) and 24 per cent (107 articles) of the total coverage respectively.

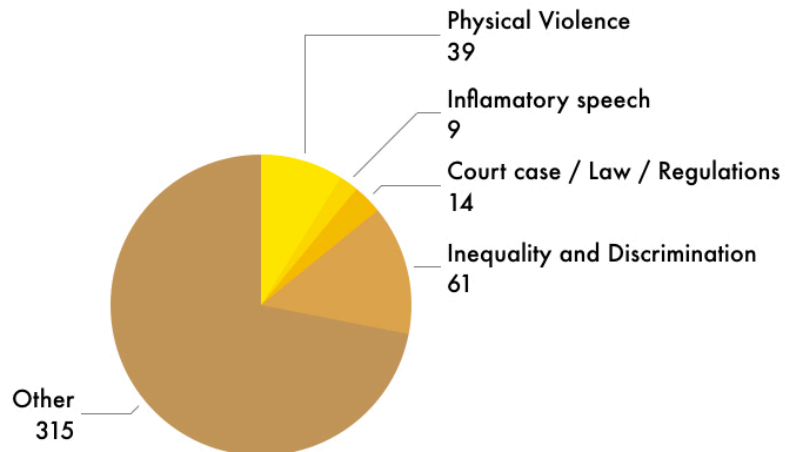
Religious freedom was discussed under the following five themes:

- a) Physical violence;
- b) Inflammatory speech;
- c) Court cases/law/regulations;
- d) Inequality and discrimination; and
- e) Other related reporting.

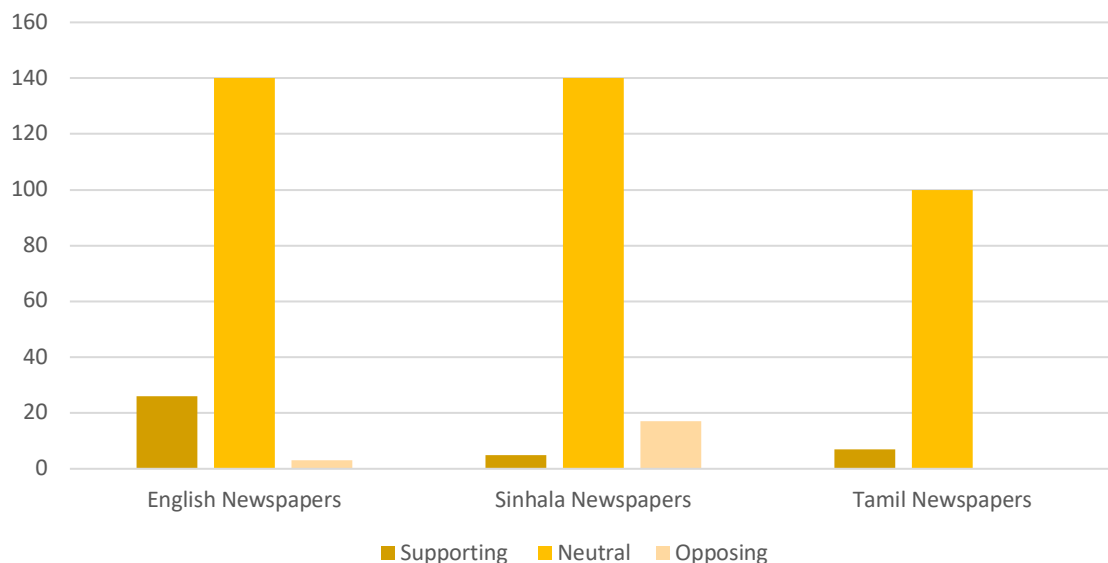


NUMBER OF ARTICLES PERTAINING TO RELIGIOUS FREEDOM BY THEME

June 2019

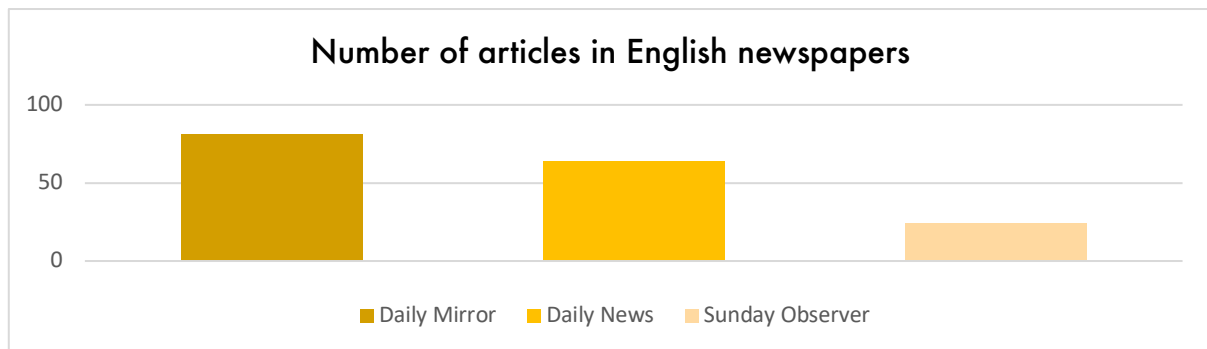


Sentiment in reportage by local language press



- Of the 169 articles in the English newspapers, 26 articles were in support of religious freedom, while 140 articles were neutral and 3 articles opposed religious freedom.
- Of the 162 articles in the Sinhala newspapers, 5 articles were in support of religious freedom, while 140 articles were neutral and 17 articles opposed religious freedom.
- Of the 107 articles in the Tamil newspapers, 7 articles were in support of religious freedom and 100 articles were neutral on religious freedom.

Coverage in English newspapers



English Newspapers	No. of Articles	Reportage		
		Supporting	Neutral	Opposing
Daily News	64	13	51	-
Daily Mirror	81	9	69	3
Sunday Observer	24	4	24	-
Total	169	26	140	3

English newspapers carried 169 articles that had a bearing on religious freedom. 26 articles were in support of religious freedom, while 140 articles were neutral, and 3 articles opposed religious freedom.

- The **26 articles in support of religious freedom** were as follows:
- An editorial in the *Daily News* condemns the lawyers who refused to represent the Muslims who were arrested in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday attacks. It also condemns the systematic boycott of all Muslim owned stores, businesses and restaurants. The editorial concludes by warning the public to not alienate the domestic or international Islamic community. It also advocates members of the public to let the relevant authorities handle the situation instead of resorting to 'extreme' measures such as boycotting and fasting-unto-death.¹¹

¹¹ *Daily News*, June 4, p. 6.



- A long opinion article in the *Daily News* discusses the roles played by stereotypes and prejudices against the Sri Lankan Muslim community in the spread of hate speech and incitement of communal tensions. The article concludes by condemning actions that may be categorised as 'Islamophobic'. These actions include sensationalist stories about police raids, and the pardoning of a 'racist' monk. The writer of the article urges the government to resist such sentiment, similar to the manner in which other nations have pulled together following terror attacks. For instance, the municipal government of Spain put in place a shock plan to combat rejection and discrimination towards the Muslim community following an attack by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in Barcelona in 2017.¹²
- A long opinion article in the *Daily News* condemns the use of acts such as hunger strikes that could pressure the government into complying with the demands of the Sinhalese community. The article states that such hunger strikes are akin to the suicide-attacks, which resulted in furthering religious and ethnic divisions. The article concludes that individuals who hold ultra-nationalist or extremist views and witnesses such actions may be prone to participating in fasts themselves for a 'cause' that they perceive to be 'sacred'.¹³
- A long opinion article written by United National Party (UNP) MP Mangala Samaraweera in the *Daily News* outlines two main points: (1) many individuals who hold positions of political power, i.e., members of the clergy and certain politicians and businessmen, try to retain their power by promoting divisive politics; and (2) groups such as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), and more recently, the Islamic State (IS), follows the same patterns as certain political actors. He affirms that the UNP stands by the victims of the Easter Sunday attacks and urges the people to speak out against extremism. He highlights that it is the duty of all Sri Lankans, especially Buddhists, to stand up against those who incite violence in the name of the Buddha. Samaraweera concludes by mentioning that he is a devout Buddhist and cites that he practices its tenets.^{14 15}
- □An editorial in the *Daily News* claims that the rhetoric and actions of certain Buddhist monks and members of the Opposition have further alienated the Muslim community. It concludes that it is important to take

12 *Daily News*, June 4, p. 6.

13 *Daily News*, June 5, p. 10.

14 *Daily News*, June 6, p. 8.

15 *Sunday Observer*, June 9, p. 9.



- measures towards the de-escalation of inter-communal tensions. It underscores that the president, prime minister and religious leaders must play a positive role in these measures.¹⁶
- A short opinion article in the *Daily Mirror* claims that the violent events after the Easter Sunday attacks indicates the lack of emphasis on developing a common identity in a multi-ethnic country. The article commends His Eminence Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith's message of peace after the attacks, and the Mahanayake Thera's appeal to Muslim ministers to resume their portfolios. However, it condemns two groups: (1) the government and the Joint Opposition (JO) are criticised for not taking a firm stance against the growth of extremism; (2) the police are criticised for allegedly taking the law into their hands and making arbitrary arrests under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).¹⁷
- An opinion article in the *Daily Mirror* criticises Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thera for inciting anti-Muslim sentiments and further claims that, "this UNP government does not want to challenge this extremely-dangerous usurping of political power that Minister Mangala Samaraweera is challenging on his own". The author concludes by noting that these conflicts will possibly enable a Buddhist theocratic state to emerge.¹⁸
- A short opinion article in the *Daily News* questions as to why Muslims are being pressed to display Vesak lanterns in mosques when Sri Lanka is a democratic nation. The author proceeds to condemn anti-Muslim attacks, and states that the government must adopt a strong stance in preventing such attacks. The author mentions the concerns and advice expressed by international actors. In light of these points, the author urges the public to be cautious, as well as united and supportive of each other.¹⁹
- A long opinion article in the *Daily Mirror* calls for security measures to be implemented in the island in a fair manner. The article also elaborates on previous fasts-unto-death that were carried out in 2003 and 2005 by Ven. Omalpe Sobitha Thera. The author claims that these fasts were overlooked in the past. However, the author outlines that Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thera capitalised on the current social climate through his

¹⁶ *Daily News*, June 7, p. 6.

¹⁷ *Daily Mirror*, June 7, p. A8.

¹⁸ *Daily Mirror*, June 7, p. A10.

¹⁹ *Daily News*, June 8, p. 5.



hunger strike in order to be characterised as a ‘national hero’ among Sinhala nationalists and extremists.²⁰

- An editorial in the *Daily News* opines that the measures taken by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe to establish a national religious reconciliation board to eliminate misunderstandings and mistrust between religious groups is apt and timely. The editorial claims that had this body existed previously, several tense situations, including the tensions in Aluthgama, could have been avoided.²¹
- A short opinion article in the *Daily Mirror* newspaper explains that Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism grew as a reaction to colonialism as well as due to the manipulation of a frustrated Sinhala working class population by Sinhala nationalist political actors. The author mentions that a side- effect of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism was the first recorded Sinhala- Muslim riots in 1915.²²
- A short opinion article in the *Daily News* labels the Easter Sunday attackers as “apostates of Islam”. It expresses the Muslim community’s shock and sadness due to the Easter Sunday attacks. The article also opines that more open discussions are required in the mainstream press to avoid any misunderstandings about the Islamic faith. It also claims that such open discussions could create an environment that is conducive to religious freedom and co-existence.²³
- A short opinion article in the *Daily News* cautions about the dangers of confusing Wahhabism, which is cited as an “Islamophobic construction of the West”. It also notes that the response from non-Muslim communities following the Easter Sunday attacks has mainly been commentary that calls on the Muslim community to change their lifestyle to suit normative cultural practices. The author states that while terrorist or extremist Islamist groups should be disbanded, moderate groups that preach the ‘genuine’ teachings of Islam should not be “touched”.²⁴
- A short opinion article in the *Daily Mirror* discusses the commentary surrounding the resignation of the Muslims MPs. The author characterises the pressure placed on the MPs as a form of “demonisation and vilification

20 *Daily Mirror*, June 10, p. A9.

21 *Daily News*, June 11, p. 6.

22 *Daily Mirror*, June 11, p. A10.

23 *Daily News*, June 13, p. 11.

24 *Daily News*, June 14, p. 11.



of Islam and Sri Lankan Muslims by the media and the members of the Opposition”.²⁵

- A short opinion article in the *Sunday Observer* highlights the prevalence of anti-Muslim sentiments and the ways in which Muslims have been mistreated since the Easter Sunday terror attacks. One such example of anti-Muslim sentiments is the boycotting of Muslim-owned shops. Whilst criticising such anti-Muslim sentiments, the author writes that “intra- Muslim violence brings neither credit nor credibility to anyone. It only spreads what it expects to stop”.²⁶
- A short opinion article in the *Daily Mirror* criticises the radicalisation of both the Sinhala-Buddhist community as well as the Sri Lankan Moor community. The author warns that these conditions will lead to an ‘othering’ of the Muslim youth, thereby driving them towards religious extremism. Within the context of this article, the state is blamed for failing to acknowledge Sri Lanka’s multi-ethnic demographic reality.²⁷
- A short opinion article in the *Daily News* writes that Sri Lankan Muslims were also among the victims of the Easter Sunday attacks. The article cautions against an alleged Sinhala nationalist view that conflates all Sri Lanka Muslims with global Islamist terrorist groups. The author urges readers to collectively stand against such views and accept the Muslim community as a part of Sri Lankan society.²⁸
- An editorial in the *Sunday Observer* speculates that the alleged anti- Muslim teaching and statements made by some senior members of the Buddha Sasana will further entrench attitudes of communal mistrust and violence against the Sri Lankan Muslim community. The article concludes by calling for introspection within the majority Sinhalese community.²⁹
- A short opinion article in the *Daily News* condemns the statements made by senior members of the Sri Lankan Buddha Sasana. The author reaffirms that all citizens, including the prelates, have the same freedoms and rights, and must abide by the same laws.³⁰

25 *Daily Mirror*, June 14, p. A8.

26 *Sunday Observer*, June 16, p. 9.

27 *Daily Mirror*, June 19, p. A11.

28 *Daily News*, June 20, p. 9.

29 *Sunday Observer*, June 23, p. 10.

30 *Sunday Observer*, June 24, p. 14.



- A long opinion article in the *Daily Mirror* frames Sinhala nationalist views following the Easter Sunday attacks as a “rejuvenated campaign of Islamophobia”. The author adds that “political connivance” has paved the way for the mainstreaming of racism that may have existed on the fringes of society. The author also calls for introspection from Sri Lankan Muslims to tackle the “unfolding wave of radicalisation and Arabisation” taking place within their communities. The article condemns the government’s ineffectiveness in responding to inflammatory statements.³¹
- A long opinion article in the *Daily Mirror* outlines that Sri Lanka may be moving towards becoming an authoritarian Sinhala-Buddhist state by citing the wrongful arrest of gynaecologist Dr. Segu Siyabdeen Mohamed Shafi, short story writer Shakthika Sathkumara, and a Muslim woman who was wearing an outfit of a ship’s wheel that was mistaken for a sacred Buddhist symbol. The article briefly details the history of Sinhala- Buddhist ethno-religious nationalism since Sri Lanka’s independence. The author concludes by noting the abuse of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) Act to arrest those who speak in favour of minority communities.³²
- Three articles were news-graded as being in support of religious freedom but contained neutral views. These articles included statements from President Maithripala Sirisena, UNP MP Mangala Samaraweera, and the Mahanayake Theras, who all called for religious and ethnic harmony.^{33 34 35}
- The **1 article that opposed religious freedom** was as follows:

A feature article in the *Daily Mirror* discusses the erection of a Buddhist Temple in the Saptha Kannimar Kovil Complex by the Sri Lankan Army, and its alleged obstruction of religious rituals at the aforementioned kovil. The author cites this incident in order to demonstrate the army’s alleged practice of erecting Buddhist temples in military occupied territory in the Mullaitivu District.³⁶

31 *Daily Mirror*, June 25, p. A10.

32 *Daily Mirror*, June 28, p. A10.

33 *Daily Mirror*, June 5, p. A4.

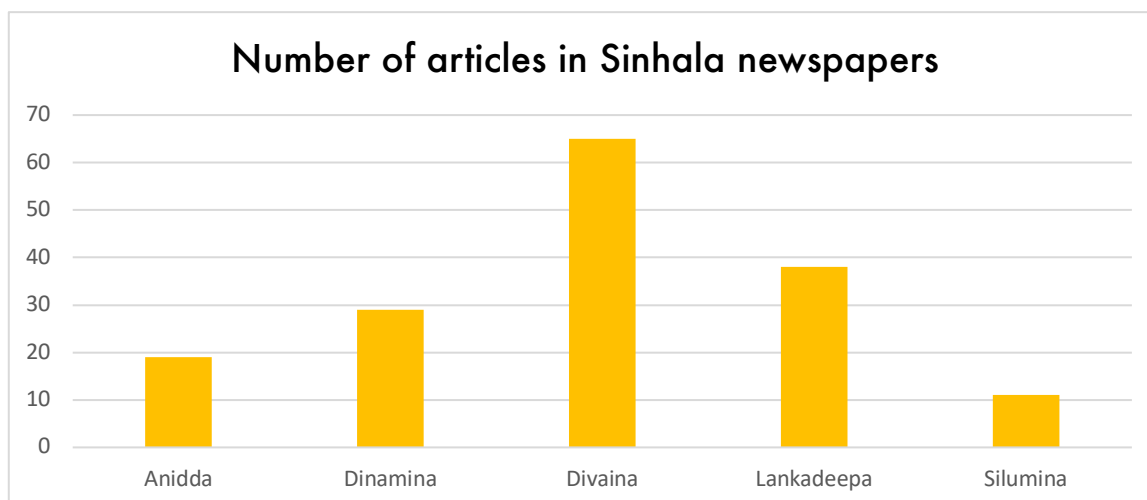
34 *Daily News*, June 11, p. 10.

35 *Daily News*, June 12, p. 1, 8.

36 *Daily Mirror*, June 20, p. A15



Coverage in Sinhala newspapers



Sinhala Newspapers	No. of Articles	Reportage		
		Supporting	Neutral	Opposing
Anidda	19	1	18	
Dinamina	29	2	27	-
Divaina	65	1	48	16
Lankadeepa	38	1	36	1
Silumina	11	-	11	-
Total	162	5	140	17

- The Sinhala press featured 162 articles that had a bearing on religious freedom. 5 articles were in support of religious freedom, 140 articles were neutral and 17 articles opposed religious freedom.
- The **4 articles in support of religious freedom** were as follows:
- An article in the *Divaina* perceives religion to be a force that “nurtures the spiritual side of an individual” and explains that religion helps to build “virtuous individuals”. The article cites demographic statistics to demonstrate that there is a sizeable non-Buddhist population. Therefore, it argues that people should encourage the nurturing of co-existence between different communities.³⁷

³⁷ *Divaina*, June 11, p. 6.



- A column in the *Anidda* cites the respective provisions in the Sri Lankan constitution that guarantee the freedom of religious practice for all citizens. It specifically cites Articles 10 and 14(1)(e). It concludes that it is the responsibility of the state to protect these rights.³⁸
- A short opinion in the state-owned newspaper the *Dinamina* quotes the views expressed by Ven. Pelpola Vipassi Thera, urging the Buddhist majority to refrain from condemning or insulting 'other' ethnic and religious groups.³⁹
- The *Dinamina* features a notice by the government that was released in response to the joint statement issued by the special advisors to the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and Responsibility to Protect. It emphasises that the constitution guarantees the freedom to practice one's religion. It adds that the Muslim community, which constitutes 10 per cent of Sri Lanka's population, had been peacefully living alongside the country's Buddhist majority and other communities for centuries.⁴⁰
- In comparison, the **17 articles opposed to religious freedom** were as follows:
 - An editorial in the *Divaina* discusses Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thera's hunger strike and the subsequent resignation of Muslim MPs. While explicitly stating that Azath Salley is the "worst" of the aforementioned MPs, the editorial accuses him of verbally attacking members of the Buddhist clergy.⁴¹
 - A short opinion in the *Divaina* discusses the commentary surrounding the arrest of Dr. Shafi. It reports that the Convener of National Organisations Gunadasa Amarasekera stated that the president should establish an independent commission to investigate Dr. Shafi. He further claimed that Dr. Shafi's incident may be an extension of the alleged programme to sterilise the Sinhalese, as mentioned by Ven. Madihe Pagnanaseeha Thera.⁴²
 - A short opinion in the *Divaina* discusses the statements made by Leader of the National Freedom Front (NFF) Wimal Weerawansa concerning the arrest of Dr. Shafi. Weerawansa claims that Dr. Shafi deliberately

38 *Anidda*, June 16, p. 5.

39 *Dinamina*, June 17, p. 7.

40 *Dinamina*, June 1, p. 8.

41 *Divaina*, June 2, p. 4.

42 *Divaina*, June 14, p. 9.



damaged the fallopian tubes of mothers. The article also reports that according to Weerawansa, Dr. Shafi contested in the general election under Rishad Bathiudeen, who he claims is accused of supporting “Islamic fundamentalist terrorism”.⁴³

- A long opinion in the *Lankadeepa* discusses a statement by the Chief Prelate of the Amarapura Bhikkhu Chapter, Ven. Kotugoda Dhammawasa Thera. It reports that according to the Thera, the Sinhala race and the Buddha Sasana should be safeguarded. The Thera notes that the Sinhalese race was “awoken” after the Easter Sunday attacks.⁴⁴
- The weekly column in the *Divaina* discusses the alleged negligence of the police in relation to acts of Islamist extremism in Sri Lanka. It claims that the government focused on converting Kattankudy into an “Islamic Province” with the aid of Saudi Arabia. It also features the statements made by former Governor of the Eastern Province M. L. A. M. Hizbullah on Muslims being a global majority that should stand united.⁴⁵
- A short opinion in the *Divaina* discusses the statements made by Leader of the Pivithuru Hela Urumaya (PHU) Udaya Gammanpila. Gammanpila claims that while the birth rate of Muslims has increased, the birth rate of the Sinhalese has declined. He notes that the alleged rapid growth of the Muslim population has been documented for decades. Therefore, he concludes that the Sinhalese race is facing extinction as a result of this alleged increase in the Muslim population.⁴⁶
- In an interview with the *Divaina*, Lawyer Kalyananda Thiranagama states that there is evidence to prove the prevalence of a planned project to sterilise the Sinhalese community. He notes that Dr. Shafi was a part of this plan.⁴⁷
- A short opinion in the *Divaina* discusses the arrest Dr. Shafi. The author writes that he “feels sorry for the Sinhala race” that is allegedly being sterilised by “extremist assassin doctors”. The author continues to criticise Dr. Shafi by claiming that he had “removed even the wombs of some Sinhala women”.⁴⁸

43 *Divaina*, June 14, p. 13.

44 *Lankadeepa*, June 15, p. 10.

45 *Divaina*, June 16, p. 3.

46 *Divaina*, June 20, p. 5.

47 *Divaina*, June 23, p. 4.

48 *Divaina*, June 23, p. 12.



- A short opinion article in the *Divaina* claims that there is a “Bathiudeenisation” of the Wilpattu forest that exceeds any form of “Arabisation”. The article ends with a rhetorical question, which asks whether Sri Lanka will be turned into an “Islamic State” by the year 2025. For further context, press usage and interpretations of the term “Arabisation” are detailed in the *Qualitative Analysis* of this report.⁴⁹
- A long opinion article in the *Divaina* discusses the commentary surrounding the Gurukanda Rajamaha Viharaya. The article claims that “Tamil extremists” forcefully tried to build a kovil inside the premises of the viharaya. It concludes that “We [Sinhalese] cannot sit still as a ‘coward ethnicity’ by allowing extremist politicians to rob us of our Sinhala Buddhist heritage”.⁵⁰
- A short opinion article in the *Divaina* covers the statements made by Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thera. The Thera accuses the government of concealing the charges levelled against Dr. Shafi. The Thera states that there has been a plan to make the Sinhalese race extinct since 1995.⁵¹
- A long opinion article in the *Divaina* features statements made by Leader of the PHU Udaya Gammanpila concerning the arrest of Dr. Shafi. The article claims that according to Gammanpila, Dr. Shafi performed “forceful sterilisations” on an ethnic group, i.e., the Sinhalese, which is a form of “genocide”. The article also reports that Gammanpila revealed that the Ministry of Health pays an incentive allowance for carrying out sterilisation surgeries.⁵²
- A short opinion article in the *Divaina* reports that Ven. Kotapola Amarakiththi Thera made a statement that extremist Islamist organisations are working towards making the Sinhala race extinct.⁵³
- A short opinion article in the *Divaina* reports that Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thera stated that he would act responsibly to expose the alleged attempts made by Dr. Shafi to make “an ethnic group [Sinhalese]” extinct.⁵⁴
- A long opinion article in the *Divaina* discusses the statements made by Lawyer Terry Fernando on the arrest of Dr. Shafi. The article features

49 *Divaina*, June 23, p. 12.

50 *Divaina*, June 23, p. 14.

51 *Divaina*, June 25, p. 1.

52 *Divaina*, June 25, p. 13.

53 *Divaina*, June 26, p. 15.

54 *Divaina*, June 27, p. 13.



excerpts from a report allegedly revealed by the Criminal Investigation Division (CID) concerning the practices of Dr. Shafi. As per the featured excerpts, Dr. Shafi only sterilised Sinhalese and Tamil women, while praising God when delivering the children of Muslim women.⁵⁵

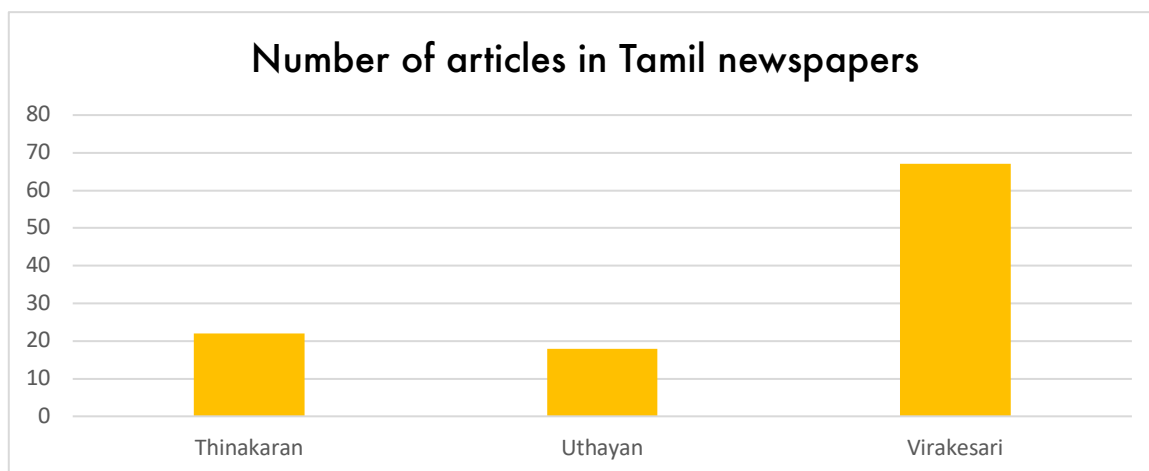
- A short opinion article in the *Divaina* claims that Sri Lanka has been subjected to “Islamisation”. As such, the article claims that the potential decline of the Sinhala population will lead to Sri Lanka becoming akin to Syria or Afghanistan in the next century.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ *Divaina*, June 28, p. 7.

⁵⁶ *Divaina*, June 30, p. 5.



Coverage in Tamil newspapers



Tamil Newspapers	No. of Articles	Reportage		
		Supporting	Neutral	Opposing
Thinakaran	22	-	22	-
Uthayan	18	1	17	-
Virakesari	67	6	61	-
Total	107	7	100	-

- The Tamil papers carried 107 articles relating to religious freedom. 7 articles supported religious freedom and 100 articles were neutral on religious freedom.
- The **7 articles in support of religious freedom** were as follows.
- An article in the *Virakesari* discusses the commentary surrounding the Thirumalai Navam Kovil. The article opines that Tamil Hindus in the North are challenged by the Department of Archaeology's attempts to take over the land belonging to Hindu temples in the region.⁵⁷
- An editorial in the *Virakesari* discusses the harassment faced by the Muslim community in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday attacks. It affirms that minorities should not continue to be 'submissive to chauvinists'.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ *Virakesari*, June 1, p. 17.

⁵⁸ *Virakesari*, June 5, p. 4.



- An editorial in the *Virakesari* discusses the commentary on the land ownership of Hindu temples in the North and East. It alleges that the Department of Archaeology is attempting to seize the land belonging to the Kanniya Venneerootru Pillayar temple in order to convert it into a Buddhist place of worship. The editorial states that according to United National Party (UNP) MP Mano Ganesan, the religious rights of Hindus were violated. Ganesan requests the government to “represent all religions”.⁵⁹
- An editorial in the *Virakesari* discusses the resignation of Muslim MPs in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday attacks. The author asserts that the government must ensure that no religious community is marginalised. The author also mentions the gesture made by four Buddhist chapters who requested these MPs to assume their seats again.⁶⁰
- An editorial in the *Virakesari* opines that the display of “Buddhist chauvinism” against minorities, especially against Muslims, is increasing in Sri Lanka following the Easter Sunday attacks. The editorial calls for minority parties to join forces with “progressive” Sinhalese leaders who advocate religious harmony and co-existence.⁶¹
- An article in the *Virakesari* opines that those who engage in ‘Islamophobic’ campaigns violate the civil and political rights of religious minorities. It also claims that certain local politicians promote divisive politics.⁶²
- An article in the *Uthayan* outlines the alleged attempts to “forcibly” take over the lands of traditional Hindu temples in the North and East in order to construct Buddhist temples. The article condemns these alleged attempts and calls on the relevant authorities to ensure that the rights of all religious groups are respected.⁶³

59 *Virakesari*, June 6, p. 6.

60 *Virakesari*, June 7, p. 4.

61 *Virakesari*, June 8, p. 4.

62 *Virakesari*, June 22, p. 17.

63 *Uthayan*, June 3, p. 8.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

The 438 articles monitored during the month of June 2019 can be categorised under five overarching themes pertaining to religious freedom. These themes are: *physical violence towards people and/or property; inflammatory speech; court cases, laws and regulations pertaining to religious freedom; religious inequality and discrimination; and other related reporting.*

This section aims to identify and understand press sentiment in reporting on events/issues related to these overarching themes. These events/issues are selected on the basis of the volume of coverage they received in editorials, opinion articles, feature articles, and statements made by political and non-political actors/groups. Only events/issues that received significant coverage were selected for in-depth qualitative analysis in this report. These three issues/events were as follows: (1) the launch of a hunger strike by Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thera for the removal of Governors Azath Salley and M. L. A. M Hizbullah and Minister Rishad Bathiudeen; (2) the collective resignation of all Muslim ministers; and (3) the alleged ‘Arabisation’ of the Sri Lankan Muslim community.

All three events/issues can be categorised under the theme of *other related reporting.*

Overarching Theme	Event
Other related reporting	<p>(1) The launch of a hunger strike by Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thera for the removal of Governors Azath Salley and M. L. A. M Hizbullah and Minister Rishad Bathiudeen;</p> <p>(2) The collective resignation of all Muslim ministers; and</p> <p>(3) The alleged ‘Arabisation’ of the Sri Lankan Muslim community.</p>

Other related reporting

The hunger strike, the collective resignation and the alleged 'Arabisation'

This theme accounts for all reportage in relation to religious freedom that cannot be brought under any of the other themes. In the monitoring period, reporting that fell within this theme comprised the highest number of articles (315 out of 438 articles in total). Reporting under this theme appeared most prominently in relation to three incidents that took place during the month of June:

- (1) On May 31, Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thera launched a hunger strike in front of the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic in Kandy calling for the removal of Governor of the Western Province Azath Salley, Governor of the Eastern Province M. L. A. M. Hizbullah and Minister Rishad Bathiudeen from their respective posts. The call for the removal of these politicians came amidst allegations linking them with Islamist fundamentalism and with certain individuals thought to be involved in the Easter Sunday attacks.
- (2) On June 3, Governors Hizbullah and Salley tendered their resignations. Following their resignations, Rathana Thera ended his hunger strike. On the evening of June 3, all Muslim ministers, including Rishad Bathiudeen, announced their decision to collectively resign and serve as backbench MPs.
- (3) Following the Easter attacks, press discussion has featured increased allegations of the 'Arabisation' of the Sri Lankan Muslim community. Such reportage claims that there has been a visible increase in the Sri Lankan Muslim community's adoption of elements of Arab culture, including its language, attire, education, food and landscape (e.g. date palm trees along the roadside in Kattankudy in the Eastern province).

Notably, the above events/issues differed from those previously chosen for qualitative analysis. Previous events/issues have been more explicit in impeding religious freedom. These events/issues include the vandalism of Buddha statues in Mawanella in December 2018; the attempted assault and verbal abuse by a Buddhist monk against Tamil politicians in the Northern Province in October 2018; threats to Hindu places of worship; and attacks against Christian and Muslim communities. Conversely, the events/issues chosen for this analysis impede religious freedom in a more implicit manner: they have the *potential* to fuel anti-Muslim sentiment and tension between ethno-religious communities. Accordingly, the occurrence of these events/issues leaves room for the Muslim community to be discriminated against on the grounds of religion.

Besides reporting on the above events/issues, the rest of the coverage that fell within this theme was scattered among a variety of issues, including the allegations of illegal sterilisation of Sinhala Buddhist women levelled against Dr. Shafi (which continued from May 2019), and the holding of events on religious reconciliation and co-existence.



Reportage on the Thera's hunger strike and the collective resignation of the Muslim ministers were covered in Sinhala, Tamil and English newspapers. However, press discussion on the alleged 'Arabisation' of the Sri Lankan Muslim community was limited to Sinhala and English newspapers. The following analysis aims to capture the sentiment prevalent in reporting on the above events/issues in the Sinhala, Tamil and English press.

In the aftermath of the Easter Sunday attacks, press coverage across the board has persisted in expressing an explicit narrative that promotes ethno-religious co-existence.⁶⁴ However, each language press diverges in its main interpretation of the notion of co-existence. The Sinhala press can be seen to advance a **majoritarian** notion of co-existence; the Tamil press can be seen to advance a **minoritarian** view of co-existence; and the English press can be seen to advance a **conciliatory** notion of co-existence. These diverging views on co-existence were reflected in press reporting on the three events/issues described above. The general stance adopted by the press of each language on the three events/issues chosen for the month of June 2019 have been summarised in Figure 1 below.

Events/Issues	Sinhala press	Tamil press	English press
Rathana Thera's fast	Supportive ↓ Critical	Critical	Critical
Collective resignation	Critical	Supportive	Critical
Alleged 'Arabisation'	Critical	N/A	Critical

Figure 1: Overall reporting on the events/issues for the month of June 2019

⁶⁴ See report titled *Understanding Press Coverage on Religious Freedom for the month May 2019*.

The Sinhala press

Sinhala press discussion on the three chosen events/issues reflected a majoritarian view of co-existence. In other words, the press **advanced a narrative on ethno- religious co-existence that is in line with the traditional interests of the majority Sinhala Buddhist community.**

Some segments of the Sinhala press has traditionally been viewed as appealing in its reporting to the interests of the majority Sinhala Buddhist community. This type of reporting was previously observed in the implicit attitude adopted by the Sinhala press in reporting on the communal violence that took place in several areas in the North Western and Western provinces in the country in May 2019.⁶⁵ In previous reports, the behaviour of the Sinhala press has been explained as drawing from ‘a deeper source of legitimacy in the Sinhala mindset that could be described as a subconscious host-guest contract, where Sinhala-Buddhists are viewed as the primary citizens and minorities as guests’.⁶⁶ In effect, the Sinhala press can be seen to be advancing a narrative on ethno-religious co-existence that reinforces **Sinhala Buddhist hegemony**. This pattern of behaviour appears to have continued in reporting on the three events/issues reported on in June 2019. As such, Sinhala press reporting framed the three events/issues as follows.

- The alleged ‘Arabisation’ of the Sri Lankan Muslim community was widely criticised as a **threat to co-existence** in Sri Lanka.
- The Muslim ministers who resigned were criticised as **antagonists of co- existence**.
- Rathana Thera’s fast was praised and criticised within a framing of the monk as a **champion of co-existence** and **saboteur of co-existence**, respectively.

(1) ‘Arabisation’: a threat to co-existence

Press reporting framed the alleged ‘Arabisation’ of the Sri Lankan Muslim community as a threat to the co-existence of ethno-religious communities in the country. Notably, the press identifies ‘Arabisation’ of the Sri Lankan Muslim community as the adoption of elements of Arab culture, including its language, attire, education, food and landscape. ‘Arabisation’ was deemed as threat for two main reasons: (a) for causing Muslims to deviate from the ‘Sri Lankan Muslim identity’, and (b) for increasing the potential for Islamic expansionism in Sri Lanka. These views appear to be undergirded by the Sinhala press’ association of ‘Arabised’ Muslims with ‘Islamic fundamentalists and/or extremists’. As such, criticism of the alleged ‘Arabisation’ of the Muslim community was strongly featured in Sinhala press reporting.

⁶⁵ See report on *Understanding Press Coverage on Religious Freedom for the month May 2019*.

⁶⁶ This idea has previously been explored by Verité Research in its weekly publication *The Media Analysis*. For example, refer Verité Research, *The Media Analysis*, Vol.4 #16 (April 21 – 27, 2014).

(a) ‘Arabisation’ as a deviation from a ‘Sri Lankan Muslim’ identity

Voices in the press criticised the ‘Arabisation’ of the language, attire, food and education of Sri Lankan Muslims on the basis that these changes would result in the ‘isolation’ of Muslim individuals from the rest of the Sri Lankan society.⁶⁷ For instance, press voices argued that the Arabic language is not familiar to other communities and therefore would act as a ‘formidable’ challenge in achieving co-existence.⁶⁸ In light of this, Minister Patali Champika Ranawaka called for the creation of a ‘Sri Lankan Muslim’ identity as opposed to an ‘Arabic Muslim’ identity.⁶⁹ Such calls for a ‘Sri Lankan Muslim’ identity may be explained via the ‘host-guest’ dynamic, within which guests are encouraged not to ‘challenge existing power structures’.⁷⁰

(b) ‘Arabisation’ as potentially leading to Islamic expansionism

Commentators presenting this view drew parallels with global Islamist expansionism in other Buddhist states in the Asian region to voice concerns on the potential plight of the Buddhist community in Sri Lanka. Notably, some of the Sinhala press justified these insecurities of the Buddhist community over Islamic expansionism on account of Buddhists being the ‘original residents’ of Sri Lanka, and therefore being entitled to reject ‘discriminatory’ practices of the Muslim community, such as the ‘implementation of Muslim laws in some Muslim regions’.⁷¹ Once again, these arguments appeal to the ‘host-guest’ dynamic within which Sinhala Buddhists are the true hosts or residents of the nation.

Overall, the Sinhala press frames ‘Arabisation’ as a threat to co-existence via arguments that ‘Arabised’ Muslims threaten a) the ‘Sri Lankan’ identity of Muslims (i.e., with less visible markers of the Arab culture such as its language, attire, food, etc.) and b) the dominance of the Sinhala Buddhist community. As such, some of the Sinhala press appears to equate threats to the Sinhala Buddhist community with threats to national co-existence.

(2) Muslim ministers: antagonists of co-existence

Press reporting critically framed the collective resignation of the Muslim ministers as ‘antagonistic’ towards co-existence. The Sinhala press presented two interpretations of the collective resignation that buttressed this criticism.⁷²

The first interpretation was that the resignation signalled the **complicity** of the Muslim ministers in ‘protecting’ politicians accused of being associated with Islamist

⁶⁷ *Silumina*, June 2, p. 8.

⁶⁸ *Divaina*, June 11, p. 6.

⁶⁹ *Dinamina*, June 11, p. 7; *Lankadeepa*, June 20, p. 10.

⁷⁰ Gehan Gunatilleke, *The Chronic and the Entrenched: Ethno-religious Violence in Sri Lanka* (Equitas and ICES 2018), p. 70. <http://ices.lk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/The-Chronic-and-the-Entrenched-Mr.Gihan-Book-FINAL-WEB-PDF.pdf>.

Also see report on *Understanding Press Coverage on Religious Freedom for the month May 2019*.

⁷¹ *Divaina*, June 10, p. 8.

⁷² This idea has previously been explored by Verité Research in its weekly publication *The Media Analysis*. For example, refer Verité Research, *The Media Analysis*, Vol.9 #21 (June 03 – 09, 2019).

fundamentalists.⁷³ In this case, the ministers were criticised for tacitly supporting an ideology seen to threaten the Sinhala Buddhist community (as explained in the above section on ‘Arabisation’).

The second interpretation was that the resignation was an instance of collective action indicating the **solidarity** of Muslim ministers.⁷⁴ In this case, mainstream Sinhala press criticised the ministers for prioritising their ethno-religious identities.⁷⁵

Overall, the Sinhala press saw the action of the ministers as widening the ethno-religious fault-lines between the Sinhala-Buddhist and Muslim communities, and therefore threatening co-existence in wider society.

(3) Rathana Thera: champion and saboteur of co-existence

The press widely commended Rathana Thera’s hunger strike.⁷⁶ The stated the purpose of the hunger strike was to push for the resignation of Governors Hizbullah and Salley and Minister Bathiudeen, who were reportedly associated with Islamist extremists. As such, the Sinhala press positioned the Thera as attempting to combat the threat of Islamist extremism. This led to the Thera’s positive characterisation as a ‘champion’ of co-existence. The Thera was characterised as “showing the correct path”, displaying traits of an “authentic” monk as opposed to those “who wear robes and sit silently” and as securing a “victory” via the strike.⁷⁷ However, the Thera’s positive characterisation was short-lived following the subsequent collective resignation of the Muslim ministers. This shift in characterisation may be better understood within the context surrounding the launch of the hunger strike. In this regard, a collective campaign was launched by nationalist-leaning politicians and sections of the Buddhist clergy, who called for the removal of three Muslim ministers.⁷⁸ Notably, this collective is portrayed within some segments of the Sinhala mainstream press as representing the interests of the majority Sinhala Buddhist community. Against this backdrop, the Thera was criticised for two reasons. First, he was criticised for furthering his own political interests and not the interests of the collective campaign. In this context, Gnanasara Thera criticised Rathana Thera for launching the strike with “narrow intentions”. Second, the collective resignation was seen as thwarting the campaign to discredit the three named Muslim ministers. Therefore, the perceived failure of the campaign that was viewed to have been launched with ‘narrow intentions’, led to the Thera’s negative characterisation as a ‘saboteur’ of co-existence.

The Sinhala mainstream press’ amplification of the positive role played by the Thera at the commencement of the strike may be seen as serving to advance the majoritarian narrative of co-existence. Further, the criticisms levelled against the Thera following the perceived

⁷³ *Lankadeepa*, June 5, p. 12; *Divaina*, June 5, p. 4; *Divaina*, June 5, p. 8; *Divaina*, June 5, p. 13. ⁷⁴

Divaina, June 5, p. 4; *Divaina*, June 5, p. 8; *Divaina*, June 5, p. 13.

⁷⁵ *Divaina*, June 5, p. 13.

⁷⁶ *Dinamina*, June 1, p. 3; *Divaina*, June 1, p. 1, 4; *Lankadeepa*, June 1, p. 6.

⁷⁷ Certain aspects of the analysis presented above was extracted from Verité Research’s trademark product *The Media Analysis*, Volume 09, Issue no. 21, published on June 12, 2019.

⁷⁸ *The Media Analysis*, Vol.9, #21.



failure to advance the interests of the collective, and therefore the interests of the majority, may be seen as another instance of advancing the majoritarian narrative.

Overall, reporting indicates that the Sinhala press has viewed the three events/issues mentioned above through a largely Sinhala-Buddhist-centric lens, which may serve to reinforce a notion of co-existence in line with Sinhala Buddhist interests i.e., a majoritarian co-existence.

The Tamil press

Tamil press discussion on the three chosen events/issues reflected a minoritarian view of co-existence. In other words, the Tamil press advanced a narrative on ethno- religious co-existence that emphasised the elevation of minority rights to be in line with those enjoyed by the majority Sinhala Buddhists.

As such, Tamil press reporting framed the events/issues as follows.

- Rathana Thera's fast was criticised as an act of suppression of minority rights.
- The collective resignation of the Muslim ministers was characterised as an act of resistance against Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism.
- The alleged 'Arabisation' of the Sri Lankan Muslim community was not discussed in the Tamil press.

(1) Hunger strike: an act of suppression

Tamil press commentary was overwhelming critical of the Thera's hunger strike. Press voices characterised the Thera's actions as 'suppressing the rights of the Muslim minorities' to further his 'Sinhala Buddhism chauvinist' agenda. Notably, this line of criticism was generalised to all Buddhist clergy. For instance, an article in *Virakesari* characterised the actions of Buddhist monks as a 'curse' to the country.⁷⁹

(2) Collective resignation: an act of resistance

Tamil Press commentary positioned the resignation as a display of solidarity in response to the Thera's fast. The action of the ministers was lauded as an 'act of resistance' towards the acts of 'Sinhala Buddhist chauvinists', such as Rathana Thera.⁸⁰ In effect, the press interpreted the decision as an example of the Muslim ministers being successful in undermining the agenda of the 'Sinhala Buddhist chauvinists'.⁸¹ For example, articles reported in *Uthayan* and *Virakesari* characterised the action as a 'slap' against Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism.⁸²

Overall, reporting indicates that the Tamil press has viewed the two events mentioned above through a minority-centric lens. Press reporting revealed an underlying sympathy towards minority communities, which the press perceived to be continually suppressed by Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism.⁸³ Therefore, Tamil press reporting framed co-existence as requiring the extension of equal rights to members of ethno-religious minority groups.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ *Virakesari*, June 8, p. 13.

⁸⁰ *Virakesari*, June 6, p. 6; *Uthayan*, June 9, p. 9.

⁸¹ *Uthayan*, June 9, p. 9; *Virakesari*, June 8, p. 13.

⁸² *Uthayan*, June 9, p. 9; *Virakesari*, June 8, p. 13.

⁸³ *Virakesari*, June 5, p. 4; *Uthayan*, June 5, p. 14; *Thinakaran*, June 11, p. 7; *Virakesari*, June 7, p. 15;

Thinakaran, June 11, p. 17; *Virakesari*, June 22, p. 17; *Virakesari*, June 12, p. 18; *Virakesari*, June 8, p. 4;

Virakesari, June 3, p. 4.

⁸⁴ *Thinakaran*, June 11, p. 17.

The English press

English press discussion on the three chosen events/issues reflected a conciliatory view of co-existence. In other words, the English press **advanced a narrative on ethno- religious co-existence that condemned any assertions of ethno-religious dominance against greater society**. Therefore, they condemned both Islamist extremism and Sinhala Buddhist hegemony.

The English press saw the three events/issues as impediments to co-existence resulting from the polarisation of the Sinhala and Muslim communities. More specifically, reporting revealed two accounts of the polarisation of these two communities.

- The **alienation of the Muslim community** as evidenced by Rathana Thera's hunger strike.
- The **self-alienation of the Muslim community** as evidenced by both the alleged 'Arabisation' of the Sri Lankan Muslim community and the collective resignation of the Muslim ministers.

(1) **Alienation of the Muslim community** – Under this strand, the English press criticised Rathana Thera for his conduct. They framed his action as an attempt to 'vilify an entire [Muslim] community' and exacerbate communal tensions in his combat against terrorism.⁸⁵ For instance, an editorial in *Daily News* claimed that 'certain Buddhist monks and members of the opposition have furthered the alienation of Muslims with their rhetoric and actions'. Further, an opinion article in *Daily Mirror* remarked that 'isolation and alienation of Muslims is a condition that has been imposed on them, one in which they have not played any role'.⁸⁶

(2) **Self-alienation of the Muslim community** – Under this strand, both Muslim ministers and the allegedly 'Arabised' segment of the Muslim community were criticised for creating intercommunity and intracommunity rifts, respectively.⁸⁷ For instance, Leader of the Opposition Mahinda Rajapaksa stated that 'the Sri Lankan Muslim community had gradually isolated themselves from the rest of Sri Lankan society and with the emergence of exclusively Muslim political parties from the 1980s onwards, Muslims have isolated themselves in the political sphere as well'.⁸⁸

Overall, English press criticism of all three events/issues reflected a conciliatory notion of co-existence. Within this view, the press did not reflect the interests of any particular ethno-religious group, but rather took a broader view of national co-existence. Despite adopting a broader view, the English press' recommendations for encouraging co-

⁸⁵ *Sunday Observer*, June 9, p. 6, 12; *Sunday Observer*, June 9, p. 9.

⁸⁶ *Daily Mirror*, June 6, p. A12.

⁸⁷ *Daily News*, June 7, p. 6.

⁸⁸ *Daily Mirror*, June 12, p. A1, A2.



existence did not appear to be long-term remedies, such as increasing intercommunal understanding. Instead, the press called for what may be perceived as a ‘band-aid solution’: stopping expressions of dominance, including violence, against other communities.

CONCLUSION

This study was based on media reportage produced during the month of June 2019 in all three languages on issues related to religious freedom. The analysis in the study considered 438 articles dealing with religious freedom under five overarching themes. The events/issues that were qualitatively analysed in this report related to one out of these five themes: ***other related reporting***. The articles picked for analysis were chosen due to the high degree of traction that they received in the English and/or Tamil and/or Sinhala press. These articles were analysed by taking into account the sentiment contained therein. Sentiment was identified through content, perspective and tone of reporting. A qualitative analysis of the reported content led to the following key findings:

Press reporting on the three events/issues reflected diverging views on co-existence. Notably, press coverage in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday attacks expressed an explicit narrative that promotes ethno-religious co-existence. However, the Sinhala, Tamil and English press diverged in their main interpretations of the notion of co-existence: they framed co-existence through lenses that were **majoritarian**, **minoritarian** and **conciliatory**, respectively.

First, the Sinhala press reflected the advancement of a narrative on ethno-religious co-existence that is in line with the traditional interests of the Sinhala Buddhist community. In this context, a section of the Sinhala press characterised the alleged ‘Arabisation’ as a threat to co-existence; cast the Muslim ministers as antagonists of co-existence; and framed the Thera as a champion and saboteur of co-existence.

Second, the Tamil press reflected the advancement of a narrative on ethno-religious co-existence that framed co-existence as requiring the extension of equal rights to members of ethno-religious minority groups. As such, the Tamil press framed the Thera’s hunger strike as an expression of suppression by an influential figure in the Sinhala Buddhist community. At the same time, it characterised the subsequent resignations of Muslim politicians as an act of resisting Sinhala Buddhist hegemony. Notably, the Tamil press did not discuss the alleged ‘Arabisation’ of the Sri Lankan Muslim community.

Third, the English press reflected the advancement of a narrative on ethno-religious co-existence that appeared to be concerned with the conciliation of the Sinhala Buddhist and Muslim communities. As such, reportage highlighted two accounts of the polarisation of these two communities: 1) the alienation of the Muslim community, and 2) the self-alienation of the Muslim community. It criticised the hunger strike as an instance of the former, while criticising the collective registration of the Muslim ministers and the alleged ‘Arabisation’ of the Muslim community as instances of the latter.

RELATED REPORTING

No information on whether they arrived in India – President says Islamic terrorists were trained in countries abroad – President Maithripala Sirisena stated that Islamic terrorists were trained in countries abroad. However he stated that he did not receive information from officials whether they had arrived in India. He stated that India was assisting Sri Lanka to defeat the Islamic State (IS) threat and that the visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on June 9 would be positive for Sri Lanka.⁸⁹

Media which blows problems out of proportion – The editorial states that the Muslim community is faced with several challenges following the Easter attacks. However, it points out that the media too plays a role in highlighting small issues and thereby making them look like major issues. The editorial states that such actions of certain media outlets are also a cause for the current situation where one community is targeted.⁹⁰

Athuraliye Rathana Thera commences hunger strike; calls for resignation of Rishad, Azath Salley, Hizbullah (by M. Manochithra) – Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thera commenced a hunger strike opposite the Kandy Dhaladha Maligawa (Temple of the Tooth relic) on the May 31 demanding the removal of Minister Rishad Bathiudeen and Governors Azath Salley and M.L.A.M. Hizbullah from their respective positions. The monk alleged that the three Muslim politicians promoted extremism in the country and demanded that they be removed. ⁹¹

Religious war cannot be permitted in the name of archeological research – Member of Parliament Velu Kumar – Deputy Leader of the Democratic People's Front and Kandy District Parliamentarian Velu Kumar has stated that war against places of worship in the name of archeological research cannot be permitted. He stated that there were several instances of premises of traditional Hindu worship places in the North and East being taken over in the name of archeological research. He pointed out that such actions systematically destroy artifacts and symbols of Hindus. He stated that recently too, authorities had entered premises of a temple in Trincomalee in the name of archaeological survey. ⁹²

Move to sideline (by Thirumalai Navam) – The commentary discusses the problems and challenges faced by the Tamil community over the years. The commentary primarily deals with political problems faced by Tamils under successive governments. However, while discussing the situation in the post war scenario, the commentary

⁸⁹ *Virakesari*, June 1, p. 1.

⁹⁰ *Thinakaran*, June 1, p. 6.

⁹¹ *Virakesari*, June 1, p. 1.

⁹² *Virakesari*, June 1, p. 6.

points out that the Tamils now face problems through moves by the Department of Archeology to take over lands belonging to Hindu temples in the North.⁹³

Ven. Rathana Thera stages fast-unto death near Sri Dalada Maligawa (by Indika Polkotuwa) - MP Ven. Rathana Thera yesterday began a fast-unto death protest in front of the Sri Dalada Maligawa in Kandy demanding the removal of Minister Bathiudeen, Eastern Province Governor M.L.A.M. Hizbullah and Western Province Governor Azath Salley from their posts. He also asked for the appointment of an independent commission to investigate the activities of Kurunegala Hospital's Dr. Shafi and to pay compensation to mothers who were said to have been sterilised. The Thera stressed that "Islamic terrorism" could only be defeated through non-violence and has written to the president requesting stern action against terrorism.⁹⁴

Hizbullah decries clashes among sects (by Lahiru Fernando) - Eastern Province Governor M.L.A.M. Hizbullah, issuing a statement, said that clashes among Islamists of different sects, like Wahabists and Thowheeds, set a dangerous precedent. The statement was issued following the recent demolition of a mosque by a group of Muslims in Madatugama in Kekirawa. He said the All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama Council, Muslim leaders and the Muslim Religious Affairs Ministry should discuss this issue at length and take a decision.⁹⁵

Muslim members air their issues to GMOA (by Dilshan Tharaka) - Muslim members of the Government Medical Officers' Association (GMOA) yesterday presented a statement to the GMOA Executive Committee regarding the hardships they are undergoing, given the prevailing situation in the country. They stated that as the GMOA Executive Committee, they should explain to all their members that everyone should be treated equally, irrespective of race, religion, class, creed, designation or seniority. They made several suggestions to the GMOA to preserve and strengthen unity, goodwill and harmony in their union, including eradicating hate speech, social media propaganda, and re-assessing security at the institution.⁹⁶

Organised mobs behind 13 May vandalism - Ganesan - Minister of National Integration, Official Languages, Social Progress and Hindu Religious Affairs Mano Ganesan blamed "political terrorists" and the government's opponents for attacks on the Muslim community after the Easter Sunday bomb blasts. During May 13 attacks in the North Western Province, a Muslim man was killed, and several shops and mosques were vandalised. Given the time lag between the terror attacks and the anti-Muslim violence, Ganesan attributed a political motive to these attacks. The minister also

⁹³ *Virakesari*, June 1, p. 17.

⁹⁴ *Daily News*, June 1, p. 1, 6.

⁹⁵ *Daily News*, June 1, p. 1, 6.

⁹⁶ *Daily News*, June 1, p. 3.



mentioned the failure of the security forces to prevent the Easter Sunday attacks based on prior intelligence, but acknowledged their swift action against the perpetrators in the aftermath.⁹⁷

Rathana Thera launches hunger strike - Ven. Rathana Thera yesterday launched a hunger strike in front of the Sri Dalada Maligawa, calling for the removal of Minister Bathiudeen, Eastern Province Governor M.L.A.M. Hizbullah, and Western Province Governor Azath Salley from their posts. He said he launched the hunger strike because of a lack of a positive response when some politicians and the Maha Sangha requested the removal of extremist ministers and governors from their posts to allow for impartial investigations. In a letter to the president, the Thera stated that while the Sinhala, Tamil and moderate Muslims are striving for peace, some ministers and governors supporting extremists were issuing statements which lead to a breach of peace. Additionally, he called for an independent investigation panel to probe the Kurunegala doctor facing several allegations. A mechanism should also be set up to compensate mothers who suffered from the doctor's actions. The Thera said he would continue with the hunger strike until the above demands were met. ⁹⁸

People who attacked me with swords moving freely in Kattankudy - Musafeer - Musafeer was severely injured on March 10, 2017 when the NTJ launched their Jihad struggle. A video provided by a monk to the media depicts Zahran and his fellow extremists disrupting a meeting of Muslims at Aliya junction in Kattankudy, carrying swords and poles and beating all those who were at this meeting, including Musafeer. Musafeer said Zahran took great pains to spread the concept of Muslim extremism in the East in 2017. There was a strong opposition by the Sunnis, while the Sufis staged a protest at the Aliya Junction. "I participated in this protest campaign with my brother-in-law. Suddenly Zahran and a group of extremists wearing orange shirts and carrying swords, kris knives and poles attacked the protesters. In the attack, Zahran's brother Rilvan, who blew himself up at a house in Sainthamaruthu, and Niyaz and Ajuwath attacked me with swords," Musafeer said.⁹⁹

SLFP submits proposals to quell extremism (by Sandun A Jayasekera) - The SLFP presented proposals to quell extremism to the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee. SLFP's senior vice president Nimal Siripala De Silva said the 11-point set of proposals includes the close monitoring of social media and the proscribing of face veils like the burqa, hijab and full-face helmets. Other issues that these proposals wish to address include the need for a comprehensive system to screen tourists coming to Sri Lanka to deliver lectures or preach on religion and culture, conduct seminars or workshops. Further, registration of political parties on religious, caste or regional lines has to be

⁹⁷ *Daily News*, June 1, p. 9.

⁹⁸ *Daily Mirror*, June 1, p. A1, A2

⁹⁹ *Daily Mirror*, June 1, p. A2.



banned, and there must be a common law on religious centres, places of worship and prayer centres. Formation of ministries separately on religious lines must be stopped, and there must only be one Ministry of Religious Affairs to take care of all religions. Emigration and immigration law has to be further strengthened with national security in mind to suit the present-day needs, and there must be a monitoring mechanism to keep tabs on foreign funds to various religious, cultural and social organisations and their origin. They must come through the Central Bank. The UPFA is ready to discuss these proposals with all political parties and social organisations, and MP Duminda Dissanayake said the oversight committee was scheduled to meet next week to discuss the proposals further.¹⁰⁰

The man who might have stopped Sri Lanka's Easter bombings (by BBC) – This piece focuses on Mohammad Razak Taslim, who was shot in the head in March, on the orders of Zahran Hashim, according to officials. The article briefly describes his pain and difficulty following the attack. Taslim, a local politician and a member of Mawanella's town council, was involved in tracking down the chief suspects in the vandalism of Buddha statues in Mawanella. The brothers, Sadiq and Shaheed Abdul-Haq, were later linked to the Easter Sunday bombings. Close friends and relatives of the suspects claim that they frequently preached extremism and violence and had been deeply affected by communal riots around Kandy in 2018. Taslim was present when security forces discovered explosives in connection to the vandalism, some of which has also been linked to the Easter Sunday attacks. A senior Sri Lankan police source told the author of the piece that one of Hashim's close associates confessed that Hashim ordered Taslim be killed for acting as an "informant". He was shot in the head while asleep in his own house. The piece notes that the "Muslim community actively tried to stop the emergence of radical elements in their midst" and that "the authorities failed to recognise repeated warning signs ahead of the Easter attacks". Sri Lanka's Army Commander Lt. Gen. Mahesh Senanayake admitted that the previous incidents should have made the authorities more alert to the dangers of a jihadist attack. Further, warnings by the Indian security services in the days and hours leading up the bombings weren't followed up on due to problems with "intelligence sharing" between different departments. The piece briefly mentions the anti-Muslim rioting after the attacks. The piece interviews Taslim's wife.¹⁰¹

Ruhunu Uni students stage protest against Sharia Uni in Batticaloa (by Krishan Jeewaka Jayaruk) - More than 1,000 students of the Ruhunu University staged a protest in front of the campus, calling on the government to close the Sharia University in Batticaloa. They believe that the university is part of the effort to spread extremism in the country. The President of the General Students' Union of the Ruhunu University Weranga Pushpika warned that the student community in the country would launch a

¹⁰⁰ *Daily Mirror*, June 1, p. A3.

¹⁰¹ *Daily Mirror*, June 1, p. A5.

massive campaign demanding the closure of the Batticaloa campus. He claimed that the university was not recognised by the University Grants Commission and blamed both the current and previous presidents for the establishment of the institute.¹⁰²

Athuraliye Rathana Thera stages a fast in front of the Temple of the Tooth (by Indika Polkotuwa) – Athuraliye Rathana Thera initiated a death-unto-fast in front of the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic yesterday (May 31) demanding the removal of Governors of the Eastern and Western Provinces and Minister Rishad Bathiudeen. Moreover, Thera also demanded the setting up of an independent investigation commission to probe on the conduct of Doctor Shafi Siyabdeen of Kurunegala Hospital and the payment of compensation to mothers who were allegedly sterilised by him. Rathana Thera has also sent a letter to the President demanding the taking of proper measures against the Islamist extremists.¹⁰³

Response from the Government of Sri Lanka to the Joint-Statement by the UN Special Advisers (by Mahinda Aluthgedara) – Sri Lanka Government emphasises that the freedom to practice one's religion, freedom to move freely within Sri Lanka and freedom to settle down in any place in the country have been guaranteed by Constitution. The notification also mentions that the aim of the brutal bomb attacks that took place on Easter Sunday was to topple the base of the multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural society in Sri Lanka. It is also emphasised that all peace-loving Sri Lankans are endeavouring to get rid of the shock generated by the bomb attack. The notification has also expressed concern on the distortion of the fact by the two special advisers of the United Nations pertinent to Prevention of Genocide and Responsibility to Protect through making references such as "that the special advisers examined a series of attacks targeting the Muslim and Christian communities in Sri Lanka where there is a Buddhist majority" and "that the intensification of the extremist and nationalist ideologies in the Asian region putting the religious minorities at peril, is vividly reflected through the recent incidents in Sri Lanka". The notification notes that the Muslim community that constitutes 10 per cent of the Sri Lankan population of 22 million, had been living with the Buddhist majority and other communities peacefully for centuries. It also notes that even when there were merciless attacks against the Buddhist places of worship and the Islamic places of worship during the separatist terrorist conflict that existed in the country for 30 years, religion never became a root-cause for conflict. This notification has been released as the response of the Government of Sri Lanka on the joint statement issued by two special advisers on Prevention of Genocide and Responsibility to Protect.¹⁰⁴

Remove Bathiudeen, Azath Salley and Hizbullah – Rathana Thera initiates a fast near the Temple of the Tooth (by Cyril Wimalasurendra and Samanthi Weerasekera)

¹⁰² *Daily Mirror*, June 1, p. A5.

¹⁰³ *Dinamina*, June 1, p. 3.

¹⁰⁴ *Dinamina*, June 1, p. 8.



– Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thera initiated a continuous fast at the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic. Thera initiated this fast demanding the removal of Minister Rishad Bathiudeen and Governors Azath Salley and Hizbullah from their posts and also demanding the setting up of an independent investigation commission to probe on Doctor Shafi Siyabdeen, who is alleged to have sterilised Sinhala mothers. Thera, who addressed the media before the initiation of the fast, stated that notwithstanding the fact that Sinhala and Tamil communities as well as the peace-loving Muslims reject the Islamist extremism, the trio of Bathiudeen, Hizbullah and Salley are sponsoring terrorism. Thera also noted that Islamist terrorists and the handful of Muslims who assist those terrorists cannot be allowed to sabotage the daily life of the citizens in this country.¹⁰⁵

Madrasa Act should be immediately rolled back , if not we will go to courts – Bandula Gunawardane (by Lasitha Duminda) – Joint Opposition MP Bandula Gunawardana stated that Madrasa Act that had been presented by the Minister of Muslim Affairs is not in compliance with the Educational Acts in the country and that it should be immediately rolled-back. Gunawardana also mentioned that if that were not to happen, the Joint Opposition would file a case in the Supreme Court. Gunawardana also mentioned that it is reported that 311 Muslim religious institutions, 317 Arabic schools, 1721 Madrasa schools that are not in compliance with the national educational policy had been registered in the Ministry of Muslim Religious Affairs. He added that in this context Minister of Muslim Religious Affairs Haleem had presented a cabinet paper to set up a special board to regulate Madrasas and to set up a special fund for that. Gunawardana stressed that it is completely illegal to assign Madrasas to the Ministry of Education for the regulation of Madrasas.¹⁰⁶

A Muslim politician unusually keen on the accomplices of Zaharan who are imprisoned (by Keerthi Warnakulasuriya) – A Muslim politician and a German organisation have initiated a secret investigation on the accomplices of Zaharan who had been imprisoned over the Easter Sunday bomb attack.¹⁰⁷

The lady Doctor who quit because of the burqa had received higher education in Pakistan (by Chathura Pamunuwa) – It has been disclosed that the lady Doctor who quit the medical service as an objection to the notification given by the hospital authorities in Homagama to report to service sans burqa, had received her higher education in Pakistan. It is also reported that the director of the hospital had acknowledged her letter of leave and she had come to the hospital sans a burqa to hand over it.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Divaina, June 1, p. 1, 4.

¹⁰⁶ Divaina, June 1, p. 2.

¹⁰⁷ Divaina, June 1, p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ Divaina, June 1, p. 3.



Crossing from right path to the wrong path (by M. S. M. Ayub) – It seems that some media outlets and politicians are deviating the attention of people from Thowheed Jama'ath terrorists and it is also examined that the entire country is focussing on an imaginary enemy instead. Many, who voice their concerns at present on the Muslim terrorism, are targeting burqa, niqab, Madrasas, Arabic language and Muslim personal law that is under the control of the Judiciary. That is why aspersions are being cast as to whether we are chasing the real enemy. Many who raise objections over the Muslim terrorism opine that they are against Muslim extremism as opposed to the conventional Muslim community. But they condemn the Quran that is the main religious scripture of conventional Muslims. They also demand the banning of the religious school that the conventional Muslims have been studying for nearly a century. They also demand the relinquishment of the Arabic language that was learned by the traditional Muslims from the past. Although Muslim personal law is under the control of the judicial system in the country, there are extremely regressive elements in it. These things must be rectified. There is no point in telling that we are not against conventional Muslims telling that above issues should be eliminated, without making the necessary changes. Many states that all Muslims are not terrorists. But it is an issue as to how many leaders who state like that understand the gravity of the destruction of property of Muslims that was reported in several areas in the country (where any distinction between the extremists and conventional Muslims was not taken into consideration).¹⁰⁹

Rathana Thera initiates a fast near Temple of the Tooth (by J. L. A. Jayasinghe, Chamil Rupasinghe and Chanda Uduwela) – Athuraliye Rathana Thera initiated a fast yesterday at the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic in Kandy, demanding the removal of Minister Rishad Bathiudeen and Governors Hizbullah and Azath Salley. Thera who addressed the media, before the commencement of the fast noted that the hundreds of innocent civilians died due to the extremist Muslim terrorism. Thera also noted that Islamist terrorist groups had invaded state institutions and private institutions in the country. It was also stated by Thera that extremist education has been propagated throughout the country. Emphasising the fact that Bathiudeen, Salley and Hizbullah have acted in an extremely racist way using their designations, Thera demanded the removal of the trio from their posts.¹¹⁰

An attempt to attribute all allegations on the Easter Sunday attack on the President – S. B. Dissanayake (by Vineetha M. Gamage) – MP S. B. Dissanayake noted that what is done by the disclosure of the proceedings of the Parliamentary Select Committee appointed to probe the Easter Sunday bomb attack, is the attribution of all the allegations on Easter Sunday attack on the President. He appreciated the conduct of the Muslim residents in Madatugama for demolishing a Mosque that belongs to National Thowheed Jama'ath (NTJ) Organisation. He also mentioned that although it was the NTJ that was involved in the Easter Sunday attack, Sri Lanka Thowheed Jama'ath, All Ceylon

¹⁰⁹ *Lankadeepa*, June 1, p. 4.

¹¹⁰ *Lankadeepa*, June 1, p. 6.

Thowheed Jama'ath and Youth Thowheed Jama'ath too are organisations that foment extremist Wahhabism. He also urged the Muslim youth to demolish the extremist Mosques as done in Madatugama.¹¹¹

HRCSL gets tough on racism (by Anurangi Singh) - In a letter addressed to the president of the Bar Association of Sri Lanka (BASL), the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) states that it was informed that members of the bar of Mawanella and Badulla had refused to appear on behalf of members of the Muslim community arrested post Easter Sunday attacks. It also states that according to the reports received by the commission, the Nikaweratiya Bar protested when the police requested the court not to grant bail for suspects of the 13 May communal violence. Meanwhile, the Sunday Observer reliably learned that the commission has also written to the attorney general, requesting him to prevent officials of the department from posting or disseminating racially biased or harmful content. Pertaining to any future complaints the commission will receive, it will take steps to lodge complaints with the police on behalf of the affected persons.¹¹²

Kurunegala DIG has given the information (by Rekha Nilukshi Herath) – Journalist Hemantha Randunu had stated that he received information regarding the sterilisation of 4000 Sinhala Buddhist mothers from Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Wasantha Kithsara Jayalath. Mr. Randunu who works for Divaina newspaper has revealed this to the Criminal Investigation Division (CID). A Doctor in the Kurunegala Hospital had been arrested on 25th of May. A news item published by the correspondent of Lankadeepa newspaper in Kurunegala - Pushpakumara Jayaratne had mentioned on May 25 in Lankadeepa website that DIG Kurunegala stated that there are allegations against the particular Doctor on the sterilisation of a large number of Sinhala women through more than 8000 caesarean surgeries and there is an investigation against it.¹¹³

The allegations of Gnanasara Thera rejected (by Rekha Nilukshi Herath) – Sri Lankan Muslim Council (SLMC) issuing a notification mentions that the allegation made by Gnanasara Thera that the representatives of the SLMC met a terrorist leader is inaccurate. It is noted in that notification that they met a religious intellectual – Yusuf Al Kalrawee (who was working as an Adviser to the Head of the State of Qatar) at a conference that was held in Qatar in 2013. They have also noted that particular meeting was not a secret meeting at all.¹¹⁴

The factory that was torched with the assistance of villagers (by Rekha Nilukshi Herath) – It is true that the owner of the pasta factory that was torched in Minuwangoda is a Muslim. But the majority of the 300 workers who worked there were Sinhalese. It is

¹¹¹ Lankadeepa, June 1, p. 8.

¹¹² Sunday Observer, June 2, p. 1, 2.

¹¹³ Anidda, June 2, p. 1, 2.

¹¹⁴ Anidda, June 2, p. 2.

true that the attack was carried out under the leadership of outsiders; but the full support of the residents of the area had been extended to it.¹¹⁵

Exploit as they wish – Any person who glances at some Sinhala papers might reckon that Sri Lanka is at a juncture where a racist conflagration is blazing fiercely. It seems that the news items in the front page of every such newspaper are targeted at a particular thing – anti-Muslim sentiment! Instead of reporting what is happening in the country, these newspapers are hell-bent on to depict as to how an anti-Muslim sentiment can be depicted to the maximum extent possible. Surprisingly, the bulk of the society except a handful does not raise objections about this unethical media use. The most prominent example is the phobia created against a doctor in Kurunegala and the anti-Muslim sentiment carried out targeting the entire Muslim community. The Chief Prelate of the Asgiriya Bhikkhu Chapter keeps on talking to the media testing as to how the country can be further pushed into chaos.¹¹⁶

The intensification of political collapse as one looks at it (by Jayadeva Uyangoda) – A month has passed after the Easter Sunday bomb attacks. There was an unabated process during the past few weeks where the entire Muslim community was moulded as the ‘vicious enemy’ of the State and of Non-Muslim communities. The entire Muslim community was blamed upon for the terrorist acts that happened on 21st of April. Penalising of the entire minority community collectively, when a terrorist campaign emerges within that particular community must be ceased immediately. That is because it pushes that particular community to further marginalisation. It further intensifies the fault lines that already exist in the society. It seems that the broad alliance that consists of politicians, political forces, ethno-nationalist intellectual groups, professional tiers and media institutions that has been formed at present aspires to establish the Sinhala ethnic and cultural authority in the Sri Lankan state. Meanwhile there is the risk of the emergence of the Sri Lankan society as a Sinhala-Buddhist ethno political community, state or else a Pakistan in South Asia.¹¹⁷

A Presidential Commission against religious extremists who sterilised mothers- Bodu Saviya urges Sirisena (by Sirimantha Rathnasekera) – Bodu Saviya Organisation has made a written request from the President to set up Presidential Investigation Commission to conduct a probe on the religious extremists who deliberately sterilise Mothers.¹¹⁸

Rathana Thera commences a fast (by Cyril Wimalasurendra) – Athuraliye Rathana Thera initiated a fast in front of the Temple of the Tooth demanding the removal of Minister Rishad Bathiudeen, Governors Azath Salley and Hizbullah from their posts. Thera is also demanding an independent investigation into the incident where a Muslim

¹¹⁵ *Anidda*, June 2, p. 5.

¹¹⁶ *Anidda*, June 2, p. 6.

¹¹⁷ *Anidda*, June 2, p. 7.

¹¹⁸ *Divaina*, June 2, p. 1, 18.



Doctor is alleged to have performed sterilisation surgeries on Sinhala- Buddhist women.¹¹⁹

Azath Salley and Pettah Police – Athuraliye Rathana Thera has initiated a fast demanding the removal of Minister Rishad Bathiudeen, Governors Azath Salley and Hizbullah. Azath Salley is the worst out of the trio. It is this Azath Salley who carries out the worst verbal attacks against the Buddhist clergy and the Sinhala ethnic stability. The most detrimental impact of his foolish statements would fall on the President and his Sinhala vote base.¹²⁰

Easter Sunday attacks and the discovery of Army Camouflages (by Saman Gamage) – A no-confidence motion has been brought against Rishad Bathiudeen alleging that he had links with the terrorists who took part in the Easter Sunday attacks. One another special discovery that was disclosed during the search operations that were conducted in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday attack must be noted. That is the discovery of piles of army camouflages across various places in the country. The speciality of it is that all these camouflages were discovered in the possession of Muslims. How come some Muslims possess the army camouflages? Moreover, some of these army uniforms were discovered while they were being transported. How come the Muslims were able to transport army camouflages without any fear in a context where there was a widespread fear in the country of an Islamic terrorist attack? The reason is that relevant authorities had assigned the task of supplying camouflages of the tri-forces to three Muslim businessmen long before Thowheed Jama'ath terrorists carried out bomb attacks. This is in a context where there were intelligence reports even in 2011 of the fact that there is an emergence of Islamist extremism in the country and the fact that that particular extremism is associated with ISIS terrorism. The article concludes by affirming that the newspaper does not make the claim that the three businessmen aided Zaharan Hashim.¹²¹

Here are the stunts of Kurunegala Muslim Doctor (by Tharanga Ratnaweera) – A brutal story that ought to be never heard was heard from the Kurunegala Hospital. That is the story that the Sinhala mothers have been tactically sterilised. The allegations are levelled at the Senior Gynaecologist of the Kurunegala Hospital Shafi Siyabdeen. Mothers are making complaints at the Kurunegala Hospital that they did not conceive again after the performance of caesarean surgeries by Doctor Shafi.¹²²

A group of Doctors had intervened to rescue Doctor Shafi – A group of gynaecologists had intervened to rescue Doctor Shafi Siyabdeen of the Kurunegala Hospital who had been accused of performing sterilisation surgeries on Sinhala Buddhist women. The majority of these doctors who had intervened are said to be

¹¹⁹ Divaina, June 2, p. 1, 4.

¹²⁰ Divaina, June 2, p. 4.

¹²¹ Divaina, June 2, p. 4.

¹²² Divaina, June 2, p. 12.

doctors of the Kurunegala Hospital and the speciality is that all of them are Sinhala doctors.¹²³

All Madrasa schools must be immediately banned – Bandula Gunawardana (by Jayantha Samarakoon) – Joint Opposition MP Bandula Gunawardane stated that Minister of Muslim Affairs M. L. M. Haleem had presented a cabinet paper to take 2,349 Madrasa schools under the Ministry of Education. He also warned that if it were given the Cabinet approval, the entire education system in the country would be turned upside down. Gunawardana noted that there are 311 Muslim religious institutes, 317 Arabic schools and 1721 Madrasa schools under the schools that are to be taken under the Ministry of Education. He mentioned that there is an accepted national education policy on sub- schools and teaching colleges. He added that these illegal Madrasa schools that buttress Muslim extremism must be immediately banned.¹²⁴

The lady Doctor who quit the service due to the unwillingness to remove the burqa (by Muditha Dayananda, Buddhika Kumarasiri and Priyantha Jayalath) – President Maithripala Sirisena stated on 29th of April that all face-covers that are worn concealing the identity of an individual would be banned under the emergency law for the national security. The Gazette relevant to it too had been issued at present. Thus, the wearing of burqa and niqab worn by some Muslim women is prohibited. The main religious organisation that gives leadership to Muslims- Jamiyyathul Ulama organisation urged the Muslim women to refrain from wearing the burqa and niqab in public places. There were several instances where this ban was taken in different ways in both the Muslim society and the Non- Muslim society. One of the most notable incidents is the experience a group of teachers in the Puwakpitiya Tamil School had to undergo; the questioned teacher was not wearing a burqa or a niqab; she was wearing only a long gown and a scarf; but as she was compelled to come to the school in a saree, all Muslim teachers including her left the school. The latest incident is reported from the Homagama Hospital. The root cause of this issue is the reporting of a Muslim lady Doctor to duty wearing a niqab. She had been treating the patients at the O. P. D and a group of patients had raised an objection as she had been wearing a niqab. She had refused to alter her attire despite appeals from other doctors in the hospital and it is reported that she had quit the service. Until recently, Muslim women wore a saree and covered their heads using the saree. Young Muslim girls wore a Punjab or a long trouser and a suitable cloth for the upper parts of the body. But this garment gradually started to change. It is clear that there was foreign influence behind this. Many intellectuals point out that it is critical error to have consented to the conditions on propagation of religion imposed by Muslim states when they were granting aid.¹²⁵

Hundreds of complaints against the Kurunegala Doctor (by Pushpakumara Jayaratne) – The name Shafi Shiyabdeen emerged in day to day discussions with a news

¹²³ *Lankadeepa*, June 2, p. 1, 13.

¹²⁴ *Lankadeepa*, June 2, p. 1, 13.

¹²⁵ *Lankadeepa*, June 2, p. 3.

item that a Muslim Doctor attached to a Thowheed Jama'ath organisation had performed sterilisation surgeries on Sinhala Buddhist women. Ultimately, parliament too had to intervene in this regard as the Leader of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) repeatedly questioned the Speaker on it. Therefore, the task of holding investigations into this incident was assigned to the Criminal Investigation Department. No one can allege that Doctor Shafi is guilty of this allegation on sterilisation surgeries until truth is revealed properly. But, if this allegation were to be true, it is an egregious crime; he must be given serious punishments if so.¹²⁶

Funds came from Saudi Arabia to sterilise women – Athuraliye Rathana Thera (by Prasanna Sanjeewa Tennakoon) – United National Front (UNF) MP Ven Athuraliye Rathana Thera mentioned that Wahhabism is a movement that induces to practice a fundamentalist idea in the Islamic religious scriptures (if there are any as such) in the very same manner mentioned in that religious scripture. Noting that Wahhabism has become the most prominent tendency in Saudi Arabia at the moment, Thera opined that Wahhabism has spread throughout the world due to Saudi Arabia and the oil resources that it has. Thera also noted that the Madrasa schools are entirely illegal, and they were setup to create Islamic imams. Thera also noted that the investigations to the income sources of the Kurunegala Doctor Shafi would reveal that those colossal amounts came from Saudi Arabia. Thera also stressed that that amount was sent to sterilise women.¹²⁷

Is it ok for us to harass Muslims in the guise of Buddhism (by Pavithra Rupasinghe) – It is well-known that the Easter Sunday attack was carried out by the Thowheed Jama'ath organisation that has links with the Islamic State. But it is the opinion of some extremist groups that the Easter Sunday attack and the incidents that followed it are vicious attempts to wipe out Sinhalese. It must also be stated that the lack of openness that Muslims depict as a community too buttress the emergence of a sentiment like this. Though 1983 Black July generated euphoria to a group of Sinhala extremists, the cost paid for that for 30-40 years is innumerable. It would be an uphill task to enlighten our lives based on religion in a backdrop where several monks use the religion as a shield.¹²⁸

Mothers who flock to lodge complaints cursing Shafi (by Gayan Kumara Weerasinghe) – Doctor Shafi Siyabdeen who worked in the Kurunegala Teaching Hospital has become a controversial role at present. That is because there are allegations against him that he had sterilised Sinhala Buddhist mothers while performing caesarean surgeries on them.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ *Lankadeepa*, June 2, p. 6.

¹²⁷ *Lankadeepa*, June 2, p. 12.

¹²⁸ *Silumina*, June 2, p. 2.

¹²⁹ *Silumina*, June 2, p. 4.



Islamophobia that upsets dear Muslims (by Rajitha Jagodaarachchi) – Islamophobia had been existing in the country for a period of time. If it is not stated that there was a buttress also from the Muslim society for the emergence of such an anti-Muslim sentiment, that would be a hypocrisy. Former Minister Imthiyaz Bakeer Marker noted that as per the International Galup Research, 90 per cent of Muslims in the world are moderate and peaceful Muslims. He also stated that therefore it is clear that the attempt made by powerful media outlets to create a nexus between the Muslim people and terrorism is spurious. He also denied the opinion that the Muslim society maintained a passive behaviour until the Easter Sunday attack that claimed the lives of more than 250 lives happened. He elaborated that Muslim Intellectuals Association in Sri Lanka had been briefing about the groups that deviated from Muslim culture from 2014 and that all of them fell on deaf ears. Famous Composer Nilar N. Cassim noted that the Muslim identity is within oneself and it should not be specifically exhibited. He added that the moment the Muslims try to exhibit it, for an example by wearing a burqa, Muslims are spontaneously deviated from the rest of the society.¹³⁰

Muslim Council rejects Ven. Gnanasara's claim (by Mandira Wijerathna) – The Muslim Council of Sri Lanka (MCSL) vehemently rejects the claims made by Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara Thera that members of the Council met a terrorist leader in Qatar. "In 2013, the advisor to the president of Qatar, Usuf Al Karlavi, an Islamic theologian met a representative of MCSL at a seminar in Qatar," the MCSL stated in a communiqué. "We insist that it wasn't a confidential meeting. We only discussed the importance of living peacefully with the Buddhist community, the major ethnic group in Sri Lanka," the MCSL added. The council appealed to all parties not to destroy the process of establishing a Sri Lankan identity with false accusations. ¹³¹

Muslims face continued harassment in wake of terror fears (by Vimukthi Fernando) - This feature piece details the harassment of the Muslim community following the Easter Sunday attacks, specifying the number of deaths, the extremist Sinhala Buddhist groups, and the political involvement. The piece also elaborates on the freedoms Muslim people have had to give up, including their cultural cloths. They have also had to endure arbitrary arrests, such as the woman who was mistaken for wearing a dress with a Buddhist symbol. Further, the piece describes the restrictions put on clothing, even in government institutions, such as the Ministry of Public Administration and Disaster Management, which issued a circular mandated that female officers must wear saris or the 'osariya' to ensure security. Human rights activist Shreen Saroor claimed that Muslim women never had the choice of how they dressed given that the All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama (ACJU) kept issuing fatwas making the face cover compulsory, and brainwashing Muslim men to enforce this. These new restrictions are simply

¹³⁰ *Silumina*, June 2, p. 8.

¹³¹ *Sunday Observer*, June 2, p. 2.

exacerbating the issue. The only authority from which justice was carried out regarding complaints was the HRSC. Meanwhile, speaking to the media, Minister Mangala Samaraweera stressed the need for national unity at a time opportunistic extremist elements are trying to create racial conflict.¹³²

Kurunegala doctor's saga: tale of a witch-hunt? (by Rajitha Jagoda Arachchi and Aanya Wipulasena) - The tornado of allegations levelled against Dr. Segu Siyabdeen Mohamed Shafi ignited after a newspaper article accused him of sterilising 4,000 mothers without their consent, this feature piece states. The piece notes that Dr. Shafi was well regarded before this incident. Dr. Shafi was arrested on 24 May for amassing large amounts of wealth, and hundreds of complaints against him regarding illegal sterilisation quickly followed suit. Most complaints were ambiguous in nature. Soon afterwards, there were protests staged outside the Kurunegala Teaching Hospital (KTH), where Dr. Shafi was employed. The doctor's family, based in Kurunegala, has since left the area fearing backlash. The protests organised at the KTH were led by the Government Medical Officers' Association (GMOA) backed by other trade unions. On Tuesday, the members of the expert panel appointed by the ministry were turned away by the officials at the KTH. Director of the Hospital Dr. Sarath Weerabandara said they have sufficient equipment and expertise to conduct an in-house investigation. Senior Research Professor at the National Institute of Fundamental Studies, Prof. Gamini Seneviratne suggested looking at the doctor's patient statistics to figure out whether a significant portion of his patients had actually been sterilised. A senior consultant in the hospital suggested that the case against Dr. Shafi was manipulated by the hospital director and "some other authority", given that the complaints lacked credibility. The article wonders whether business and professional competition and political motives played a role in getting Dr. Shafi's detractors to speak up. The piece also notes that the KTH director asked women to lodge complaints if they suspected sterilisation.¹³³

Love, the weapon to conquer enemies (by Revd. Wilson Gunadass) - This piece states that "to the majority Christians, these attacks are signs of 'End Times', as clearly spelled out in the Holy Bible." The piece gives a brief history of the persecution of Christians and commends religious leaders for preaching peace after the Easter Sunday attacks. The author recounts historical instances when Christians have resorted to violence but claims that a true follower of Jesus Christ could not do so. "If the sword is the weapon of non-Christians, love is the weapon of Christians to fight the war against their adversaries," the piece states.¹³⁴

The powerful key that Rathana Thera possesses – Athuraliye Rathana Thera has initiated a fast in front of the Temple of the Sacred Tooth relic demanding the removal

¹³² *Sunday Observer*, June 2, p. 4.

¹³³ *Sunday Observer*, June 2, p. 6.

¹³⁴ *Sunday Observer*, June 2, p. 10.



of Minister Rishad Bathiudeen, Governors Azath Salley and Hizbullah. Thera also demands the setting up of an independent investigatory board to probe on Doctor Shafi Siyabdeen who is alleged to have sterilised a considerable number of Sinhala Buddhist women. Rishad Bathiudeen would not be removed unless he resigns on his own volition; on the other hand, if the Government stays with him, it can secure the Muslim votes at the next election. Hizbullah and Azath Salley are acolytes of the President and they represent the Muslim vote base of the President. If President Maithripala Sirisena were to contest in the next presidential election, he should be concerned about the Muslim votes. Thus, what is visible at present is that Rathana Thera is in a precarious situation. Batticaloa District MP S. Viyalendran has initiated a fast with the very same demand made by Athuraliye Rathana Thera. He is ready to go for a fast-unto-death, if Bathiudeen, Salley and Hizbullah were not to resign. All Sinhala masses should respect this progressive Tamil person. We are also of the belief that the fast initiated by Rathana Thera would be a golden key that opens the lid of the locker- ethnic political base.¹³⁵

Attempts made to capture power by triggering racial conflict (by T. Sobithan) – Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has accused certain individuals of creating racial disharmony and trying to gain power by using the ISIS. He stated that the attacks on Muslims following the Easter bombings were largely based on false information. He added that the government had established security and there was no room for extremism and terrorism to raise their heads.¹³⁶

Rishad, Hizbullah and Azath Salley should resign on their own volition (by Rajadurai Hashan) – Parliamentarian Vasudeva Nanayakkara has stated that Minister Rishad Bathiudeen and Governors Azath Salley and M.L.A.M. Hizbullah should resign on their own. He stated that all three politicians were acting in a manner that was detrimental to national co-existence. The call comes in the wake of a hunger strike by Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thera demanding the removal of the three politicians from their respective positions. Nanayakkara pointed out that if the president failed to address the concerns, there would be tensed situations in the country and the conflict between communities would intensify.¹³⁷

The Muslim community that is faced with various inconveniences (by M.S.M Noordeen) – Chairman of the Bismi Organisation and head of Kattankudy Civil Society Federation Ash-Sheikh M.P.M Firthous in an interview stated that the Muslim community was faced with several challenges following the Easter bomb attacks. He pointed out that the community was targeted during search operations and were greatly inconvenienced. In addition, he also pointed out that the community was viewed

¹³⁵ *Divaina*, June 3, p. 8.

¹³⁶ *Virakesari*, June 3, p. 1.

¹³⁷ *Virakesari*, June 3, p. 1.

with suspicion due to the Easter Sunday attacks by other communities, which also inconvenienced them.¹³⁸

Decision on No-Confidence Motion against Rishad will be taken considering welfare of Muslims – MP Sritharan (by N. Thanuja) – Tamil National Alliance Parliamentarian, S. Sritharan stated that the party would take a decision on the no- confidence motion against Minister Rishad Bathiudeen, keeping in mind the welfare of the Muslim people.¹³⁹

Attire of Muslim women officials: Circular to be issued soon – MP Imran – Parliamentarian Imran states that a circular on Muslim women’s attire in government offices will be issued soon. He made this statement when questioned about a circular issued earlier preventing Muslim women from wearing abhaya in government offices. He stated that such a move was against the rights of the women.¹⁴⁰

The responsibility to alleviate the accusations on Muslims is on the community itself – Yatawatte Dhammananda Thera of Sribodhi Maha Vihara – Yatawatte Dhammanada Thera of the Kandy Vairavakanda Srimala Bodhi stated that the onus of eradicating the accusations levelled against Muslims, after the Easter Sunday attacks, rested on the community itself. The monk made this statement while attending a conference on reconciliation in Kandy.¹⁴¹

New circular will not ban abhaya – Minister Ranjith Madduma Bandara assures Haris – Minister of Public Administration and Disaster Management, Rajith Madduma Bandara has assured State Minister H.M.M Harees that the new circular on attire for Muslim women in government offices would not ban Abaya. He stated that the previous circular which banned the abhaya would be withdrawn and a new circular would be issued.¹⁴²

We don’t need a governor who acts in a racial manner – Parliamentarian Viyalendiran launched a protest in Batticaloa against Eastern Province Governor, M.L.A.M. Hizbullah and Minister Riashad Bathiudeen, calling for their removal. He stated that both acted in a manner which created racial disharmony.¹⁴³

Government should resolve the doubts of Sinhalese people – Chief Priest of Kalmunai Subathrarama Maha Vihara, Ven. Ranmuthugala Sangarathna thera supported the protest launched by Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thera stating that those who were identified as suspects cannot be investigated while they hold higher positions. He

¹³⁸ *Virakesari*, June 3, p. 4.

¹³⁹ *Virakesari*, June 3, p. 11.

¹⁴⁰ *Virakesari*, June 3, p. 15.

¹⁴¹ *Virakesari*, June 3, p. 17.

¹⁴² *Virakesari*, June 3, p. 17.

¹⁴³ *Virakesari*, June 3, p. 19.



therefore urged that the government should clear the doubts that have arisen among the Sinhalese.¹⁴⁴

Can we be satisfied with the security of motherland? (by Uwatenne Sumana Thera) – M. H. M. Ashroff was engaged in an attempt to terminate the participation of Muslims in mainstream politics in Sri Lanka by forming a party called “Sri Lanka Muslim Congress” based on ethnicity. But the impediment to his exercise was the threshold of 12.5 per cent votes to get a Parliamentary Seat. But this threshold was later reduced to 5 per cent by President Ranasinghe Premadasa on the insistence of M. H. M. Ashraff to get the Muslim votes in 1988 Presidential election. Thus, small parties with a vote base of ethnic minorities were empowered to manipulate the main political parties. This paved the way for the transformation of politics based on vote of minorities to that is guided by extremism. It is crystal clear that it was the political leadership of Muslim parties that nurtured and harboured these extremists. It is no secret that the fact that Islamic fundamentalism has also initiated a covert mechanism of “sterilisation of women” of Sinhala origin and it is being divulged with evidence. It has also been confirmed that money is being flowed secretly to Islamic extremist organisations in the country from Gulf Arab states and Turkey. Schools and lecture halls that disseminate Islamic extremist ideas are vicious milestones of terrorism. It is ridiculous to reckon that the Islamic extremist terrorist risk has diminished till they continue to function.¹⁴⁵

The presidential pardon, how prudent is it? - This short opinion piece questions the presidential pardon of fire-brand monk Ven. Gnanasara Thera, who walked right into the current debate about the prevalence of Muslim fundamentalist terrorism in the country. The piece claims that vigilance in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday attacks is acceptable, while paranoia and racism are not. It is not only the fault of the majority, however. The responsibility also falls on the shoulders of leaders of the Muslim community for not openly condemning the extremists and opposing stringent security measures. Released into this charged climate, Gnanasara Thera seemed slightly more moderate, although “he made some startling assertions which certainly merit investigation.” Following the Easter attacks, there was a perception that Gnanansara Thera may have been right about Islamic extremism, making a pardon a viable option. The piece expresses concern at what message this pardon will send, especially as Gnanasara Thera is yet to acknowledge regret at the actions that landed him in jail. The piece concludes that such actions, along with a few other examples, make a mockery out of the justice system, and contradicts this government’s motto of ‘good governance’.¹⁴⁶

Lest history repeat itself... (by Sanjeewa Fernando) - This long opinion piece condemns the communal violence following the Easter Sunday attacks, and remarks at

¹⁴⁴ *Thinakaran*, June 3, p. 8.

¹⁴⁵ *Divaina*, June 3, p. 8.

¹⁴⁶ *Sunday Observer*, June 3, p. 9.



the ease with which the country slid back into functioning as a police state, ten years after the end of the war. The author mentions that even churches got stoned, despite Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith stating otherwise. Further, the piece mentions Sinhala extremist groups, such as Mahason Balakaya, and the political motive behind the riots, organised with the aim of destabilising the country and government. The author also faults the government for their part in the Easter Sunday attacks. The piece also mentions the allegations against certain Muslim ministers, “in some cases with more than sufficient information to suggest that they need to be seriously examined.” The piece cautions the nation to learn from its past mistakes, with regards to interacting with minorities. Further, Sinhala politicians (such as Rajapaksa) have been sponsoring extremist elements within the Muslim polity with the intention of dividing the Muslim voter base which, in general, had not been in their favour, the author claims. “The last strand of legitimacy this ‘good governance’ government might have left intact, could be that it is not given to racist or Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism as a political weapon as the Rajapaksa regime did,” the article states. Nevertheless, we should learn from the past and act diligently and vigilantly.¹⁴⁷

No mercy for those who promote communal hatred (by Yohan Perera and Sithum Chathuranga) - The government will show no mercy to those who create tension among the Sinhalese and Muslims and will act against them in the same manner it is dealing with ISIS and the NTJ, PM Ranil Wickremesinghe said yesterday, at a ceremony held in Jaffna to distribute Samurdhi aid to new recipients. The PM stated that the anti-Muslim riots and the rumours of attacks on schools were all carried out to make things hard for the government. He added that he was informed by intelligence units of plans to execute attacks in other areas, such as Biyagama. The PM said that attacking Muslims would also hinder the rooting out of Islamic extremists, as they are the ones who most frequently inform the government of such activity.¹⁴⁸

Foreseeing Modern Threats (by Camelia Nathaniel) - In this Q&A, Minister of Megapolis and Western Development Patali Champika Ranawaka explains Sri Lanka’s security vulnerabilities in the present era. Minister Ranawaka is of the view that radicalisation takes place today in a very individualised manner and through social media and electronic means. He stated the importance of having a big data platform to monitor and identify threats coming in through social media, instead of simply blocking it altogether, especially as people can simply go through a VPN to access it anyway. The minister stated that unlike the LTTE, which was a real time physical threat, these extremist groups operate on a cyber level and only get together to orchestrate an attack. Further, the minister advocated the use of surveillance systems which will trigger warnings the moment it detects words which are deemed threatening. Minister Ranawaka stated that the extremists behind the attack wanted to kill all non-believers, a

¹⁴⁷ *Sunday Observer*, June 3, p. 10, 12.

¹⁴⁸ *Daily Mirror*, June 3, p. A1, A2.



sign that the attacks weren't simply a reaction to being an oppressed minority. Further, the minister state that madrasas teach Muslim children "Islamic sciences" which attempt to prove the message in the Quran that women are inferior to men. He claimed that this was the reason that Muzammil's wife lost the election. He states that there is a clear distinction between the Muslim identity and Arabisation, the latter being something that should be eradicated in Sri Lanka.¹⁴⁹

Fasting by All Ceylon Hindu Federation (by Nadeeka daya Bandara) - The All Ceylon Hindu Federation began a fast in Palledelthota, Kandy yesterday in support of Ven.Rathana Thera, who is engaged in a fast at the Dalada Maligawa. Chairman of the Hindu Federation Nara T. Arun Khanth has begun his fast near the Halwattha Bodhiya. He said the government should act to eliminate the Islamic fanaticism spreading in the country after the Easter attacks, and fulfil the requests of Ven. Rathana Thera. Further, he stated the Eastern Province governor should be arrested for introducing new laws that brought "destruction for the people". There is sufficient evidence to prove the allegations against Bathiudeen, he added, but an investigation has not been initiated. Central Province Hindu Priest Nilamba Haridev S. Brabha Kurukal also joined the fasting.¹⁵⁰

Jaffna Muslims stage demonstration against terrorism - Muslims in Jaffna staged a demonstration after their Friday prayers at the Muslim College Road - Navalar Road junction in order to pay homage to the victims of the Easter Sunday attacks and express condemnation of ISIS terror activities. The demonstrators carried banners denouncing ISIS as anti-Islamic, urging minorities not to divide, and calling on the government to take action. Jaffna District mosque administrators, ulamas, representatives of civil movements, educationalists, youth and students also participated in the demonstration.¹⁵¹

Distress of informal Muslim workers (by Ahilan Kadirgamar) - In this short opinion piece, the author outlines some of the concerns raised by Muslim informal workers about their livelihood problems to the Jaffna People's Forum for Coexistence—a group of multi-ethnic community leaders and progressive activists, formed immediately after the Easter attacks. The author states that, of the 2,000 Muslim families that returned to Jaffna after the war and registered their interest to resettle there, only 650 families remain in Jaffna today, due to the lack of job opportunities and bureaucratic obstacles to resettlement. Furthermore, about 90% of the currently resident Jaffna Muslims are involved in informal sector jobs including scrap iron collection, mutton and beef trading, pavement vending and door to door sales. 11 informal Muslim workers informed the Jaffna People's Forum, of which the author is a member, that in the month following the

¹⁴⁹ *Daily News*, June 3, p. 4.

¹⁵⁰ *Daily Mirror*, June 3, p. A6.

¹⁵¹ *Daily Mirror*, June 3, p. A6.



Easter Sunday attacks, they did not even attempt to go out for petty trading due to fear of backlash. When they eventually went out, they were harassed. Further, Muslim women have complained to the forum saying that their independence has been compromised, as they are afraid to go out in hijabs. The piece concludes that while there is no easy fix, authorities can certainly do more to prevent the harassment of working-class Muslims on the pretext of security.¹⁵²

Batticaloa Campus embroils in controversy (by Kelum Bandara) - This long opinion piece focuses on the controversy of the 'Shari'a University' in Batticaloa. The author describes the modern teaching facilities of the campus, with "Arabic architecture and landscape at its core". He notes that the campus has not been granted degree granting status by the University Grants Commission (UGC), nor has its courses or curricula been approved. Initially, in 2013, the campus was supposed to be a vocational training facility open to students from all communities, not a degree granting institution. However, after conducting interviews in May 2014, only 58 Muslim students were enrolled. The piece discusses in detail the conflicts in the land agreement of the campus, including the total land area used by the Batticaloa Campus being in excess of the extent officially approved. Further, the piece states that the initial investment in the campus, approved by the Board of Investment, was USD 4.75 million, although up to USD 26 million had been invested as of January 2019. The campus authorities failed to disclose how the investment was financed. The Auditor General found that USD 9.457 million was received from Saudi Arabia. The piece also questions the involvement of Governor Hizbullah in the campus, and the ethical implications of him signing certain documents as a member of parliament. The article concludes by stressing the importance of monitoring private higher education institutes and suggests that the enactment of the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Bill may be a good first step.¹⁵³

Ultimatum for the government till 12 noon today (3 June): Monks to protest islandwide if Rishad, Hizbullah and Azath Salley do not resign – Gnanasara Thera warns - General Secretary of the Bodu Bala Sena, Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara Thera has warned that tension would erupt in several parts of the island if there is no solution given for the demands by Ven. Athuraliye Thera by 12 noon on June 3. Rathana Thera commenced a hunger strike demanding the removal of Minister Rishad Bathiudeen and Governors Azath Salley and M.L.A.M. Hizbullah from their respective positions. The monk alleged that the three Muslim politicians promoted extremism in the country.¹⁵⁴

Why this pathetic situation for places of worship? - The opinion article discusses the recent incidents where traditional Hindu temple premises are forcibly taken over and

¹⁵² *Daily Mirror*, June 3, p. A8.

¹⁵³ *Daily Mirror*, June 3, p. A9.

¹⁵⁴ *Uthayan*, June 3, p. 1.



Buddhist statues and temples are being constructed. The article condemns such actions and urges authorities ensure that the rights of all religions are ensured.¹⁵⁵

Another victim of Buddhist, Sinhala chauvinism - The editorial discussing the resignation of Muslim ministers states that the Muslim politicians and the people were victims of Buddhist, Sinhala chauvinism in the country. The editorial points out that the Tamils faced a similar situation, adding that the Sinhala, Buddhist agenda destroys anyone who struggles for Tamil-Muslim communities.¹⁵⁶

Muslim ministers resign (by Maheswaran Prasath) – All Muslim Ministers unanimously decided to resign from their portfolios on June 3 following calls for the resignation of Minister Rishad Bathiudeen and Governors M.L.A.M. Hizbullah and Azath Salley. The decision was made on June 2 morning and was conveyed to Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe at Temple Trees subsequently. Leader of the SLMC Rauff Hakeem stated that the Muslim ministers held discussions with the Cabinet and Wickremesinghe on the accusations leveled against certain Muslim politicians and therefore, decided to resign from their respective positions. He also called for investigations on the allegations leveled against the said politicians.¹⁵⁷

Muslim Ministers resign (by R. Yasi and MFM Basheer) – All Muslim Ministers unanimously decided to resign from their portfolios on June 3 following intense calls for the resignation of Minister Rishad Bathiudeen and Governors M.L.A.M. Hizbullah and Azath Salley. The decision was made on June 2 morning and was conveyed to Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe at Temple Trees subsequently. Leader of the SLMC Rauff Hakeem stated that the Muslim ministers held discussions with the Cabinet and Wickremesinghe on the accusations levelled against certain Muslim politicians and therefore, decided to resign from their respective positions. He also called for investigations on the allegations leveled against the said politicians.¹⁵⁸

Mosque and shops stoned – Stones were pelted at a mosque and several Muslim owned shops in Kekirawa during a protest march that was held in support of Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thera who had launched a hunger strike calling for the removal of Minister Rishad Bathiudeen and Governors Azath Salley and M.L.A.M. Hizbullah. It was alleged that the police had not taken any action against those who were involved in the incident.¹⁵⁹

Political impact of Buddhist monks is dangerous for minorities – Former Deputy Minister Prabha Ganesan has stated that the involvement of Buddhist monks in the

¹⁵⁵ *Uthayan*, June 3, p. 8.

¹⁵⁶ *Uthayan*, June 4, p. 8.

¹⁵⁷ *Thinakaran*, June 4, p. 1.

¹⁵⁸ *Virakesari*, June 4, p. 1.

¹⁵⁹ *Virakesari*, June 4, p. 1.



current complex political scenario would be detrimental for the minority communities. While stating that allegations of aiding terrorism levelled against three Muslim politicians should be investigated. He further pointed out the growing involvement of Buddhist monks in politics would turn against the Tamil community and therefore urged the people to be vigilant.¹⁶⁰

Only 559 Muslims have been arrested – President – President Maithripala Sirisena says that only 559 Muslim individuals have been arrested and detained following the Easter bomb attacks. Speaking at an Ifthar ceremony at the President's House, the President stated that all those who are not connected to the attacks would be released after investigations.¹⁶¹

Australian Home Affairs Minister visits Katuwapitiya St. Sebastian Church – Australian Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton visited the Katuwapitiya St. Sebastian's church that was affected by the bomb attack in April. He inspected the renovation activities of the church and also paid homage to the victims.¹⁶²

Dharmachakra dress issue: arrested woman released on bail – The Muslim woman who was arrested for allegedly wearing a dress with the Dharma Chakra (Buddhist symbol) in Mahiyangana, was released on Rs. 100,000 personal bail by the Mahiyangana Magistrate.¹⁶³

No one can go to heaven by killing others; Muslims are hurt because of Zaharan – Security Forces Commander of Ampara, Maj. Gen. Mahinda Mudalige stated that the Muslims were hurt because of actions of Zahran and added that no one can go to heaven by killing fellow human beings.¹⁶⁴

Destruction of Kanniya Venneerootru is a part of plan to Sinhalise East – Former member of the Eastern Provincial Council M. Rajeswaran alleged that moves to capture the premises of the Kanniya Venneerootru area was part of a plan to 'Sinhalise' the East. He stated that the government was indulged in supporting such actions while also portraying that it was against such activities. He stated that such moves would hamper harmony between communities.¹⁶⁵ We should live by respecting all religions – Security Forces Commander of the Ampara District, Maj. Gen. Mahinda Mudalige stated that all should respect religions. He

¹⁶⁰ *Virakesari*, June 4, p. 2.

¹⁶¹ *Virakesari*, June 4, p. 8.

¹⁶² *Virakesari*, June 4, p. 9.

¹⁶³ *Virakesari*, June 4, p. 11.

¹⁶⁴ *Virakesari*, June 4, p. 15.

¹⁶⁵ *Thinakaran*, June 4, p. 9.

made this statement during an Ifthar ceremony organised by Kalmunai Malgaikadu traders.¹⁶⁶

Sri Lanka is a Buddhist country; those who deny do not know history – Public Enterprise, Kandy Heritage and Kandy Development Minister Lakshman Kiriella said that Sri Lanka is a Buddhist country and anyone arguing otherwise has no accurate understanding of the history of Sri Lanka. Minister Kiriella also observed that the present government will always be dedicated to safeguard the Buddha Sasana. “When there is a Sinhala Buddhist government in this country, it shall never allow the Buddha Sasana to be destroyed. All previous governments protected the Buddha Sasana and this government will also take every measure to safeguard Buddhism.¹⁶⁷

Muslim ministers call it quits (by Rukshana Rizwie) - Nine Muslim ministers have announced their resignation from their ministerial portfolios to sit as backbenchers in parliament for a period of one month during which they have requested the government to investigate allegations against the ministers and the Muslim community expeditiously. Sri Lanka Muslim Congress Leader Rauff Hakeem requested the government to hand over investigations to the Colombo Crimes Division and said they are willing to accept any allegations if proven true. He also addressed the attacks against Muslims and the unfair arrest of many who are not linked to the terror attacks. The state ministers who are vacating their positions include Ali Zahir Moulana, Faizal Cassim, Ameer Ali, H.M.M. Harees and Deputy Minister Abdullah Mahrooff. Yesterday, Governor of the Western Province Azath Salley and Governor of the Eastern Province M.L.A.M. Hizbullah submitted their resignations to the president. Their resignation comes in the wake of a fast unto death by Buddhist monk Ven. Rathana Thera who demanded that the governors resign over alleged links to the Easter Sunday bombings.¹⁶⁸

Mangala takes on Cardinal (by Disna Mudalige) - The archbishop of Colombo Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith “fanned communalism and hatred” by visiting fasting MP Ven. Rathana Thera, Finance Minister Mangala Samaraweera accused yesterday. The minister, in a post on Twitter, requested the attention of the Vatican regarding the cardinal’s actions. The archbishop of Colombo, meeting Ven. Rathana Thera in Kandy yesterday morning, expressed his solidarity with the monk’s fast-unto death campaign which had entered its fourth day. The cardinal said that he too supports the demand to remove Minister Rishad Bathiudeen and Governors M.L.A.M. Hizbullah and Azath Salley from their respective posts. He complained that justice had not been meted out to the people who lost their lives in the Easter Sunday terrorist attacks.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ *Thinakaran, June 4, p. 9.*

¹⁶⁷ *Thinakaran, June 4, p. 10.*

¹⁶⁸ *Daily News, June 4, p. 1, 8.*

¹⁶⁹ *Daily News, June 4, p. 1, 8.*



Lawyers take their turn - This editorial condemns the lawyers that refused to represent Muslims who were held in custody on suspicion of terrorist links following the Easter Sunday attacks. The areas these lawyers belong to include Mawanella and Badulla. In a letter addressed to the Bar Association of Sri Lanka (BASL), Chairperson of the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka Dr. Deepika Udagama stated that such discriminatory conduct denied certain citizens the right to enjoy equal protection of the law under the Constitution of Sri Lanka. Such a violation of the code of ethics of the legal profession should lead to cancellation of their licence to practice, the article states. “Every member of the public irrespective of race or religion is guaranteed protection under the law and it is the duty of lawyers to recognize this inalienable right,” the piece states. Further, the piece condemns the systematic boycott of all things Muslim, questioning why these lawyers don’t also stop “pumping fuel into their vehicles since every drop of petrol and petrol products comes from Arab countries.” The editorial questions whether these anti-Muslim lawyers were politically motivated, given that the BASL tends to be highly politicised. The piece concludes by warning the public not to alienate both the domestic and international Muslim communities, and let the authorities handle the situation instead of resorting to antics such as boycotting and fasting.¹⁷⁰

Drowning in a sea of hatred (by Ravi Ratnasabapathy) - This long opinion piece elaborates on the role stereotypes and prejudices play in hate speech, the basis for communal tension and violence. The author states that all humans have the need to belong to a group, and those outside the group are usually dehumanised, making it easier to perpetrate violence against them. Regarding the anti-Muslim sentiment in Sri Lanka, the author states that in addition to dehumanising them, rumours and misleading news stories have portrayed them as a threat to the majority Sinhala Buddhist population. The piece calls out the ignorant non-Muslim population that indirectly perpetuate hate speech by sharing racist “jokes” or “edgy comments” on social media, all the while calling for peace in the aftermath of the riots. The author expresses concern that even after the riots, the hatred has not abated, and the victim seem to be forgotten. The piece stresses that the government and security forces need to gain control of the situation and be unified in their response. The piece concludes by condemning Islamophobic actions, such as sensationalist stories about police raids and the pardon of a racist monk and urges the government to combat such sentiment as other nations have done following terror attacks.¹⁷¹

Work to promote and protect peace and harmony - President – President Maithripala Sirisena, while condemning extremism and terrorism yesterday, said the country will be in peril if clashes erupt among communities. He added that the government is committed to building a nation where people of all communities can live

¹⁷⁰ *Daily News*, June 4, p. 6.

¹⁷¹ *Daily News*, June 4, p. 6.



in peace and harmony. The president refuted reports that thousands of Muslims are being held by the security forces as part of investigations into the Easter Sunday terror attacks, stating that “only 559 Muslims have been detained for further questioning.” President Sirisena said that he has already issued directives to the authorities concerned to ensure the release of those who do not have any involvement in the Easter Sunday terror attacks after investigations. The president was speaking at the national Ifthar ceremony held at president’s house in Colombo yesterday evening. Islamic leaders commended the efforts of the president to protect the dignity of all religions and communities.¹⁷²

Desecration of Buddha statues in Mawanella: Suspects re-remanded until June 13 (by Saman Vijaya Bandara) - The suspects accused of desecrating the Buddha statues in Mawanella between 22 and 25 December last year were re-remanded until June 13 by Magistrate Upul Rajakaruna yesterday. 13 suspects were produced before the Mawanella Magistrate Court earlier. When the hearing resumed yesterday, another suspect was produced by the Mawanella Police. The police claimed the suspect had transacted business at a private bank in Mawanella with suspects Mohamed Ibrahim Sahid Abdul Haq and Mohamed Sadik Abdulla. A statement and report obtained from the bank were also submitted to the court. The 14th suspect has been identified as 24- year-old Hisbullah Khan Hamid. The suspects were brought to court from remand prison in Kegalle under special police security. The article also names all the suspects.¹⁷³

HRCSL seeks corrective action from BASL (by Yohan Perera) - The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) stated yesterday that a few regional bar associations had been discriminative in rendering their services to the Muslim community and sought corrective action. HRCSL Chairperson Dr. N.D. Udagama made this request in writing to Bar Association Chairperson Kalinga Indatissa. The letter noted that the Mawanella and Badulla Bar Associations refused to appear on behalf of Muslims arrested in connection with post-21 April attacks, resulting in financial inconveniences for their families. Further, the letter observed that members attached to the Nikaweratiya Bar protested when police requested the court not to grant bail to those arrested on suspicion of participating in the communal violence perpetrated on May 13.¹⁷⁴

Sri Lanka has been a Buddhist country for centuries - Minister Kiriella (by Sandun A. Jayasekera) - In an apparent broadside against Finance Minister Mangala Samaraweera, Leader of the House, Lakshman Kiriella, yesterday said that it is those who are not familiar with Sri Lankan history who claim it is not a Buddhist country. He added that this government promotes, fosters and augments Buddhism. Minister

¹⁷² *Daily News*, June 4, p. 10.

¹⁷³ *Daily Mirror*, June 4, p. A8.

¹⁷⁴ *Daily Mirror*, June 4, p. A8.



Samaraweera's statement, which triggered protests from many quarters, claimed that Sri Lanka was not a Buddhist Sri Lankan country, but a country of Sri Lankans. Referring to the survival of Buddhism through 400 years of foreign rule, Minister Kiriella said that the constitution grants the government the right to protect Buddhism, and no one can challenge that.¹⁷⁵

Twists and turns in the Dr. Shafi controversy (by Piyumi Fonseka) - This feature piece focuses on Dr. Segu Siyabdeen Mohamed Shafi, who has been accused of sterilising women without their consent. The piece details how an article in the Divaina newspaper about a doctor performing sterilisation procedures during c-sections turned into a Facebook post accusing Dr. Shafi, which then deteriorated into threats against his wife and children. The piece also mentions that Dr. Shafi worked under a consultant, and that there were usually at least six individuals in an operating room when performing a caesarean section. Dr. Shafi was a senior house officer in gynaecology and obstetrics, at the teaching hospital in Kurunegala when he was taken into custody on 24 May on charges of acquiring a large number of assets through suspicious means. The police questioned Dr. Shafi and his family twice after the Easter Sunday attacks, following which they inspected his father-in-law's medical lab. Upon arresting Dr. Shafi, the police did not present him to the Judicial Medical Officer (JMO) on duty, as is the law. Instead, a JMO not on duty was asked to come by the director of the Kurunegala Hospital. Members of Dr. Shafi's family said that they suspect a link to the DIG Kithsiri Jayalath, whose wife is also a doctor serving the Kurunegala Hospital in the capacity of an associate of the director of the hospital. Dr. Shafi's wife, Dr. Imara, stated that her husband's arrest and public persecution have made her and her children afraid to leave home. The article concludes with the professional opinion of Prof. Hemantha Senanayake, Head of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo, who said that the fallopian tubes are not usually seen during a c-section, unless it is manipulated into the wound by inserting the hand into the abdomen.¹⁷⁶

The ultra-nationalist ultimatum (by Ranga Jayasuriya) - This short opinion piece criticises the current government for their ineptitude following the Easter Sunday attacks. Further, the piece calls the requests of Ven. Gnanasara Thera and Ven. Rathana Thera to remove certain Muslim politicians from their posts ultra-nationalist and suggests that the resignation of Governors Azath Salley and M.L.A.M. Hizbullah could be seen as a capitulation of the government, thereby further emboldening majoritarian bigotry. The author suggests that conflict within the government, specifically between the president and prime minister, has resulted in impeding the primary and most basic function of a government: national security. The article mentions recent events that make this point evident, such as the failure to prevent the Easter Sunday attacks or follow up on explosives found in an extremist training camp in Puttalam beforehand.

¹⁷⁵ *Daily Mirror*, June 4, p. A8.

¹⁷⁶ *Daily Mirror*, June 4, p. A10.



The author talks about the perceived complicity of Muslim politicians in spreading Wahabi or Arabisation and mentions Minister Bathiudeen and Governors Hizbullah and Salley. Until these allegations are properly investigated, it is natural for the majority Sinhalese to be apprehensive, the piece states. The responsibility of finding out the truth and balancing the sensitive nature of the issue for all parties falls on the government. The author stresses the need for tight security and strict laws that cannot be bent for political motives. In terms of the communal unrest, this means that the instigators must be punished.¹⁷⁷

Muslim Ministers give up ministerial portfolios for the peace and harmony in the country (by Chameera Elladeniya) – Muslim Ministers in the Government resigned from their posts. They stated that they are quitting their Ministerial posts for the improvement of peace and harmony in the country. They further stated that the need to assist the investigations that are being carried out on the Easter Sunday attacks too prompted them to take this decision.¹⁷⁸

Impose punishments on the errant individuals regardless of their portfolios (by Chameera Elladeniya) – Former Minister Rauff Hakeem stated the entire Muslim community has become culprits due to the conduct of a miniscule group. Noting that errant individuals should be penalised regardless of their portfolios, Hakeem pointed out that there are innocent Muslims who have been imprisoned due to the search operations that were carried out in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday attacks. Former Minister Kabir Hashim who attended the meeting was of the opinion that they have taken every step against terrorism as Muslim leaders. He was also of the view that they took several steps to avert possible reasons (if any) that led to the emergence of extremists. He added that former Minister Haleem took steps to amend the act on Madrasa schools and that steps were taken to alter the wearing of niqab as wearing it triggers problems.¹⁷⁹

Defeating terrorist ideologies – It would be an uphill task to defeat terrorism if it is supported by common public. If a particular terrorist organisation has emerged based on a particular ethnic group or a religious group, it is incorrect to deem all people in that particular ethnic group or the religious group as terrorists. We have such an experience with regard to LTTE terrorism. Though there was a possibility of such an eventuality even in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday attack, it was averted on time.¹⁸⁰

Muslim Ministers resign (by Saman Gamage) – Former Minister Rauff Hakeem stated that all Muslim Cabinet Ministers, State Ministers and Deputy Ministers representing the Government decided to resign from their portfolios. It was also added by him that this decision was taken to establish co-existence and peace in the country and to allow a

¹⁷⁷ *Daily Mirror*, June 4, p. A12.

¹⁷⁸ *Dinamina*, June 4, p. 1, 6.

¹⁷⁹ *Dinamina*, June 4, p. 2.

¹⁸⁰ *Dinamina*, June 4, p. 4.



proper investigation on the allegations presented by various parties. Hakeem opined that the entire Muslim community including Muslim politicians rendered their full assistance to guarantee the security in the country. He further stated that however they have a sentiment of contempt about the fact that there are propagandas that incite malice notwithstanding extensive support by the Muslim community to security operations. Hakeem also entertained the view that the entire Muslim community has become victims due to the conduct of a few.¹⁸¹

Let's build a powerful Government – Athuraliye Rathana Thera has terminated the fast that was carried out for four days. Meanwhile all Muslim Ministers representing the Government resigned. The Muslim Ministers who resigned stated that they decided to resign to secure the harmony that exists between the communities in the country. It should be also stated that all communities in the country condemn terrorism. The most prominent example for that is the fact that ordinary Muslims gave valuable tips on extremists and that they took steps to remove the Mosques of extremists. All communities in the country had been living united. It was the individuals who established political parties on ethnic and religious lines who disrupted it; this segregation went to such an extent that it escalated to extremism inadvertently. Thus, it is the responsibility of all masses to make sure that such a thing never occurs again.¹⁸²

Muslim Ministers sacrificed the Ministerial Portfolios for the long-lasting peace and co-existence in the country (by Nimala Kodituwakku) – Former Minister Rauff Hakeem stated that Muslim Ministers sacrificed the ministerial portfolios for the long- lasting peace and co-existence. Pointing out the fact that they would continue as backbenchers though they quit from the ministerial portfolios, Hakeem pointed out the fact that he believes that the Government would guarantee the security of the Muslim community. Hakeem also opined that entire Muslim community has become victims due to the conduct of a miniscule clan. Former Minister Kabir Hashim who attended the meeting was of the opinion that they have taken every step against terrorism as Muslim leaders. He was also of the view that they took several steps to avert possible reasons (if any) that led to the emergence of extremists. He added that former Minister Haleem took steps to amend the act on Madrasa schools and that steps were taken to alter the wearing of niqab as wearing it triggers problems.¹⁸³

Organisation of Islamic countries call for security of Muslim community to be ensured – Ambassadors and the High Commissioners of Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) countries, releasing a joint statement called for the Government to prevent communal violence and take swift judicial action against perpetrators. “Communal violence targeting Muslims in Sri Lanka has regional and global security implications. The developing situation over the past few days has been

¹⁸¹ Divaina, June 4, p. 4.

¹⁸² Divaina, June 4, p. 8.

¹⁸³ Lankadeepa, June 4, p. 8.



extremely worrying with regard to the safety and protection of the Sri Lankan Muslim community, including some foreign Muslim refugees,” the statement said. 184

Decision of Muslim ministers was a result of racist politics – Nuwara Eliya District Parliamentarian Mayilvaganam Thilakaraj stated that the unanimous decision for Muslim Ministers to resign was taken as a result of racist politics.185

The problem is not solved even though they have resigned (by Rajadurai Hashan) – General Secretary of the Bodu Bala Sena, Ven. Galagoda Aththa Gnanasara Thera says that Islamist fundamentalism continues to be a problem despite the resignation of Azath Salley, Hizbullah and Bathiudeen. He pointed out that Islamist fundamentalism was dangerous than the LTTE and added that the Buddhist monks were prepared to bring a solution for this problem.186
 Huge danger for democracy due to the influence of Buddhist monks – Former Chief Minister of the Northern Provincial Council, C.V. Wigneswaran has stated that the influence of Buddhist monks in the current political situation would result in grave danger for democracy. He stated that the Sinhala chauvinism which devoured the Tamils are focusing on the Muslims and therefore both communities should unite to face the problem.187

A situation where submission to chauvinistic forces should not continue – The editorial explains the developments following the Easter bomb attacks where allegations have been levelled against certain Muslim politicians of aiding terrorist activities. The editorial also discusses instances where violence has been unleashed on Muslims in the guise of tackling terrorism. The editorial states that even though the resignation of Muslim politicians spoiled the conspiracy of chauvinists, the minorities should not continue to be submissive to them.188

Ven. Rathana Thera’s death fast boosts extremism - Ven. Gnanasara Thera - Acts like the fast-unto-death campaign launched by Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thera could push the moderate Muslims in the country towards extremism, Ven. Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara Thera said yesterday. He pointed out that more than the Sinhala people, it was the moderate Muslims who had helped curb extremist acts by the followers of terrorist leader Zahran after the Easter Sunday bombing. The Thera also questioned why Ven. Rathana Thera was protesting against three individuals when there were so many others behind the Easter Sunday carnage. Ven. Gnanasara Thera said the

184 *Thinakaran, June 5, p. 1.*

185 *Thinakaran, June 5, p. 3.*

186 *Virakesari, June 5, p. 1.*

187 *Virakesari, June 5, p. 2.*

188 *Virakesari, June 5, p. 4.*

requirement today was for a national agenda to defeat extremism and not individual acts like Rathana Thera's fast-unto-death campaign.¹⁸⁹

Catholic Council condemns Minister Mangala's tweet - The Council of Priests of the Roman Catholic Colombo Archdiocese condemned the Twitter message circulated by Finance Minister Mangala Samaraweera against Archbishop Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith's visit to Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thera in Kandy. They claimed that Ven. Rathana Thera was on a hunger strike on behalf of the victims of the Easter Sunday attacks, demanding the expediting of the investigations that are underway and the removal of two governors and a minister who are alleged to have had close ties with those responsible for extremist terrorist activities in Sri Lanka. Further, the council stated that they will continue to support the peace efforts among religions and condemned those like Minister Samaraweera who were spreading "erroneous and vengeful" comments on social media.¹⁹⁰

Forty-two more complaints against Dr. Shafi - Another group of 42 mothers who received C-sections from Dr. Shafi visited the Kurunegala Teaching Hospital yesterday and handed over their complaints, increasing the total number of complaints against the doctor to nearly 700. Meanwhile, representatives of the Kurunegala branch of the Sri Lanka Nidahas Health Services Union said they would not accept any of the recommendations made by the Health Ministry Committee appointed to probe the incident. Pivithuru Hela Urumaya Leader Parliamentarian Udaya Gammanpila yesterday submitted a complaint to the SLMA against Dr. Shafi.¹⁹¹

Exalting Sir D.B.'s altruism (by Nadira Gunatilleke) - Speaker Karu Jayasuriya was the chief guest at the 75th death anniversary commemoration of the late Sir D. B. Jayatilaka, held at the Public Trustee's Department. The speaker expressed disappointment at the decline of the nation in the 71 years since independence due to racial, religious and political reasons. Further, he commended former leaders like D.S. Senanayake and Sir D.B. Jayatilaka, who united the country during similar conflicts, and denounced the Easter attacks and the communal violence in the present era. The commemoration speech highlighted Sir D. B. Jayatilaka's generosity in donating to the government and the public, as well as his fight for the rights of the Sinhala Buddhists, for which he was imprisoned in 1915. He promoted Buddhist education in the country and worked against the colonial rulers. Kelaniya University Chancellor Ven. Welamitiyawwe Kusaladhamma Thera said that all members of the Jayatilaka family are still devoted Buddhists.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ *Daily News*, June 5, p. 1, 6.

¹⁹⁰ *Daily News*, June 5, p. 1, 6.

¹⁹¹ *Daily News*, June 5, p. 3.

¹⁹² *Daily News*, June 5, p. 4.

‘Country belongs to all communities’ (by Nuwan Jayasekara) - Minister of Housing, Construction and Cultural Affairs Sajith Premadasa condemned the recent communal violence and stated that everyone who loves this nation should unite irrespective of their party, race, religion, cast or creed and stand against terrorism. He claimed that the government had defeated the terrorists behind the Easter Sunday attacks, and that they would root out other similar groups. The minister said that if a conflict is created based on religion or race, it would affect the sovereignty of the country. He added that those who urge people to perpetrate ethnic violence are attempting to gain power by exploiting any situation. He requested Buddhists not to be misled and join those who destroy the assets of other communities.¹⁹³

Muslim community affected by a few extremists - Bathiudeen (by Camelia Nathaniel and Amali Mallawarachchi) - Due to the actions of a group of Muslim extremists, the whole Muslim community is under pressure, MP Rishad Bathiudeen said in Parliament yesterday. Bathiudeen noted that the Muslims had lived amicably with the Sinhalese and all other communities in the country. He said however, that certain groups are trying to damage that unity, including extremists in the Sinhala community. He added that investigations into the Easter Sunday attacks would not be hindered by Muslim MPs, as they have never intervened in such issues, and stated that Muslims should not be harassed in the mission to eradicate terrorism.¹⁹⁴

History of ‘fasts-unto-death’ (by K.K.S. Perera) - This long opinion piece condemns acts such as hunger strikes that strongarm the government into favouring the majority or political favourites. The piece elaborates on the history of such behaviour in Sri Lanka, from the 1950s when ultra-nationalists fasted in protest of the Tamil language, to 2010 when Wimal Weerawansa fasted for the disbanding of the UN committee assigned to investigate war crimes in Sri Lanka. The piece also notes that during LTTE leader Amirthalingam Thileepan’s death fast in 1987, no doctors rushed to his side as they did for Ven. Rathana Thera. The article states that this type of “suicide attack” is incredibly effective in creating religious and ethnic division, as it attracts media attention, and any form of retaliation by the government to this type of perceived martyrdom can be conceived as further injustice. The piece concludes that any ultra-nationalist or extremist witness to such actions are vulnerable to participating in fasts themselves.¹⁹⁵

Bimal critical of politically driven-calculated intimidation of Muslims - JVP MP Bimal Rathnayake was critical yesterday of the calculated and politically driven intimidation targeting the Muslim community in the country. Rathnayake highlighted that some Muslim suspects have been arrested under the International Covenant on

¹⁹³ *Daily News*, June 5, p. 8.

¹⁹⁴ *Daily News*, June 5, p. 8.

¹⁹⁵ *Daily News*, June 5, p. 10.



Civil and Political Rights, which deprives them of applying for bail. He pointed out one such suspect is a Muslim female who is nine months pregnant and was arrested for wearing a veil. Rathnayake added that politicians are using the Muslim MPs as scapegoats, when it is the entire government that should be blamed for the attacks. Referring to the protest fast carried out by Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thera, Rathnayake said that the JVP would have supported him if it was a protest to remove the government. The MP pointed out that members the Pohottuwa group are spreading Islamophobia in the country, backed by their own media channels, for their political gain.¹⁹⁶

Colombo archdiocese condemns Mangala's Tweet - The Archdiocese of Colombo yesterday condemned a tweet posted by Minister Mangala Samaraweera accusing Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith of fanning fires of communal hatred by visiting Ven. Rathana Thera during his hunger strike. In a statement, the Council of Priests of the Archdiocese of Colombo said the minister's tweet has given a distorted interpretation of the cardinal's visit to the Thera along with two other bishops and some Catholic clergy. It said Rathana Thera was on a hunger strike on behalf of the victims of the Easter Sunday attacks demanding the expediting of the outcome of the investigations that are underway and the removal from office of two governors and a cabinet minister who are alleged to have had close ties with those responsible for extremist terrorist activities in Sri Lanka. The letter commended the cardinal's leadership in the aftermath of the attack and claimed that the council would continue to pursue peace despite vengeful comments from people like Minister Samaraweera.¹⁹⁷

Conflicts should not arise on cultural, ethnic lines: President (by Sandun A. Jayasekera) - Everyone should work together with mutual understanding to avoid cultural conflicts so that the country can move forward, the president said. The president made these remarks addressing the national Ifthar ceremony at president's house yesterday, adding that the government would take every precaution to ensure peace and security. Addressing the anti-Muslim sentiment and mass arrests following the 21 April attacks, the president reassured the gathering that he had already called for a report on the 559 Muslims arrested, and that those who do not have charges against them would be released.¹⁹⁸

Even the prez and the PM must resign (by Ajith Siriwardana and Yohan Perera) – JVP MP Bimal Ratnayake said yesterday that the whole government, including the president and the prime minister, should resign over the Easter Sunday attack, not only the Muslim ministers. He told parliament that Muslim ministers should not resign just

¹⁹⁶ *Daily News*, June 5, p. 12.

¹⁹⁷ *Daily Mirror*, June 5, p. A1, A2.

¹⁹⁸ *Daily Mirror*, June 5, p. A4.



because they were Muslims, but as ministers of the government. He said extremism could not be eliminated without the support of the Muslim community.¹⁹⁹

On the trail of a fasting monk (by Ravi Nagahawatte) - This short opinion piece suggests that contrary to what his supporters believe, Ven. Rathana Thera is less of a triumphant hero, and more of a parliamentarian trying to bring his political career back to life. The author attributes part of this failure to the Thera's refusal to listen to expert advice. According to the teachings of Buddhism, Ven. Rathana Thera should not even be able to hold onto his political position, as monks are supposed to renounce everything worldly. The author concludes that a situation has arisen in the country where politicians are increasingly losing favour to the clergy, who are rising to the forefront. It cites an incident where a Muslim woman was arrested for wearing a dress with a symbol similar to the Buddhist Dharmachakra, seemingly due to public pressure rather than a breach of law. "Rathana Thera showed in no uncertain terms the power behind a Buddhist institution and individuals clad in saffron robes," the piece states. The author refers to supporters of the monk as "hard-line Buddhists", and suggests that, had he died from the hunger strike, it would have triggered unrest in the country, and compares this to an event at the beginning of the civil war.²⁰⁰

The base of religious teachings is to calm down human feelings – Father Heshan de Silva – (by Krishanthi Vitharana) – Father Heshan de Silva of the Baptist Church stated that the religious leaders can still play a large role and added that people in the country should not be viewed based on religious lines, i.e. Buddhists, Hindus, Christians and Islamic. He also mentioned that we should acknowledge the fact that Muslim community has been affected to some extent. It was also emphasised that a particular community should not be isolated, and it is impossible to solve problems like that.²⁰¹

The Colombo Archbishop Association condemns the statement made by Mangala Samaraweera – A press release has been issued with the signature of the Secretary of the Catholic Archbishops Association Jude Freely Muthukudaarachchi on the twitter message of Minister Mangala Samaraweera. It is stated in that the Catholic Archbishops Conference condemns the interpretation given by the Minister distorting facts about the visit paid by the Archbishop Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith to meet the Athuraliye Rathana Thera who was engaged in a fast. It is also stated in the notification, that as everyone knows that Athuraliye Rathana Thera was engaged in the fast demanding the removal of a Minister and two Governors who had been accused of having maintained close relations with the Easter Sunday bombers and also who had been accused of nurturing those terrorist activities. It is also stated that one another objective of it was to expedite the investigations into the Easter Sunday attacks. It is also stated in the notification that they are willing to inform Minister Mangala Samaraweera and other individuals who

¹⁹⁹ *Daily Mirror*, June 5, p. A6.

²⁰⁰ *Daily Mirror*, June 5, p. A11.

²⁰¹ *Dinamina*, June 5, p. 2.



propagate inaccurate ideologies that, as Catholics Archbishops would definitely render assistance to make this common objective a success at a moment like this.²⁰²

Kurunegala Hospital musters information on all mothers who were operated by Shafi (by Hemantha Randunu and Sarath Eraminigammana) – Kurunegala Teaching Hospital has decided to hold an extensive investigation after collecting information of all Mothers who were operated by Doctor Shafi Siyabdeen who has been accused of performing sterilisation surgeries. Meanwhile, 735 Mothers had complained to the Kurunegala and Dambulla hospitals against Doctor Shafi Siyabdeen who had been accused of making Sinhala mothers sterilised and subjecting them to various disorders in caesarean surgeries.²⁰³

It is clear that Wahhabis Ulama organisation is handling Muslim Ministers – Gnanasara Thera (by Chathura Pamunuwa) – General Secretary of the Bodu Bala Sena organisation Galagodaaththe Gnana Sara Thera stated that it is clearly seen that Wahhabis Ulama Council is directing Muslim Ministers. Thera also emphasised that a unity that the Sinhala leaders do not possess is there among the Muslim leaders and that it would not be a surprise if these Muslim Ministers justify the attack by Zaharan. Thera also stressed that problems that existed became complicated due to the fast of Rathana Thera and that the issue on Wahhabism that ought to be given the priority relegated into a secondary position. Thera also added that he is ready to work together with any front to defeat Muslim extremism.²⁰⁴

Jihad trouble – Issues arose as to the conduct of Minister Rishad Bathiudeen, Governors Azath Salley and Hizbullah in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday attack. The death-unto-fast that was initiated by Athuraliye Rathana Thera demanding the removal of this trio ultimately resulted in the resignation of all Muslim Ministers in the Government from their posts. The Muslim Ministers resigned from the posts requesting a decision of the investigations into the allegations that have been levelled against the Muslim politicians within a month. Those Ministers stated that they decided to resign to establish peace and co-existence in the society. There are various opinions on this. Some argue as to why Muslim Ministers resigned en-masse when there were allegations only against a few Muslim Ministers. There is no gainsaying in the fact that attack launched by Jihad extremists not only shocked the entire country, but it also resulted in the emergence of not-so-good relations between different communities in the country. The ultimate result of perpetuation of these types of incidents is the country becoming an anarchy. Jihad menace should be rooted up to rescue the country from such trouble.²⁰⁵

I do not trust any Political Party – Lord Buddha is the my only Leader – Galagodaaththe Gnanasara Thera (by Chathura Pamunuwa) – General Secretary of

²⁰² *Dinamina*, June 5, p. 2.

²⁰³ *Divaina*, June 5, pg. 1, 4.

²⁰⁴ *Divaina*, June 5, p. 4.

²⁰⁵ *Divaina*, June 5, p. 8.



the Bodu Bala Sena Organisation Galagodaaththe Gnanasara Thera noted that at present, the Sinhalese who did not have an aim have awoken and the Buddhist clergy had taken the leadership in the struggle against Muslim extremism. Noting that the politicians are the ones who aspire a conflict at present, Thera noted that what ought to be given priority at present is to defeat Wahab extremism. Noting that the real concern was relegated into a secondary position because of the fast of the Rathana Thera. Positing the view that Tamil society was trying to alienate from the Sinhala society, Thera noted that they have joined the mainstream society at present. Thera also stressed the need to get the support of the Muslim society too. While entertaining the view that Ulamas are the ones who are trying to alienate the Muslim society, Thera added further that the Ulamas are the ones who are advocating for marriages for children below 12 years. Querying as to whether what the need to have separate Sharia banks, Thera also questioned whether the Buddhist majority of 70 per cent demanded separate banks. .206

The message of destruction as opposed to the message of peace was conveyed through the resignation of Ministers against whom there were no charges – Jayantha Samaraweera (by Lasitha Duminda) – MP Jayantha Samaraweera noted that the charges levelled against some Muslim Ministers that they supported Islamist extremists do not undermine merely because they resigned from their posts. He also posited the view that Rathana Thera staged a fast to demand the imposition of punishments after arresting Bathiudeen, Hizbullah, Azath Salley and Mujibur Rahuman. Noting that the fast was abandoned, when the relevant individuals resigned from their posts, he queried as to whether the demands of everyone are fulfilled by such resignations. He also opined that the message conveyed by the resignation of Muslim Ministers en-masse is a strong, dangerous message. 207

Sri Lankan Medical Council is silent on Doctor Shafi (Erik Gamini Jinapriya) – MP Udaya Gammanpila stated that Medical Council of Sri Lanka is silent on the conduct of Doctor Shafi. Referring to the en-masse resignation of Muslim Ministers that happened recently, he noted that it was a wonderful drama. He noted that Muslim Ministers conveyed two lessons from that resignation. One is that those Ministers depicted that their religion and ethnicity is more important to them above their political party. He also urged the Sinhala leaders who are usually not in good terms with each other to learn a lesson from that.208

The resignation of Muslim Ministers is another farce of the Government – Anura Priyadarshana Yapa (by Anura Balasuriya) – MP Anura Priyadharashana Yapa noted that the resignation of Muslim Ministers en-masse from their posts is another farce of the Government. He noted that people became helpless with the terrorist attack. Noting that all people irrespective of ethnic and religious differences were affected due to the

206 Divaina, June 5, p. 13.

207 Divaina, June 5, p. 13.

208 Divaina, June 5, p. 13.



attack, he noted that the mentality of Sinhala people collapsed to such an extent that they began to contemplate that there is no one to protect them. 209

The statement made by Mangala Samaraweera on the Archbishop is a distortion of the truth – A press release has been issued with the signature of the Secretary of the Catholic Archbishops Association Jude Freely Muthukudaarachchi on the twitter message of the Minister Mangala Samaraweera. It is stated in that the Catholic Archbishops Conference condemns the interpretation given by the Minister distorting facts about the visit paid by the Archbishop Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith to meet the Athuraliye Rathana Thera who was engaged in a fast. It is also stated in the notification that as everyone knows that Athuraliye Rathana Thera was engaged in the fast demanding the removal of a Minister and two Governors who had been accused of having maintained close relations with the Easter Sunday bombers and also who had been accused of nurturing those terrorist activities. It is also stated that one another objective of it was to expedite the investigations into the Easter Sunday attacks. It is also stated in the notification that they are willing to inform Minister Mangala Samaraweera and other individuals who propagate inaccurate ideologies that as Catholics they would definitely render assistance to make this common objective a success at a moment like this.²¹⁰ Only three were asked to resign: Did the other Muslim Ministers resign because they too supported terrorism– Omalpe Sobhitha Thera (by Ariyaratne Ranabahu) – Omalpe Sobhitha Thera noted that the suspicion arises as to whether the other Ministers (who resigned with the Ministers against whom there were allegations) too are involved with terrorism. Thera pointed out that this is because there were allegations only against three Muslim politicians. Thera also noted that Sinhala Community does not have any disagreement/ adverse ideas with the Muslims whom were not inclined to terrorism. Thera also queried as to whether all Muslim Gynaecologists would resign, if Doctor Shafi who is accused were to resign.²¹¹

Buddhist clergy has taken the leadership in the struggle against extremism– Country must be built according to a national agenda- national harmony cannot be built through party politics - Galagodaaththe Gnanasara Thera (by Hasitha Ranga Gunathilake) – General Secretary of the Bodu Bala Sena Organisation Galagodaaththe Gnanasara Thera noted that at present, the Sinhalese who did not have an aim have awoken and the Buddhist clergy had taken the leadership in the struggle against Muslim extremism. Noting that the politicians are the ones who aspire a conflict at present, Thera noted that what ought to be given priority at present is to defeat Wahab extremism. There was also of the view that the real concerns were relegated into a secondary position because of the fast of the Rathana Thera. Positing the view that Tamil society was trying to alienate from the Sinhala society, Thera noted that they have

209 *Divaina*, June 5, p. 13.

210 *Lankadeepa*, June 5, p. 6.

211 *Lankadeepa*, June 5, p. 8.



joined the mainstream society at present. Thera also stressed the need to get the support of the Muslim society too. It was also opined by Thera that the BBS had been pointing out the threat of Islamic fundamentalist extremism from 2012. Thera also added that those references fell on deaf ears at that time and at present the rulers have woken up with the Easter Sunday attack.²¹²

Organisation of Islamic countries call for security of Muslim community to be ensured - Ambassadors and the High Commissioners of Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) countries, releasing a joint statement called for the government to prevent communal violence and take swift judicial action against perpetrators. “Communal violence targeting Muslims in Sri Lanka has regional and global security implications. The developing situation over the past few days has been extremely worrying with regard to the safety and protection of the Sri Lankan Muslim community, including some foreign Muslim refugees,” the statement said. ²¹³ Monks should solve issue of Islamic fundamentalism - General Secretary of the Bodu Bala Sena, Ven. Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara Thera has stated that the monks should provide a solution for the issue of Islamic terrorism which had divided the country after the Easter Sunday attacks. He stated that the politicians were trying to divert the problem and therefore, it was the responsibility of the Buddhist monks to provide a solution. ²¹⁴

Muslims are falling prey for Sinhala, Buddhist chauvinism - Former Chief Minister of the Northern Provincial Council, C.V. Wigneswaran states that Muslims have become victims of the Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism. He stated that the influence of Buddhist monks in the current political situation would result in grave danger for democracy. He stated that the Sinhala chauvinism which devoured the Tamils was focusing on the Muslims and therefore, both communities should unite to face the problem.²¹⁵

Political impact of Buddhist monks is dangerous for minorities - Former Deputy Minister Prabha Ganesan has stated that the involvement of Buddhist monks in the current complex political scenario would be detrimental for the minority communities. While stating that allegations of aiding terrorism levelled against three Muslim politicians should be investigated, he also pointed out the growing involvement of Buddhist monks would turn against the Tamil community and therefore urged the people to be vigilant. ²¹⁶

Neeravippitti temple premises belong to Buddhism; Sinhalese led by monks protest - A group of Sinhalese who were brought from the Weli-Oya region staged a protest near the Mullaithivu Old Chemmalai Neeraviyadi Pillayar temple. The protestors

²¹² *Lankadeepa*, June 5, p. 14.

²¹³ *Uthayan*, June 5, p. 1.

²¹⁴ *Uthayan*, June 5, p. 1.

²¹⁵ *Uthayan*, June 5, p. 13.

²¹⁶ *Uthayan*, June 5, p. 14.



claimed that the premises belonged to the Gurukanda Raja Maha Vihara, adding that the politicians were creating problems. The protestors urged the President and Prime Minister to address this situation.²¹⁷

Monks who do not know the path of Buddha – Mangala says - Finance Minister Mangala Samaraweera stated that some Buddhist monks do not know the true nature of Buddhism, where Lord Buddha did not prevent a temple for Devadatta who came to kill him.²¹⁸

Monks protest Mangala - Buddhist monks staged a protest march in Matara stating that Finance Minister had insulted Buddhism and Buddhist monks. ²¹⁹ Sangha leaders urge Muslim ex-ministers to resume portfolios (by Indika Polkotuwa) - Following a meeting of the Maha Sangha of the three Nikayas in Kandy yesterday, the Anunayaka of the Malwatte Chapter of the Siyam Nikaya Ven. Niyangoda Vijithasiri, said that all Muslim ministers who had resigned should take their portfolios back and resume normal duties. The Thera said that if there were allegations against ministers or other important officials of the government, they should prove their innocence. “At our meeting we decided to hold separate discussions with these political leaders on the matter,” he added. He also said that it was important for all three major communities—Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim—to stay united more than ever, to overcome the current difficulties. “Following another round of talks we will release a statement containing the opinions and proposals of the Maha Sangha on these matters in the next few days,” the Thera said.²²⁰

Rauff Hakeem in Australia radio interview: 31 mosques damaged: ‘Political action unless situation under control within a month’ (by Amali Mallawaarachchi) - Unless the current harassment of the Muslim community is brought under control within the month, those Muslim parliamentarians who have resigned their portfolios will be “compelled to take political action”, Sri Lanka Muslim Congress leader and former Minister Rauff Hakeem told Australian ABC Radio. The SLMC leader, however, did not spell out the ‘political action’ that could be taken. Hakeem expressed his alarm over “xenophobic extremist forces demonizing the innocent Muslim minority after the Easter Sunday terror attacks,” and noted that 31 mosques have been vandalised in various parts of the country. He explained that the Muslim MPs had given up their portfolios as a sign of solidarity with the Muslim community and to expedite the investigations into claims against certain Muslim leaders. Hakeem noted that it was not the Catholic people who retaliated against innocent Muslims, but certain extremist elements. He also

²¹⁷ *Uthayan*, June 6, p. 1.

²¹⁸ *Uthayan*, June 6, p. 1.

²¹⁹ *Uthayan*, June 6, p. 1.

²²⁰ *Daily News*, June 6, p. 1, 6.



observed the privilege given to Buddhist monks, citing the hunger strike of one, and the presidential pardon of another.²²¹

Take a stand in the stride towards unity: Minister (by Mangala Samaraweera) – This long opinion piece written by Minister Samaraweera states that many who have leadership roles in politics, the clergy and business try to retain their power by dividing the nation. He mentions that groups such as the LTTE, and more recently, the IS, follow the same patterns, and claims that the UNP stands by the victims of the Easter Sunday attacks. No matter the fact that all Tamils did not support the LTTE, all Sri Lankans did not support the JVP insurrections, and that all Muslims did not support the IS, extremists and politically motivated figures seem determined to drag the country back into the days of gross human rights violations. Samaraweera claims that to certain clergymen, media institutions, politicians and political movements, racial harmony is a threat that would make them irrelevant. He claims that Bathiudeen earned the ire of the SLPP and its supporters when he refused to support the coup on October 26, and that had he done so, the NCM would have found a new target. Even now, Samaraweera says, Bathiudeen is being cajoled to join the other side in exchange for the removal of the label ‘terrorist’. He condemns the mockery made out of the justice process, where people are first declared guilty by the government and press before the police conduct any investigations or a judge hands out a ruling. He urges people not to compromise with extremists, but to speak out against them instead. Minister Samaraweera concludes by claiming to be a devout Buddhist because he actually practices its tenets, and states that it is the duty of all Sri Lankans, especially Buddhists, to stand up against those who incite violence in the name of the Buddha.²²²

Sinhalese protest near Mullaithivu Neeraviyadi Pillayar temple – A group of Sinhalese who were brought from the Weli-Oya region staged a protest near the Mullaithivu Old Chemmalai Neeraviyadi Pillayar temple. The protestors claimed that the premises belonged to the Gurukanda Raja Maha Vihara, adding that the politicians were creating problems. The protestors urged the president and prime minister to address this situation. The protest is held despite a court order allowing the Tamils to worship at the Neeraviyadi temple. In addition, the Mullaithivu District Court stated that both Sinhalese and Tamils can worship at the premises.²²³

Kanniya Venneerootru (hot springs) being taken over (by Thirumalai Navam) – The commentary discusses steps taken to take over lands reportedly belonging to Hindu temples in the North and East. The commentary specifically discusses issues pertaining to the Kanniya Venneerootru Pillayar temple where the Department of Archeology attempts to take over the premises and convert it into a Buddhist place of worship. Minister Mano Ganesan who held a discussion with authorities and religious leaders

²²¹ *Daily News*, June 6, p. 1, 6.

²²² *Daily News*, June 6, p. 8.

²²³ *Virakesari*, June 6, p. 2.

pointed out that this incident revealed that traditional rights of Hindus were violated and added that the government should represent all religions.²²⁴

Resignation of Muslim Ministers is an example of racial harmony – Deputy Minister of Development of Special Areas, V. Radhakrishnan has stated that the resignation of Muslim ministers was an example of racial harmony. He pointed out that while there are arguments on whether the move was correct or not, the move was taken from the community's point of view.²²⁵

Special proposals by JVP to strengthen national unity by defeating racism and religious fanaticism (by R. Vithusha) – The JVP has put forward special proposals to strengthen national unity and defeat racism and religious fanaticism. The proposals include suggestions to religious leaders and steps that could be taken through the education system and through media to strengthen unity. In addition, the proposals also include suggestions to ensure security of the people.²²⁶

Country in grave danger if anti-Muslim sentiment is not nipped in the bud – UNP Colombo District Organiser and former MP, C.Y.P Ram stated that the country would have to face grave danger if the anti-Muslim sentiments are not eradicated at the early stages itself. He pointed out that there were a group of people to sideline Muslim people, and such activities were also supported by certain politicians.²²⁷

Government and opposition have created an environment for Buddhist fundamentalism to dominate – Leader of the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), Suresh Premachandran has stated that the government and the opposition have given way for the dominance of Buddhist fundamentalism in the guise of tackling Islamic fundamentalism. He pointed out that even though Islamic fundamentalism resulted in the death of hundreds of people, the situation was brought under control. However, violence unleashed on Muslim people three weeks after the attack had given way for Buddhist fundamentalism.²²⁸

Resignations and their aftermath - This editorial piece states that Monday's exit of Muslim ministers from their portfolios was not the first such mass resignation of Muslim MPs. In 2001, it led to the eventual collapse of Chandrika's government. This time however, the government has the support of the Muslim leaders. The piece claims that while Ven. Rathana Thera's fast only called for the resignation of two governors, with the resignation of all Muslim MPs, he has effectively alienated the Muslim population from the government and polarised the Lanka polity along communal lines. The editorial also mentions the sentiments of Ministers Hakeem and Hashim at the

²²⁴ *Virakesari*, June 6, p. 4.

²²⁵ *Virakesari*, June 6, p. 6.

²²⁶ *Virakesari*, June 6, p. 9. ²²⁷

Virakesari, June 6, p. 11.

²²⁸ *Virakesari*, June 6, p. 16.



press conference when they announced their resignations, where they denounced attacks on innocent Muslim and called on the government to expedite the investigations into allegations against certain Muslim leaders. Hakeem wanted the investigations to be completed in 40 days and carried out by the CID. The piece claims that recent events have brought the Buddhists and Catholics together, citing Catholic solidarity during Ven. Rathana Thera's fast. However, the editorial warns, drastic measures such as death fasts should be avoided. Further, the opposition and its supporters should avoid casting aspersions on the investigative process, as it is overseen by the president who "we believe, has no particular interest in protecting any individual."²²⁹

Resume duties and responsibilities: Chief prelates inform Muslim ministers (by J.A.L. Jayasinghe and Nadeeka Daya Bandara) - Holding a special discussion in Kandy today, the Maha Sangha representing the three Nikayas expressed disappointment over the resignation of Muslim ministers and asked them to fulfil their duties and serve the people of the country. Speaking to the media after the discussion, Malwathu Anunayake Ven. Rajakeeya Panditha Niyangoda Vijithasiri Thera said that they were working on proposals to present to the government regarding the spiritual stability, livelihood, and social conduct of the public. Further he requested that all Sri Lankans including Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims act in harmony. The Thera said the situation that arose in the country in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday terror attacks should not escalate, and expressed condolences for the victims of the attack.²³⁰

'Sangha Order' imposed against Mangala Samaraweera (by Krishan Jeewaka Jayaruk) - The Matara District Chief Incumbents' Union and the Matara District Shasanarakshaka Bala Mandalaya issued a 'Sangha Order' against Minister of Finance Mangala Samaraweera yesterday (5 June). This order entails boycotting any event the minister participates in and banning him from entering Buddhist places of worship in the Matara District. This followed a statement made by him recently that Sri Lanka was not a Buddhist country. A pledge was made to this effect in front of the historic Matara Bodhiya by the Maha Sangha, including the chief incumbents in the Matara District.²³¹

Opposition MP castigates Mangala for his tweet about cardinal (by Nadeeka Daya Bandara and Chamil Rupasinghe) - Opposition MP Dilum Amunugama said that Malcom Cardinal Ranjith visiting Ven. Rathana Thera had become an issue to Minister Samaraweera, instead of the 300 Catholics who lost their lives. The MP said that they did not approve of the statement made by Mangala Samaraweera, which was critical of the cardinal. Regardless of the political views of Ven. Rathana Thera, Amunugama said

²²⁹ *Daily News*, June 6, p. 10.

²³⁰ *Daily Mirror*, June 6, p. A1, A4.

²³¹ *Daily Mirror*, June 6, p. A1, A4.



they all agreed with his objectives. He said that the mass resignation of Muslim ministers showed that they were promoting racism.²³²

Protesters urge govt. to safeguard Gurukanda Rajamaha Vihara (by Romesh Madusanka) - Residents of the area staged a protest yesterday urging the government to protect the Gurukanda Rajamaha Vihara and the surrounding archaeological sites. More than a thousand people participated. They pointed out that a group of individuals was attempting to divide the Rajamaha Vihara grounds, despite the report submitted to court by the director general of archaeology stating that it was an archaeological site under the purview of the Department of Archaeology. They said that a group claiming to be from the Presidential Secretariat informed them that the land should be divided to build a kovil.²³³

Mangala, Rajitha, Chathura; Keep them out of temple events in Gampaha: Viharadhikaries (by Tilakeratne Dissanayake) - Viharadhokaries of the Gampaha Sasanarakshaka Balamandala decided on Tuesday that Ministers Mangala Samaraweera, Rajitha Senaratne, and MP Chatura Senaratne, all of whom had allegedly insulted the Maha Sangha, should not be invited to any events in temples in the area. Gampaha District Sasanarakshaka Balamandala General Secretary Ven. Thorapitiye Ananda Thera said that he hoped that all other temples in the country would follow suit.²³⁴

An unwarranted arrest (by Shatara Jayasuriya) - Following a tip-off given by the people in Kolongoda, 47-year-old M.R. Mazahima was arrested by the Hasalaka Police last month, for wearing a kaftan with a symbol that 'resembled the dharmachakra'. Initially remanded until 27 May, she was re-remanded until 3 June under the ICCPR Act. The police informed the court that the dress concerned had been sent to the Department of Buddhist Affairs to ascertain the identity of the symbol. According to her husband, Abdul Munaf, Mazahima had been wearing the dress for the past one and a half years, with no one questioning it. Human rights lawyer J.C. Weliamuna said that the arrest was unlawful, and the woman should claim damages. He said there was no basis to arrest her under the ICCPR. "The Magistrate must decide whether the matter before him falls under that law. He cannot remand a person merely because the police ask him to do so," said President's Counsel Saliya Pieris. Ven. Dambara Amila confirmed that the picture was not that of the dharmachakra, but was of the helm of a ship, adding that the arrest was a result of Buddhist extremism. Sociology Prof. Siri Hettige elaborated on the arbitrary nature of symbols. MP Harsha De Silva concurred that the symbol did not look like a dharmachakra in a tweet.²³⁵

²³² *Daily Mirror*, June 6, p. A2.

²³³ *Daily Mirror*, June 6, p. A5.

²³⁴ *Daily Mirror*, June 6, p. A5.

²³⁵ *Daily Mirror*, June 6, p. A8.

The politics of alienation and isolation (by Malinda Seneviratne) - This short opinion piece claims that the dominant English language perspective in Sri Lanka is that the isolation and alienation of Muslims is a condition that has been imposed on them, one in which they have not played any role. The author calls out the U.S. government, which expressed concerns about “the demonising of Muslims in Sri Lanka”, stating that this is hypocritical coming from “one of the world’s most racist countries where Muslim- demonisation is almost an article of faith.” He also calls out Mangala Samaraweera and his controversial tweets, accusing him of sweeping the context of the situation under the carpet. The piece affirms that if there is any fear in the country, it is due to the Easter attacks, and that, given the religious identity of the terrorists “it is not unnatural for people to be wary of that community.” The author claims that neither the Buddhist nor Muslim communities as a whole are responsible for extremism. He also criticises the mass resignations of Muslim ministers, when the demand only pertained to three of them. Further, the author observes that Ven. Rathana Thera’s fast drew support from all communities, including Muslims and Catholics, leading to the kind of solidarity rarely seen at a time like this. The piece concludes by pointing out that the real threat is the IS terrorists. “The entire drama about some kind of Sinhala Buddhist ‘backlash’ is in this context a distraction. It plays into the hands of the Jihadists,” the article states. 236

Collective move by Muslim MPs exacerbates polarisation (by Kelum Bandara) - This long opinion piece questions why all Muslim ministers resigned alongside Hizbullah and Salley, despite being moderates with no charges levelled against them. The piece notes that although the move was interpreted as one of solidarity, it would lead to further polarisation along communal lines. “According to reports, the president remarked during Tuesday’s cabinet meeting that it was a step literally far more dangerous than Easter Sunday’s bomb attacks,” the article claims. The piece claims that the All Ceylon Jammiyathul Ulama (ACJU) prevailed upon Muslim ministers to stand united, resulting in the mass resignation. This move, the author states, has given them leverage over the government, both in terms of expediting investigations, and in influencing plans to unify certain personal laws in a bid for deradicalisation. The piece notes that envoys from Islamic countries inquired about the release of Ven. Gnanasara Thera and warned the president that even terrorist organisations such as the Taliban may hear of the harassment of Muslims in Sri Lanka.237

Why Muslims are gelling during a crisis (by Ravi Nagahawatte) - This short opinion piece claims that Sinhalese parliamentarians are not united, and lack the foresight to think ahead, unlike their Muslim counterparts, who display a lot more solidarity and strength in unity. The piece also states that Bathiudeen represents the east, which has a sizable Muslim population, making him “important to any political party wishing to

236 *Daily Mirror*, June 6, p. A12

237 *Daily Mirror*, June 6, p. A14.

form a government.” Further, the author states that Muslims would prefer to work with a more liberal UNP led government than the previous regime and claims that the current president is someone who has a reputation for entertaining minorities. The author notes that many Muslims are angry at the current government and their handling of the situation, citing the reported 559 Muslim still in custody regarding possible terrorist activity. “There is so much hate speech being posted on social media against Sri Lankan Muslims,” the author states. The piece also compares the unity of the Muslim community in the current situation to the divisiveness of the Sinhalese one, citing Ven. Gnanasara Thera calling out Ven. Rathana Thera for his fast.²³⁸

Statement by National Peace Council of Sri Lanka: Do not go down the path of ethnic conflict -

In a media statement, the National Peace Council (NPC) said that the Easter Sunday bomb attacks were being used to create rifts in Sri Lankan society. The NPC condemned racial targeting of Muslims and commended Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith for his behaviour following the Easter attacks. The statement also recognises the role played by Buddhist clergy in managing tensions during Ven. Rathana Thera’s fast. Further, the NPC notes that political elements were involved in the anti-Muslim riots. The NPC mentions that Muslims were helpful in dismantling the terrorist network in Sri Lanka.²³⁹

Five years imprisonment and a fine of ten lakhs for the publication of fake news (by Ranil Dharmasena) – The Government has decided to impose penal sanctions against the propagation of inaccurate information. The Cabinet has decided to amend the Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code to impose laws in this regard. Thus, laws would be framed to impose either a punishment of a prison sentence of not more than five years or a fine up to one lakh or both on dissemination of inaccurate information. Meanwhile the Government has decided to frame legislation to penalise individuals who make statements that disrupt the national security and who make hate speech that hinder religious harmony.²⁴⁰

The resignation of Muslim Ministers in the crisis situation cannot be approved- A special statement by Bhikkhus of Three Bhikkhu chapters on 15 matters relevant in the progress of the country (by Samanthi Weerasekera and Cyril Wimalasurendra) – Bhikkhus of three Bhikkhu chapters are scheduled to deliver a special statement. The scheduled statement would be made highlighting 15 points that are needed for the political, economic, educational, social and cultural sectors in the country. This decision had been taken when the Bhikkhus of the Three Bhikkhu chapters congregated at Kandy to discuss on the prevalent situation in the country. The Deputy Chief Prelate of the

²³⁸ *Daily Mirror*, June 6, p. A14.

²³⁹ *Daily Mirror*, June 6, p. A16

²⁴⁰ *Divaina*, June 6, p. 1, 4.



Malwathu Chapter stated that it was pinpointed at the discussion, that the resignation en masse of the Muslim Ministers cannot be approved.²⁴¹

The complaints against Shafi rises up to 765 (by Hemantha Randunu) – There were 765 complaints made by Sinhala Mothers against Doctor Shafi. The complainants had alleged that they were sterilised and were subject to various disorders after the Caesarean surgeries performed by Doctor Shafi. Meanwhile, a large group of Sinhala Mothers had informed the Kurunegala Hospital that they would be coming to the Hospital to make their complaints.²⁴²

A complaint by a Muslim Mother against the Kurunegala Doctor (by R. M. W. Bandara) – A Muslim Mother who was subject to a caesarean surgery by Doctor Shafi Siyabdeen has made a complaint at the Kurunegala Hospital. This Muslim Mother has also stated that she is married to a Sinhala man. She has also opined that her second baby was taken after a caesarean surgery by Doctor Shafi. Moreover, she has also pointed out that she has a suspicion on the particular caesarean surgery as Doctor Shafi was aware of the fact that her husband is a Sinhalese. ²⁴³

When there were many things that could have been preached – Nearly 300 religious followers died from the ‘religious’ attack that was launched by an extremist religious group. A religious or ethnic conflict was averted at that time due to the intervention of the Cardinal and the tolerance depicted by intelligent Catholic, Buddhist and Hindu followers. That is because the masses are fully aware of the fact that other Muslims are not responsible at all for the Easter Sunday attacks launched by a group of extremist religious group. Moreover, the bulk of the informants who provided tips to the security forces on the individuals who are linked to terrorist activities were Muslims and the Saindamarudu explosion was the best example. Buddhist, Hindu or Catholic masses did not get enraged even when swords, daggers were found in Mosques and even amidst the misconduct that is alleged to have carried out by extremists like Shafi Siyabdeen. But the conduct depicted, and the statements made by several politicians like Azath Salley and Mujibur Rahuman are questionable. There were no allegations against politicians like Rauff Hakeem and Kabir Hashim. Thus, the resignation of them from Ministerial portfolios cannot be approved in any manner. Moreover, it can be stated that this resignation of Muslim politicians was a result of the fast of Rathana Thera. The involvement of Gnanasara Thera too buttressed that. Nonetheless, we are of the opinion that Gnanasara Thera made a statement underrating the victory made by Rathana Thera. It is not fair for Gnanasara Thera to criticise the fast of Rathana Thera in media briefings. If the Buddhist monks and Sinhala Buddhists cannot come to one

²⁴¹ Divaina, June 6, p. 1, 4.

²⁴² Divaina, June 6, p. 1, 4.

²⁴³ Divaina, June 6, p. 1, 4.

decision, how are we supposed to face the challenges that we face as a nation? But that exemplary conduct has been depicted by Muslim politicians today.²⁴⁴

IS was created by those against Islam – Professor M.L Mubarak Madhani stated that the Islamic State terrorist organisation was created by those against Islam and Islamic teaching. During an Ifthar ceremony in Periyaneelavanai Jummah mosque, he pointed out that while the majority community had unleashed violence against Muslims, the Muslim people had always practiced restraint.²⁴⁵

Symptoms of crisis persisting (by Karunakaran) – The commentary discusses the tensions between Sinhalese and Muslim communities following the Easter bomb attacks. It points out that even though there had been clashes and crisis situations between both communities in the past, the current scenario was unprecedented since it resulted in Muslim Ministers unanimously deciding to step down from their positions.²⁴⁶

Resignations and their aftermath (2) – This editorial claims that, like President Sirisena, many others are worried about the mass exodus of Muslim parliamentarians from the government, a major reason being the rift it has caused in the community. The piece claims that certain Buddhist monks and members of the opposition have furthered the alienation of Muslims with their rhetoric and actions. The editorial warns that we may be headed towards another conflict where a minority is forced to rebel against the state. Although this column has not been a fan of Ven. Gnanasara Thera, the editorial concurred with his view regarding the fast conducted by Ven. Rathana Thera, and the communal tensions it exacerbated. What is needed most at present is for measures towards de-escalation. The president, prime minister and religious leaders should play a positive role in this respect. ²⁴⁷

President and prime minister did not take a firm stance against the undue influence of the Buddhist monks – Editorial of The Hindu alleges – The editorial of the Hindu newspaper in India has claimed that the president and prime minister had failed to take a firm stand against the undue influence of the Buddhist monks in the political scenario after the Easter bomb attacks. The editorial had discussed the resignation of the Muslim ministers in the midst of protests led by Buddhist monks, and stated that a situation had arisen where Muslims were perceived with fear.²⁴⁸

Request of the four Buddhist Chapters – The editorial discusses the political situation following the resignation of the Muslim ministers. The editorial states that the country

²⁴⁴ Divaina, June 6, p. 0.

²⁴⁵ Thinakaran, June 6, p. 8.

²⁴⁶ Thinakaran, June 7, p.3.

²⁴⁷ Daily News, June 7, p. 6.

²⁴⁸ Virakesari, June 7, p. 3.

is faced with a critical situation where the government needs to ensure that no community is sidelined. In addition, the editorial points out that the request made by the four Buddhist chapters for the Muslim politicians to take up their positions again indicated that the religious leaders understood the gravity of the situation.²⁴⁹

Muslim woman complains against Kurunegala doctor – A Muslim woman has complained against Dr. Seigu Siyabdeen, who has been accused by many Sinhalese women that he had sterilised them. Complaints against the doctor are being recorded at the Kurunegala hospital. The Health Ministry is also conducting investigations into the allegation. The said doctor is already in custody on allegations of amassing wealth. ²⁵⁰

We will not assist the Buddhists to suppress rights of Muslims – General Secretary of the Ilankai Tamil Arasu Katchi (ITAK), K. Thurairajasingam stated that the actions of Buddhist monks, such as Athuraliye Rathana Thera, against Muslim politicians was not in line with the political agenda of this country. He pointed out that another face of Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism was visible at the moment where the rights of Muslim minorities are suppressed. He stated that the Tamils will not be part of such actions.²⁵¹

A fine for hatred – The Government has decided to amend the Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code. It is stated that the main aim of this is to guarantee national security and to build peace and harmony between communities. Accordingly, strict punishments would be imposed on individuals who propagate fake news hindering national security and the individuals who make hate speech to the effect of creation of conflicts between ethnic groups. If we analyse the situation in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday attack, making of hate speech, creation of fake news and creation of unnecessary phobia were carried out in their heights. Even some politicians attempted to incite racism and religious fanaticism. But there are no proper legal provisions in the country to penalise individuals who propagate fake news. There is one simple truth behind every conflict that has occurred in the country, if one were to analyse the solving of conflicts in the country. That is that there is fake news and hate speech behind every such conflict. 1983 Black July occurred due to fake news. Fake news and false propaganda too caused the racial and religious disturbances in Minuwangoda and North Western Province.²⁵²

Eternal Truth- The role of masses in the co-existence (by Buddhi Karunarathne) – Some groups like the LTTE attempted to divide the country based on ethnic and geographical lines. Recently, the radical Islamic clan of Zaharan Hashim attempted to create havoc in the country by carrying out explosions. It must not be repeatedly stated that the majority of Tamils did not support the LTTE. Moreover, the bulk of Sinhalese did not support the JVP insurrection. Moreover, many Muslims desisted the

²⁴⁹ *Virakesari*, June 7, p. 4.

²⁵⁰ *Virakesari*, June 7, p. 7.

²⁵¹ *Virakesari*, June 7, p. 15.

²⁵² *Dinamina*, June 7, p. 4.



radicalisation of Islam. Moreover, the bulk of the Catholics and Christians rejected the endeavours taken by some to suppress innocent masses. The existence of peace and harmony between communities is detrimental to some political groups; the groups that depend only on one community are in a disadvantaged state as long as there is co- existence between communities.²⁵³

Muslim ministers must take back their portfolios – Bhikkhus of Three Bhikkhu chapters stress (by Indika Polkotuwa) – Bhikkhus belonging to Three Bhikkhu chapters who congregated in Kandy has emphasised the importance of harmony between the Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim communities. The Deputy Chief Prelate of the Malwathu Chapter Niyangoda Vijithasiri Thera noted that the resignation of Muslim Ministers in the present context ought not to happen. Thera also urged the Muslim Ministers to take back their Ministerial portfolios again. Thera also pointed out the fact if there were any Minister or elite who is accused of a charge, that individual should prove his innocence.²⁵⁴

Muslim political leadership at a crossroads (by Sugeeswara Senadhira) - This short opinion piece claims that the mass resignation of the Muslim MPs has given the Sinhala Buddhist and Christian communities the wrong impression that Muslim politicians are trying to cover up the extremist links that some have. The author claims that the best option for Muslim politicians would have been to ask Bathiudeen to resign, with the assurance that he would be re-appointed if proven innocent. The piece mentions the role of Ven. Rathana Thera, and other radical monks, in the resignation of governors Salley and Hizbullah. The author mentions that the Muslim community has cooperated fully with efforts to root out terrorism, but contradicts the claim that thousands of innocent Muslims have been detained on the issue, citing that the president claimed the number was 559, and promised that many would get released after questioning. The piece ends by stating that it is high time for Muslim leaders to work towards peace, both within their community and as a country, “instead of adopting a belligerent attitude.”²⁵⁵

Special committee of experts to examine complaints against Dr. Shafi (by Dilshan Tharaka) - Police Media Spokesperson SP Ruwan Gunasekera said the Colombo chief judicial medical officer will head a special committee of experts to examine the females who have lodged complaints against Dr. Mohamed Shafi. The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) has recorded statements from 420 females and 26 doctors, including six visiting obstetrics and gynaecology doctors (VOG), over the illegal sterilisations allegedly carried out by Dr. Mohamed Shafi. In addition, 69 nurses and 18 other hospital staff members have also recorded statements with the CID on the incident, he added. This case will be taken again before the Kurunegala Magistrate’s Court on 27 June.²⁵⁶

²⁵³ *Dinamina*, June 7, p. 4.

²⁵⁴ *Dinamina*, June 7, p. 1, 6

²⁵⁵ *Daily News*, June 7, p. 6.

²⁵⁶ *Daily News*, June 7, p. 10.

Sterilisation claims against Dr. Shafi: Team of medical experts to examine women accusers (by Darshana Sanjeewa Balasuriya) - A committee comprising medical experts led by the Colombo chief judicial medical officer will examine the women who lodged complaints against Dr. Mohamed Shafi, stating that he sterilised them, Police Spokesman SP Ruwan Gunasekara said yesterday. He said the Criminal Investigations Department (CID) has recorded statements from 421 females and 26 doctors on the illegal sterilisations allegedly carried out by Dr. Mohamed Shafi. The police spokesman said the CID also recorded statements from 69 nurses and 18 other hospital staff in the course of their investigation. He said the case would be taken in the Kurunegala Magistrate's Court on 27 June. The CID will submit a comprehensive report to the court on that day, he said.²⁵⁷

'Prompt action upon tip-off would have averted Easter Sunday mayhem' (by G. Shantha Bandara) - Mohamed Razik Mohamed Taslim of Mawanella said that when he questioned members of the extremist group responsible for the Easter Sunday attacks regarding the vandalism of Buddha statues last year, they invited him to join their group. He was critically injured, allegedly shot by the extremist group that suspected him of having tipped off the police regarding their crimes. Responding to the questions posed by the media, he stated that he knew Zahran Hashim was behind this act of vandalising the Buddha statues and thereupon informed Minister Kabir Hashim. The latter wanted the security units to be alerted. Taslim in February said that he informed the police team led by IP Marasinghe about Sahith and Sadeek, two of the main suspects in the vandalism case. Although the police team agreed to search for the suspects, it ended in failure. If they had acted promptly on the tip off and taken action, the 21 April carnage could have easily been averted, he lamented. Taslim appealed for sustenance, as he has no means of livelihood at present. ²⁵⁸

Let's unite to rebuild this nation! (by Ameen Izzadeen) - This short opinion piece claims that the violent politically charged events following the Easter Sunday attacks show that Sri Lanka does not understand the importance of nation-building and developing a common identity as a multi-ethnic country. The government, opposition, law enforcement authorities, media and clergy have failed in nation-building efforts and must look inwards to figure out the reasons behind this failure. The author criticises the government's actions following the terror attacks, with the president rushing off to visit China, and the government appearing ambivalent towards extremists spewing hate speech. The piece commends Malcom Cardinal Ranjith's message of peace after the attacks, and the Mahanayake Thera's appeal to Muslim ministers to resume their portfolios, while condemning the government and JO for not taking a firm stance against

²⁵⁷ *Daily Mirror*, June 7, p. A1, A6.

²⁵⁸ *Daily Mirror*, June 7, p. A6.



extremism, and the police for taking the law into their hands in an almost draconian manner, unreasonably arresting people under the PTA and ICCPR.²⁵⁹

It's now a "Sinhala-Buddhist" theocratic state (by Kusal Perera) - This short opinion piece compares the 1956 Bandaranaike election campaign and government with that of the current regime. The author claims that this government tries to remain ambiguous on where it really stands, and that "the absence of an ideologically strong third force in Southern politics leaves space at present for Sinhala Buddhist politics led by Buddhist monks to play the role of the opposition against this UNP Government". The piece calls out Ven. Rathana Thera for inciting anti-Muslim sentiments and claims that "this UNP government does not want to challenge this extremely-dangerous usurping of political power that Minister Mangala Samaraweera is challenging on his own." The piece further claims that both Ven. Gnanasara Thera and Mahinda Rajapaksa have a Sinhala Buddhist supremacist agenda. The author concludes by hypothesising about the coming elections and warns that there is a possibility that the result of all these conflicts will be a strictly Sinhala Buddhist 'theocratic state.'²⁶⁰

Story behind the mass resignation (by M.S.M Ayub) - This short opinion piece claims that, given the facts, it is illogical to accuse Azath Salley of having connections to terrorists. The author bases this claim on the fact that, after the terror attacks, the authorities warned that the next target could be "Hubbu" mosques, given that the terrorists are Wahabis. As Salley is the chief trustee of one such mosque, it stands to reason that he is more likely to be a target than a perpetrator. The piece also questions why Bathiudeen is a suspect for having business dealings with an individual connected to terrorists, when this same individual was a national list nominee for the JVP, who stand accused of nothing. Similarly, the author claims that it makes sense that Hizbullah shook hands with Zahran Hashim, as is depicted in a picture, given that they come from the same hometown. Further, amidst stunts such as Ven. Rathana Thera's fast that exacerbated communal tensions, no Sinhala Buddhist political or religious leaders voiced disapproval for these actions, the piece states. The author contradicts calls that all Muslim ministers resigning was racist, citing that there have been many instances where they did not work in favour of their community, this being one of the exceptions.²⁶¹

The slowly emerging Buddhist dominance - The editorial discusses recent incidents where Buddhist monks had been in the forefront in protesting against certain Muslim politicians, calling for their resignation. The editorial also points out that all Muslim

²⁵⁹ *Daily Mirror*, June 7, p. A8.

²⁶⁰ *Daily Mirror*, June 7, p. A10.

²⁶¹ *Daily Mirror*, June 7, p. A10.

Ministers had resigned following mounting protests. Therefore, the editorial stated that the minorities should be alert to the increasing influence of Buddhist chauvinism.²⁶²

NGOs lie in Geneva stating that a Muslim genocide is going on in Sri Lanka (by Keerthi Warnakulasuriya) – A number of Non- Government Organisations has complained to the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) that a Muslim genocide is going in Sri Lanka. It is also mentioned in these inaccurate complaints that Sri Lankan Police had taken into their possession Muslim religious recordings and had arrested groups that kept them in their possession. It is also mentioned in those complaints that anti- Muslim rioters had destroyed hundreds of Muslim Mosques. But there is no reference to the Easter Sunday attack that was launched by extremist Thowheed Jama'ath Organisation.²⁶³

Cardboard heroes made chaos in the country after fomenting racism; Sinhala Buddhist state cannot be made in a foolish way – Sajith Premadasa (by Senaka Ilangakon) – Minister of Housing, Construction and Cultural Affairs Sajith Premadasa noted that cardboard heroes are creating chaos in the country, fomenting racism. Referring to the fact that he builds a Sinhala village on one day and a Tamil village on another day and a Muslim village on a different day, he noted that it is the genuine co- existence.²⁶⁴

The conduct of the Doctor in sterilisation is the most ruthless genocide in the world (by Cyril Wimalasurendra and Samanthi Weerasekera) – Athuraliye Rathana Thera noted that the forces that are hell-bent on destroying the race are in active mode. Thera also stressed that as per the number of complaints that amount to nearly 800 on the issue of sterilisation of mothers by Doctor Shafi Siyabdeen, it is depicted that it is one of the most ruthless acts of genocide. Thera also noted the resignation en-masse of the Muslim Ministers is a political strategy and that they continue to enjoy all the luxuries. It was also opined that the fate of Kabir Hashim who went to the Parliament through Sinhala Buddhist votes would be depicted at the next election.²⁶⁵

The investigations against Doctor Shafi should be done using new technology – Gamini Jayawickreme Perera (by Ajith Alahakon and Akhitha Perera) – MP Udaya Prabath Gammanpila noted that there was no malice or a suspicion against the Muslim community in the immediate aftermath of the Easter Sunday attacks. He added that Sinhala and Tamil communities started to cast aspersions on the Muslim community when it was felt by them that the investigations into the Easter Sunday attacks were being intervened in. It was also opined that Muslim Ministers convinced the message that all of them are identical in their conduct through their resignation en-masse. MP

²⁶² *Uthayan*, June 7, p. 8.

²⁶³ *Divaina*, June 8, p. 2.

²⁶⁴ *Divaina*, June 8, p. 3.

²⁶⁵ *Divaina*, June 8, p. 4.



Sunil Handunneththi who joined the debate stated that the right to exercise any religion should be given within the country.²⁶⁶

The incidents that happened recently were political racist acts – the deviation of Muslim Ministers and the Muslim Masses is not a healthy trend – Ranil Wickremesinghe – Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe noted that all communities in the country got together for the first time after the Easter Sunday attacks. He also stated that certain elements are implementing programmes that disrupt the unity that was formed. He viewed the resignation en-masse of Muslim Ministers and the deviation of Muslim masses due to racist attacks is not a healthy trend.²⁶⁷

Importance of joining forces with Sinhalese progressive leaders – The editorial states that Buddhist chauvinism has intensified in the country following the Easter bomb attacks where minorities, particularly the Muslims were affected due to violence unleashed on them. Therefore, the editorial discusses the importance of minority parties to join with Sinhala progressive leaders in order to establish harmony and co-existence in the country.²⁶⁸

We did not have any other choice – Leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), Rauff Hakeem in an interview stated that the Muslim political leaders did not have any other choice but to resign from their positions. While condemning the violence against Muslims, Hakeem pointed out there were some who wanted to trigger racial and religious tensions using the current situation.²⁶⁹

Buddhist chauvinism and its negative impact (by Anbarasan) – The commentary discusses the strong anti-Muslim sentiments which evolved following the Easter Sunday bomb attacks and the gradual increase in the involvement of Buddhist monks in the political scenario. The commentary was critical of the protest launched by Athuraliye Rathana Thera, stating that the move created a negative impact on the Muslim minorities. The commentary also stated that the unanimous decision by the Muslim ministers to resign was a slap for Buddhist chauvinist activists who wanted tensions in the country.²⁷⁰

Do not allow the emergence of racist issues in your areas of authority – Prime Minister tells District Secretaries (by Nimala Kodituwakku) – Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe instructed Secretaries of all the Districts to take measures to avert the emergence of racist issues in their respective areas of authority. Wickremesinghe also instructed the District Secretaries to prepare an organised programme by combining religious leaders and societies that represent various religions.²⁷¹

²⁶⁶ Divaina, June 8, p. 6.

²⁶⁷ Divaina, June 8, p. 9.

²⁶⁸ Virakesari, June 8, p. 4.

²⁶⁹ Virakesari, June 8, p. 5.

²⁷⁰ Virakesari, June 8, p. 13.

²⁷¹ Lankadeepa, June 8, p. 1, 6.



Let's remedy the root- cause of extremist groups – A crisis emerges if different laws are practiced in respect of various communities. It is a timely need to get the involvement of all communities in the country to expeditiously solve these issues. Moreover, it is important that endeavours taken in that exercise are based on genuine, candid objectives. The resignation of all Muslim Ministers from their portfolios should be analysed in this backdrop. Though the majority in this country is Sinhalese, the history shows that they had been maintaining cordial relations with the Muslim community from the past. Though there were disturbances at some intervals of time, the rulers in the country took steps to not to allow those issues to grow into extensive issues. The present rulers should realise this well; the root cause of many of the problems in this country emerged after the rulers sought the support of political parties that are based on ethnicity and religion. We also would like to point out that every community in this country should refrain from acting maliciously on other communities. The emergence of groups and clans inclined to extremism can be averted by nurturing understanding between various communities.²⁷²

The story behind the decision (by M. S. M. Ayub) – Athuraliye Rathana Thera staged a fast demanding the removal of Minister Rishad Bathiudeen, Governors Azath Salley and Hizbullah. Muslim masses contemplate that the objections against some Muslim politicians are racist threats against the Muslim community. The fear that Muslims possess escalated after the statement of Galagodaaththe Gnanasara theras that if the three relevant Muslim Ministers were not removed before 12 noon on the subsequent day, there would be fireworks in the country; the Muslim masses who could recall the anti – Muslim violence that was reported in the Aluthgama, Beruwala areas in 2014 subsequent to a statement made by Gnanasara theras – Aba Saranayi, were terrified thinking that the fast and the demonstrations are racist inducements against them. Their fear and frustration reached its peak as there was the general absence of an intervention by a Buddhist leader or a religious leader to quell the emerging anti- Muslim sentiments. There was also mounting pressure and opposition against other Muslim Ministers. This prompted them to resign from their portfolios with the trio who were accused in order to quell the disgrace faced by the Muslim community and to not to leave the trio alone who were contemplated by them as those who did not support terrorism.²⁷³

The road to unity and harmony - This editorial states that “one major problem pertaining to our political landscape is the sheer lack of bipartisan consensus on many issues”. The opposition will oppose a bill just for the sake of opposing, regardless of what is in the best interest of the country. It was therefore heartening to see the prime minister, speaker of parliament and Opposition Leader Mahinda Rajapaksa working together at the Select Committee of Parliament to study and report to parliament its recommendation to ensure communal and religious harmony in Sri Lanka, the editorial

²⁷² *Lankadeepa*, June 8, p. 4.

²⁷³ *Lankadeepa*, June 8, p. 4.

states. The piece claims that reconciliation is a two-way street, and the Muslim community must also look within to prevent further radicalisation. The editorial concludes with calls for the forging of a Sri Lankan identity, something that has eluded the nation for years.²⁷⁴

Spirit of pluralism (by Vickramabahu Karunaratne) - This short opinion piece questions why Muslims are being urged to light Vesak lanterns in mosques this year when we live in a democracy. It is only significant if you believe in the teachings of the Buddha. The author suggests that people of all faiths should get together with their respective religious leaders to “help the anti-fascist campaign of the Yahapalanaya led by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe.” The author also condemns anti-Muslim attacks and states that the government must take a stand and show that they will not tolerate such attacks. The author mentions the concern and advice pouring in from international sources and urges the public to be cautious, certainly, but also united and supportive of each other.²⁷⁵

President calls for unity (by Maneshka Borham) - President Maithripala Sirisena called on the nation to unite, casting away all differences and divides in a bid to develop the country and bring prosperity to the people. He noted that politicians were doing the opposite, in a bid to gain votes for the election. He also said that the aftermath of the terror attacks proved that the terrorists’ goal to divide the country had been realised. “Do not allow a Muslim Prabhakaran to be born,” the president beseeched. President Sirisena said he is thankful to the people of Mullaitivu who supported his presidential bid in 2015. He promised that a new loan scheme would be introduced to bring relief to people whose land deeds were destroyed during the war.²⁷⁶

The farce of the fast of Rathana Thera (by K. Sanjeewa) – Athuraliye Rathana Thera who went to Kandy on the 31st of May sat down in front of the Temple of the Tooth to initiate a fast-unto-death. Why was that? The fast was staged demanding the removal of the Minister Rishad Bathiudeen, The Governors Azath Salley and Hizbullah. Thera stated that the trio harboured the suspects of the Easter Sunday bomb attacks and they prevented the implementation of the law against the suspects. Furthermore, it was stated that the trio had buttressed Islamic extremism. When four days had passed since the initiation of the fast by Rathana Thera, it was discussed throughout the island. Sinhala Trade Associations of many towns in the country were keenly involved in the flocking of people to Kandy. In this context, the Tamil community in areas like Batticaloa and Vavuniya and Catholics too were conducting themselves in appreciation of the fast of Rathana Thera and it depicts a darker picture on the future of the country.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁴ *Daily News*, June 8, p. 4.

²⁷⁵ *Daily News*, June 8, p. 5.

²⁷⁶ *Sunday Observer*, June 9, p. 3.

²⁷⁷ *Anidda*, June 9, p. 3.



Toxic racism in the school system (by Rekha Nilukshi Herath) – Racism has spread throughout the country at present. There are many Sinhalese who reckon that the entire Muslim community is an adversary; this belief has been supplemented by a combination of true facts, distorted facts and inaccurate facts. Many people still do not have a proper understanding on the attire of Muslim women. Media institutions and the Government had not stated clearly as to what the banned clothes and non-banned clothes are. The clothes that had been banned under a Gazette are clothes and accessories that cover the face. Accordingly, niqab and burqa are banned; the reason for it is not because they are explicitly referred to in the relevant Gazette, but because it is mentioned that garments that cover the face are banned. Accordingly, Abaya – a garment that is akin to a long gown worn by Muslim women and hijab that covers only the head but reveals the face are not banned. But many institutions and Principals of some schools are unaware of it.²⁷⁸

The labour-room of Easter bombers lies in the religion 4 (by Gamini Viyangoda) – Religion is a belief. The first commandment of the Ten Commandments is that “You shall have no other Gods but me”. This very sentiment was the belief of the Islamic religious terrorists who created a catastrophe that was targeted at three churches in the country. We are well aware that present Catholic Church does not sanction the killing of humans with the sponsorship of the Church and the State for the Ten Commandments. But those teachings are still compiled. Therefore, any Catholic has the room to use them in the name of religion. Though it is true that the white Catholic who killed 51 Muslim adherents who were praying was led by the majority supremacy, there is no doubt that the root teachings of Christianity sanctioned such vicious acts.²⁷⁹

Doctor Shafi who was made guilty bereft of evidence (by Rekha Nilukshi Herath) – The wife of Doctor Shafi noted that her husband is not involved to Thowheed Jama’ath organisation or any other organisation, though there was reference in the Divaina newspaper on a ‘Thowheed Jama’ath’ Doctor. She also mentioned that her husband is an individual who was born to a conventional Muslim family in a village in Kalawewa. She also mentioned that they are not attached to any religious sect and they are traditional Muslim people.²⁸⁰

The challenge of rebuilding the state administration that went astray (by Professor Sarath Wijesuriya) – State administration in Sri Lanka has plunged to a deeper crisis. The staging of a protest by the Athuraliye Rathana Thera in front of the Temple of the Tooth is not an act of innocence; it was a violent act. It is clear that the Rathana Thera threatened not the Government, but the Muslims. It would have been beneficial for everyone who appreciates racism. What is the issue that was solved by the euphoria

²⁷⁸ *Anidda*, June 9, p. 4. 2

⁷⁹ *Anidda*, June 9, p. 4.

²⁸⁰ *Anidda*, June 9, p. 5.



generated by it? If Cardinal had approved the fast of Rathana Thera, he too has justified the violence. Sometimes, the policy that is being adopted against Muslims at present might be adopted in respect of Christians in the future. Meanwhile Gnanasara Thera made several references to the fact that a 'Government of Sinhalese' would be established and he made threats targeting the Government; the Government was asked to quit as he would be taking decisions after going to Colombo. The consequence of this threat was that all Muslim Ministers resigned from posts allowing the formation of a Government of Sinhalese. The adverse consequences that a country would have to face are enormous, when two communities segregate in state administration. It is a bitter truth that every religion in Sri Lanka has depleted extensively. That is why some voice their ideas to secure the religion from the Constitution and law. Moreover, the development of the religion is deemed as a responsibility of the Government. Observance of a religion is a personal affair. There are even laws and regulations that have been built with the time to observe various religions. The conformity to those laws is the responsibility of respective religious adherents. It is a farce for the Government to intervene in that regard and what are the uses of such an intervention?²⁸¹

Cardinal who blesses the oppressor, setting aside the oppressed – Athuraliye Rathana Thera attempted to create chaos in the country using the saffron robes. Those who flocked together in Kandy to witness fast of Rathana Thera came there to observe as to how an individual who dons a robe is staging a death-unto fast; that too after being armed with anti-Muslim sentiments. What motivated them to reckon in that way was the anti-Muslim sentiment propagated by Rathana Thera. It is an extension of the anti-Muslim sentiment that emerged after the Easter Sunday bomb attack and that gained some momentum after the Minuwangoda attack. The difference that was there was that Rathana Thera did not vent out of his mouth that Muslims should be attacked, and their property should be extorted. The attempt of Rathana Thera became successful and anti-Muslim masses who were enraged due to the fact that Rathana Thera is going to commit suicide against Muslims flocked together in main cities in the country. The country was back on the verge of an attack that was targeted at Muslim masses and had that continued further, it would have been Rathana Thera who played the role of the Gnanasara Thera in the Aluthgama racial riots. The other person who depicted his real face is the Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith. He is the one who prevented the emergence of chaos in the country after the Easter Sunday bombings. He showed the teachings of the Jesus in example. But he is too deeply immersed in racism at present. In a society, where the Catholics are the majority, Catholic faith becomes crucial to be empathetic on the oppressed. But in Sri Lanka Catholics do not constitute the majority; they are a minority as Muslims and Tamils. Thus, the Catholics should be empathetic with Muslims and Tamils. On one hand, the discrimination that would have to be faced as a result of being

²⁸¹ Anidda, June 9, p. 9.



a minority is common to all these minorities. What Muslims experienced after three weeks after the Easter Sunday bomb attacks was a collective taking of revenge of that manner. The fast of Rathana Thera is another facet of that collective taking of revenge. What Cardinal did by visiting the Rathana Thera is that he became a partner of that collective punishment against Muslims.²⁸²

The agony emanated from Kurunegala that sterilised the entire country (by Harsha Sugathadasa) – Doctor Shafi Siyabdeen has become a buzzword in the country today. That was due to the fact that media disclosed that Doctor Shafi had performed sterilisation surgeries on 4,000 Sinhala women during caesarean surgeries. In the aftermath of the disclosure of such information, Sinhala women flocked at the Kurunegala and Dambulla hospitals stating that they did not conceive after the performance of the sterilisation surgeries by Doctor Shafi. It is not pleasant sentiments that are planted in the minds of Sinhala masses when the idea that the underlying objective of a conduct of a Muslim Doctor in sterilising Sinhala mothers is the extinction of the Sinhala race. Doctor Shafi was not arrested under the charges that he performed sterilisation surgeries on women; but because of the charges on earning income in an illegal manner. But Shafi has gained popularity now due to the fact that he had performed sterilisation surgeries on 4,000 Sinhala women.²⁸³

Timely brake of the Buddhist clergy – MP Athuraliye Rathana Thera staged a fast in front of the Temple of the Tooth, Kandy demanding the removal of Minister Rishad Bathiudeen and Governors Azath Salley and Hizbullah. The result of it was the resignation of the two Governors and then the Muslim Ministers who represented the government from their ministerial portfolios. But on the subsequent day itself, a brake was imposed to this spurious wave. Galagodaaththe Gnanasara Thera opined that there would be undue consequences if the entire Muslim community is disposed without taking actions against the Muslim extremists. Before the lapse of a considerable time from the issuance of that statement, the three Buddhist Chapters got together in Kandy and issued a statement that all Muslim Ministers ought not to resign. It was also stated that all communities should act united to take the country forward. The biggest issue in the country at present is Islam extremism. It can also be realised that there are some groups who are trying to fish in muddy waters.²⁸⁴

We are passing an extremely sensitive period – Nalinda Jayatissa (by Tharaka Wickramsekera) – MP Nalinda Jayatissa noted that a series of organised attacks had been emerging against Muslims. It was also stated by him that JVP warned that the consequence of expelling the Muslim politicians who are in the democratic stream is paving the path for the emergence of Islamic extremism. It was also opined by him that

²⁸² *Anidda*, June 9, p. 10.

²⁸³ *Silumina*, June 9, p. 4.

²⁸⁴ *Silumina*, June 9, p. 9.



this time period we are passing is an extremely sensitive period. Noting that all communities in the country are living under stress at the time being, Jayatissa noted that therefore even a minor incident can trigger a catastrophe.²⁸⁵

Vesak moon and Ramalan Moon (by Sumedha Jayabahu) – Actually, the attack that was launched on the 21st of April shocked the Muslim community. It was the opinion of many people that the Easter Sunday attack was an act of few extremists. Meanwhile there were allegations against several Muslim politicians such as Rishad Bathiudeen, Azath Salley and Hizbullah. Many view the en-mass resignation of Muslim Ministers from the posts they held as a mere media depiction. It must also be stated that Rathana Thera had to stage a fast in the Temple of the Tooth premises due to failure of the Government to take a decision anticipated by the people. A huge responsibility lies on the shoulder of Muslim politicians to rescue the Muslim society from fundamentalists.²⁸⁶

Peradeniya University's proposed dress code opposed (by Aanya Wipulasena) - The University of Peradeniya (UOP) issued a clarification on its previous notice prohibiting students from wearing 'long sleeved wears' and 'abayas' as part of its special security measures. This comes as lecturers attached to the university brought to its Vice Chancellor Prof. Upul Dissanayake's notice that the move is problematic and could cause discrimination to certain students. It was clarified that this notice was advice, not a complete ban, for students entering examination halls. It is reported that the exams were conducted without any issues and smoothly, with students wearing what they usually do. The feature piece also elaborates briefly on the burqa ban under Emergency Law, and the confusion, and harassment of Muslim women it has caused within institutions in the country. The UOP convener of the Inter University Students Federation Mahil Bandara, said they are standing against measures to impose dress codes as it directly violates a person's rights.²⁸⁷

Fast unto death: Mixed reactions from politicians - This feature piece is a collection of opinions of politicians on Ven. Rathana Thera's fast, which is thought to be a political move to win the masses before the elections. Ven. Gnanasara made an about turn, from being supportive of Ven. Rathana Thera's fast, to claiming it eclipsed the 'national agenda'. MPs Bathiudeen and Hashim claimed that they resigned in order to protect the Muslim community and expedite investigations into the allegations respectively. MP Rambukwella claimed that the fast was unnecessary as there was an NCM in place. MP Vidura Wickramanayake claimed that this incident was the result of a lack of mature political leadership. Communist Party General Secretary D.E.W. Gunasekera claimed that the mass resignation would create communal divides. Deputy Minister Karunarathna Paranavithana said that he had visited Ven. Rathana Thera and asked him to desist, so that the issue could be solved politically. TNA parliamentarian Dr. S.

²⁸⁵ *Silumina*, June 9, p. 10.

²⁸⁶ *Silumina*, June 9, p. 12.

²⁸⁷ *Sunday Observer*, June 9, p. 4.



Sivamohan said that the monk was exacerbating communal tensions and that Muslim ministers should not be vilified without any viable evidence. Meanwhile, some members of the temple administration questioned whether Rathana Thera's death fast at Maha Maluwa desecrated the most sacred place of worship for Buddhists, especially given the litter and disturbance caused by supporters who came to see the monk.²⁸⁸

Fast in Kandy: A feast for fools (by Sarath de Alwis) - This short opinion piece claims that "Sinhala Buddhism is intransigent dogmatism" and that Minister Samaraweera is the only one who talks of the true teachings of the Buddha, as he has no plans to run for president and cater to the masses. The author condemns Ven. Rathana Thera's fast, calling it a "a rare display of rowdy piety and woolly-headed patriotism". Despite his support of Samaraweera's secular political values and multi-ethnic social norms, he faults him for criticising the cardinal. The piece also observes the indirect political influence of the Dalada Maligawa, which is one of the first places seen by the government after they are sworn in. The author claims that Ven. Rathana Thera removed moderation from political discourse, something that he, as a Buddhist monk, should have been promoting.²⁸⁹

'Fast unto death' was it more than what meets the eye? - This editorial piece states that in most 'mature' democracies, accused ministers step down to ensure impartial investigations and to inspire confidence in the public. However, Salley, Hizbullah and Bathiudeen stayed put. Further, Ven. Rathana Thera's fast calling for the resignation of these three leaders is just as insensitive and immature, and likely to inspire communal tensions. It makes a mockery of the justice system, the editorial states, especially if the government capitulates. The piece also questions whether the monk's intentions in this fast were purely patriotic or driven by his political position. Given the violence and riots in the country, this fast was especially ill-informed. Respectfully, the editorial disagrees with the cardinal's visit to the fasting monk, as it comes across as an endorsement of his message and methods. Minister Samaraweera is one of the few leaders who calls it as he sees it (regarding Sri Lanka not being a Sinhala Buddhist country), the editorial opines. It concludes by questioning whether Sri Lanka has truly learned from its history. "The moral of the story is that terrorism must be dealt with with counter-terrorism, and not by vilifying the entire community that the terrorists were part of. We made that mistake once with Tamil terrorism."²⁹⁰

The cardinal truth (by Mangala Samaraweera) - This long opinion piece written by Minister Samaraweera states that many who have leadership roles in politics, the clergy and business try to retain their power by dividing the nation. He mentions that groups such as the LTTE, and more recently, the IS, follow the same patterns, and claims that

²⁸⁸ *Sunday Observer*, June 9, p. 6, 12. 2

⁸⁹ *Sunday Observer*, June 9, p. 8.

²⁹⁰ *Sunday Observer*, June 9, p. 9.



the UNP stands by the victims of the Easter Sunday attacks. No matter the fact that all Tamils did not support the LTTE, all Sri Lankans did not support the JVP insurrections, and all Muslims did not support the IS, extremists and politically motivated figures seem determined to drag the country back into the days of gross human rights violations. Samaraweera claims that to certain clergymen, media institutions, politicians and political movements, racial harmony is a threat that would make them irrelevant. He claims that Bathiudeen earned the ire of the SLPP and its supporters when he refused to support the coup on 26 October, and that had he done so, the NCM would have found a new target. Even now, Samaraweera says, Bathiudeen is being cajoled to join the other side in exchange for the removal of the label 'terrorist'. He condemns the mockery made out of the justice process, where people are first declared guilty by the government and press before the police conduct any investigations or a judge hands out a ruling. He urges people not to compromise with extremists, but to speak out against them instead. Minister Samaraweera concludes by claiming to be a devout Buddhist because he actually practices its tenets, and states that it is the duty of all Sri Lankans, especially Buddhists, to stand up against those who incite violence in the name of the Buddha.²⁹¹

The action of Muslim leadership; a slap for chauvinism (by Chandrasekara Azath) - The commentary states that the unanimous decision of Muslim ministers to resign from their portfolios was a slap for chauvinism. The article stated that the involvement of Buddhist monks in the political environment had increased following the Easter bomb attacks, and Muslims have been faced with several challenges owing to developments following the attacks. However, the article states that the unity of the Muslim leadership had come as a surprise for chauvinists.²⁹²

The rise of Buddhist fundamentalism and government's approval - The commentary says that Buddhist fundamentalism had intensified during the recent times, following the Easter bomb attacks. It also claims that the government had also paved the way for Buddhist fundamentalism to gain firm ground by not addressing the problems that had arisen as a result of the bomb attacks.²⁹³

Should not isolate Tamils, Muslims, from national mainstream - PM (by Camelia Nathaniel) - No solution can be reached by isolating the Tamil and Muslim communities from the socio-economic and political mainstream of the country, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe said at a Samurdhi ceremony in Baddegama on Saturday. He said that measures would be taken to establish a National Religious Reconciliation Committee to eliminate suspicion between religions and establish national unity. "As this is the only country for the Sinhalese, they are scared of what might happen, which is understandable," he said, regarding the terror attacks, adding that this was no reason to isolate the entire Muslim community. The prime minister noted that irrespective of

²⁹¹ *Sunday Observer*, June 9, p. 9.

²⁹² *Uthayan*, June 9, p. 9.

²⁹³ *Uthayan*, June 9, p. 10.



which religion one chooses to follow, every citizen should have the right to follow their religion peacefully. “While Buddhism is given prominence through the constitution, all other religions have also been accepted,” he pointed out.²⁹⁴

Mano to visit Trinco and Mullaithivu – Minister Mano Ganesan will visit the controversial Kanniya Venneerootru Pillayar temple in Trincomalee and the Neeraviyadi Pillayar temple in Mullaithivu on June 10 to check on the problems that had arisen in these temples.²⁹⁵

Sri Lanka is directed by Buddhist chauvinists – Leader of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), R. Sampanthan has stated that even though they did not wish Sinhalese people to be affected in any way, Sri Lanka has unfortunately become a country which is directed by Buddhist chauvinists. He made this statement when he met Head of the United Nations Counter Terrorism Secretariat Michele Coninsx. Sampanthan also explained the political situation that had arisen following the Easter Sunday bomb attacks.²⁹⁶

Al-Musthafa University does not teach fundamentalism (by R. Vithusha) – Iranian Ambassador Mohammed Zaeri Amirani has stated that Al-Musthafa University in Badulla does not teach Islamic fundamentalism. He made this observation during a meeting with upcountry academics. Concerns were raised by several persons including politicians over the subjects that were taught in the university. Suspicions were also raised as to whether the campus taught Islamic fundamentalism. The speculations created suspicion owing to the current situation following the Easter bomb attacks.²⁹⁷

The businessman and the two drivers who tried to extort an amount of ten crores from the chief-priest of the Dambulla Viharaya arrested (by Gayan Kumara Weerasinghe)– Dambulla Police arrested three individuals who tried to extort money from the Chief-Priest of the Dambulla Viharaya. The investigations revealed that the suspects had tried to extort money from the monk while pretending as members of an extremist Muslim organisation.²⁹⁸

A national religious co-existence board would be set up as per the notification issued by the Chief- Prelates of the Three Bhikkhu Chapters – Wickremesinghe (by Hiniduma Special, Poddala Special, Karapitiya United and Baddegama United) – Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe stated that he would take steps to set up a national religious co-existence board to eliminate the suspicions that exist between different religious groups and also to nurture religious co-existence as per the notification issued by the Chief Prelates of the Buddhist Bhikkhu chapters. Wickremesinghe also notes that the Chief Prelates of the Bhikkhu Chapters too had mentioned that there is no point in deviating the Tamil and Muslim masses from the mainstream society. Wickremesinghe

²⁹⁴ *Daily News*, June 10, p. 1, 8.

²⁹⁵ *Virakesari*, June 10, p. 1.

²⁹⁶ *Virakesari*, June 10, p. 7.

²⁹⁷ *Virakesari*, June 10, p. 15.

²⁹⁸ *Dinamina*, June 10, p. 1, 6.



stressed that an environment where all people can freely exercise their religions irrespective of what that faith is should be created. 299

Medical Council should solve the issue of Doctor Shafi – Patali Champika Ranawaka (by Chameera Alladeniya and Central Colombo United) – Minister of Megapolis and Western Development Patali Champika Ranawaka stated that the sole purpose of the Jihad extremism is the termination of all except those who believe in Allah. He also stated that there is no difference between their ideology and the Thowheed ideology. Positing the view that there are four Thowheed Jama'ath sects in Sri Lanka, Ranawaka noted that it should not be forgotten that there are nearly 50,000 people in it. He also noted that there should be only one Ministry of Religious Affairs. He also took this the opportunity to mention that the issue on the sterilisation surgeries that are alleged to have performed by a Doctor should be dealt by the Medical Council.300

Three individuals who tried to extort an amount of ten crore from the Chief-priest of the Dambulla Viharaya in the guise of Thowheed Jama'ath arrested (by Sarath Eraminigammana) – Dambulla Police arrested three individuals who tried to extort money from the Chief-Priest of the Dambulla Viharaya. The investigations reveal that the suspects had tried to extort money from the monk, while pretending as members of the Thowheed Jama'ath.301

Crisis, health and the political image – An 'idiot' called Mohammed Zaharan exploded a bomb last Easter Sunday. He did not contemplate for a moment, the serious repercussions that it would have on his own Muslim community due to the bomb attack. He might have only contemplated on the fact that he would go to heaven and would get the company of 72 virgins there. What happened ultimately? The economy and the freedom of Muslim community were sabotaged; the burqa was banned; moreover, the adverse impact of all of them fell on the economy of the country and the society. An egregious fault-line supplemented by racism and religious fanaticism emerged in the country due to the conduct of Zaharan. It was in this context, that a heated discussion emerged with the publication of a news article stating that a Doctor in Kurunegala is sterilising Sinhala women. Ultimately, Muslim Ministers who could not endure this tense situation any longer resigned en-masse.302

The responsibility of national harmony (by Prof. Kapila Abhayawansha) – Peace and progress in a multi-national country cannot be attained until there is peace and co- existence between different communities and ethnic groups in that country. The mutual suspicion and lack of faith between communities is the main impediment to the peace that ought to be there between those communities. The impression that is created in the

299 *Dinamina*, June 10, p. 7.

300 *Dinamina*, June 10, p. 15.

301 *Divaina*, June 10, p. 4.

302 *Divaina*, June 10, p. 8.



minds of the masses with the military operations conducted on the Easter Sunday bomb attacks is that one community in the country was armoured to fight against another community. What is the secret of the discovery of all tools needed for a genocide including weapons from houses and places of religious worship wherever that particular community reside in the country? If the politicians were to say that it was an attempt taken within a brief period of time, those politicians are sick in the head. What is revealed through the sizeable number of weapons and the number of suspects arrested is that a covert conspiracy has been going through for the past few years. President and the prime minister who are keen to be the president and the prime minister again have used the concept of co-existence to increase their vote banks by satisfying the desires of one community as opposed to guaranteeing of co-existence. The Government adopted a passive behaviour when things like the non-applicability of the common law of the country in respect of Muslims, the absence of government control to avert the Muslims creeping through the loopholes of the common law, the implementation of their own laws in some Muslim regions, spreading of Muslim expansionism. Is it acceptable to reckon that the general public in the country would tolerate, when Muslims come in an invading appearance? Are the Buddhist supposed to endure all discriminatory practices merely because they are the majority in the country? It is natural for the emergence of resistance from people when a Government is indulged in a policy of segregating communities. Many Buddhist states in the Asian region were subject to the Islamic expansionism. In such a context, it is natural for the Buddhists who are the original residents in this land to possess fears and suspicions, when Muslims are given preferential treatment over other communities.³⁰³

The aim of Jihad extremism is to destroy all except those who believe in Allah – Patali Champika Ranawaka (by Sirimantha Rathnasekera) – Minister of Megapolis and Western Development Patali Champika Ranawaka stated that the sole purpose of Jihad extremism is the termination of all except those who believe in Allah. He also stated that there is no difference between their ideology and the Thowheed ideology. Positing the view that there are four Thowheed Jama'ath sects in Sri Lanka, Ranawaka noted that it should not be forgotten that there are nearly 50,000 people in it. He stressed that there are some groups in the country who try to make this country an Arab colony by engaging in acts like wearing Arabian clothes, consuming Arabian food, using Arabic language and creating Arabic universities. Ranawaka noted that there should be laws and change in the society to make such groups genuine Sri Lankans. He also noted that there should be only one Ministry of Religious Affairs.³⁰⁴

Let's not make a big issue out of Gurukanda Vihara premises – Buddhist monks and Buddhist people in Mullaitivu staged a demonstration in Mullaitivu demanding the termination of influences made by extremist Tamil politicians and demanding the halting of the attempt to build a Kovil in the land belonging to Gurukanda Vihara

³⁰³ *Divaina*, June 10, p. 8.

³⁰⁴ *Divaina*, June 10, p. 13.



premises. The history of Gurukanda Vihara can be traced back to the time between 2nd and 10th centuries A.D. This Vihara premises has been declared as an archaeological site. Notwithstanding such a context, a group of Tamil politicians are engaged in a perpetual struggle to acquire the Vihara premises and then build a Kovil there. A reasonable suspicion emerges whether this is an attempt to create unnecessary conflicts, despite the fact that the Gurukanda Vihara had already been declared as an archaeological site. Whatever the religious or ethnic origin is - be it a Sinhalese, a Tamil or a Muslim, the history of Sri Lanka is that of all. That history should be venerated, and it is an inviolable right of all citizens belonging to all ethnicities.³⁰⁵

No need of Governments manipulated by minor parties – Udaya Gammanpila (by Bingun Menaka Gamage) – MP Udaya Gammanpila was of the opinion that out of the nine Muslim Ministers in the Government, only Minister Rishad Bathiudeen was subject to allegations. Elaborating further, he noted that the message conveyed by the resignation of all Muslim Ministers in the Government is not a healthy message. He added that it further escalated the suspicion that Sinhala and Tamil masses had on the Muslim society. It was also opined by him that the message has been conveyed to the entire country that entire Muslim community are extremists. He further added that the Joint Opposition is taking steps to bring laws to tackle Muslim extremism.³⁰⁶

Religious reconciliation board to be set up: PM (by Yohan Perera) - A religious reconciliation board, comprising members nominated by religious leaders, will be set up to resolve various issues among religious groups in the country, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe said over the weekend.. He said legislation would be brought in to set up the board after a dialogue with all religious leaders, including the Maha Sangha. The Prime Minister suggested that Sri Lanka look at the way the UK dealt with religions. "Priority is given to the Church of England in the UK. However, freedom is given to all religions in that country," he said. "All ethnic and religious groups, including the Muslims, came together after the bomb attacks. However, the Muslims seemed to have distanced themselves from the Sinhalese later. One must remember that we as Sinhalese do not want to experience problems from the Muslims when they visit the East or experience problems at the hands of Tamils when they visit the North," the PM said. "Likewise, Muslims also do not want to experience trouble from the Sinhalese," he further said.³⁰⁷

A 'state-less' nation trapped 'behind bars' (by K.K.S. Perera) - "Like in developed nations, the state service ought to be looked up to rather than looked down at as a servant, but a distinguished service, taking accountability and responsibility for all actions," this long opinion piece states. The author makes note of Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith's visit to Ven. Rathana Thera, as well as his criticism of the government and its

³⁰⁵ *Lankadeepa*, June 10, p. 4.

³⁰⁶ *Lankadeepa*, June 10, p. 4.

³⁰⁷ *Daily Mirror*, June 10, p. A1, A2.

role in not preventing the Easter Sunday attacks. The author also calls for security on the island to be fair and balanced, and devoid of racial profiling, so as not to unnecessarily alarm the public. The piece elaborates on previous fasts in 2003 and 2005 by Ven. Omalpe Sobhitha. While people generally ignored those death fasts in the past, the author claims, Ven. Rathana Thera used the current social climate to launch his own fast and became a 'national hero' among nationalists and extremists.³⁰⁸

Future belongs to all of us (by K.S. Sivakumaran) - This feature piece quotes Uditha Devapriya, who states that while Sinhala Buddhists are a majority in Sri Lanka, they are a minority globally. Therefore, "what good can come out of demonising them and questioning their right to their history?" The author also questions the role of the clergy as political influences. Just like all other religions, the piece states, the Buddhist clergy also have certain extremist elements within it. "I think apart from abolishing the presidential form of government, we must also have a bicameral legislature to give room for saner politics. It must be a chamber of all intellectuals from different disciplines," the author states.³⁰⁹

It is sad that Sinhala leaders do not speak against Buddhist chauvinism – Sampanthan – TNA Leader R. Sampanthan stated that it was unfortunate that Sinhala leaders do not speak against Buddhist chauvinists who are directing this country. He made this statement when he met Head of the UN Counter Terrorism Secretariat, Michele Coninx.³¹⁰

Muslims are a minority here; but we are majority globally – The Muslims are a minority only in this country, but a majority globally and nobody should think that they could subjugate us, former Eastern Province Governor M.L.A.M.Hizbullah. He said so at the Kattankudy Periya Jumma Mosque. He said all Muslims should live with their heads up.³¹¹

Monks agree to renovate Hot springs Sivan temple - Monks of the Kanniya Buddhist temple have agreed that they would not build a Buddhist temple in the premises where the Hindu Vinayagar temple was. In addition, it was also agreed that the ancient symbols will not be affected and that the Venneerootru Sivan temple would be renovated. The agreement was reached during a meeting held at the Trincomalee District Secretariat, chaired by Minister of National Integration, Official Languages, Social Progress and Hindu Religious Affairs, Mano Ganesan, with the participation of other religious leaders.³¹²

³⁰⁸ *Daily Mirror*, June 10, p. A9.

³⁰⁹ *Daily Mirror*, June 10, p. A10.

³¹⁰ *Thinakaran*, June 10, p. 3.

³¹¹ *Thinakaran*, June 10, p. 18.

³¹² *Thinakaran*, June 11, p. 1.



Establishment of National Religious Co-existence Council (by Subramaniam Nishanthan) – Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe states that a national council for religious co-existence would be established to promote harmony in the country and to promote religious freedom.³¹³

What Athuraliye Rathana did was a drama (by S. Thavapalan) – Former Eastern Province Governor, M.L.A.M Hizbullah stated that the hunger strike launched by Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thera was just a drama. He pointed out that the monk could have easily persuaded the President to remove the governors without coming out in public. Therefore, he pointed out that the monk wanted to gain the goodwill of the people by protesting. He also stated that these incidents showed that the country was ruled by Buddhist chauvinism.³¹⁴

The blame on Muslim people should be removed (by A.M.A Nilam) – Parliamentarian M.S.S Ameer Ali has reiterated that the blame on Muslim people should be removed. He pointed out that the Muslims had made a lot of sacrifices for the country in the past and the community should not be suppressed because they are a minority. He pointed out the community had equal rights that of the majority.³¹⁵

A timely move – The move by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe to set up a national religious reconciliation board to eliminate misunderstandings and mistrust between religious groups is a timely one, this editorial states. According to the PM, members of this board will be nominated by religious leaders and neither he nor the president will have a hand in it. The editorial claims that had this multi-religious body existed previously, all kinds of controversies could have been avoided, including the Aluthgama riots. The editorial suggests that perhaps Malcom Cardinal Ranjith should be a part of this board, given that he is a religious figure who commands a lot of respect. The piece refers to the appeal of the Mahanayake's for Muslim ministers to resume their posts, suggesting that this means that Buddhists as a whole have no animosity towards Muslims, and that the Muslim ministers should heed this call. Otherwise, communal tensions will simply rise. The piece ends by observing that things are slowly returning to normal, and that we, as a nation, can't let the terror attacks hold us back.³¹⁶

Agreement reached to build Kanniya hotsprings Vinayagar temple – Monks of the Kanniya Buddhist temple have agreed that they would not build a Buddhist temple in the premises where the Hindu Vinayagar temple was. In addition, it was also agreed that the ancient symbols will not be affected and that the Venneerootru Sivan temple would be renovated. The agreement was reached during a meeting held at the

³¹³ *Thinakaran*, June 11, p. 3.

³¹⁴ *Thinakaran*, June 11, p. 7.

³¹⁵ *Thinakaran*, June 11, p. 17.

³¹⁶ *Daily News*, June 11, p. 6.



Trincomalee District Secretariat, chaired by Minister of National Integration, Official Languages, Social Progress and Hindu Religious Affairs, Mano Ganesan, with the participation of other religious leaders.³¹⁷

Continuous conflict between Hindus and Buddhists cannot be accepted – Minister Mano Ganesan at a meeting held with religious leaders in Trincomalee stated that continuous conflicts between Hindus and Buddhists cannot be accepted. He made this statement in light of allegations that Buddhist monks were attempting to take over lands and premises belonging to traditional Hindu temples in the North and East. The discussions focused on issues surrounding the Kanniya Vinayagar temple. He pointed out that he would meet the President and Prime Minister to solve the issue. ³¹⁸

Minister Mano Ganesan visits Old Chemmala Neeraviyadi Pillayar temple (by K. Kumanan) – Minister Mano Ganesan visited the Old Chemmalai Neeraviyadi temple in Mullaithivu to inspect the situation that had arisen following the conflict between Buddhists and Hindus. The conflict arose when a Buddhist monk claimed that the premises belonged to the Buddhist temple and changed the name as Gurukanda temple. However, the Mullaithivu court had ordered that both communities could worship in the premises.³¹⁹

Mangala braves the weather calling for ‘communal harmony’ in Matara (by Priyan De Silva) - Matara District Parliamentarian and Minister of Finance Mangala Samaraweera and a large gathering of his supporters braved intermittent showers to gather near the Matara central bus stand calling for communal harmony in the district and the nation. The minister called on all Sri Lankans to show compassion in accordance to the Buddha’s teachings and unite irrespective of race, religion or creed to build a prosperous Sri Lanka.³²⁰

“The hour of compassion” against extremism- racism and opportunism begins from Matara – The “hour of compassion” organised by the residents in Matara was held in front of the Matara bus stand. The programme was organised against extremists, racists and opportunists of all kinds. It is worthy to note that Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim masses in Matara area took part in this programme without any ethnic or religious differences. The residents held a demonstration against the Easter Sunday attacks and the emerging Sinhala and Muslim extremism in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday attacks and the opportunists who are attempting to capitalise on that situation. Minister of Media and Finance Mangala Samaraweera who joined the demonstrators opined that these programmes should be implemented island wide from Dondra Head to Point Pedro. He was also of the opinion that 95 per cent of residents in Matara are Sinhala Buddhists and that they have initiated the journey towards a new Sri Lanka by depicting

³¹⁷ *Virakesari*, June 11, p.1.

³¹⁸ *Virakesari*, June 11, p.2.

³¹⁹ *iVirakesari*, June 11, p.8.

³²⁰ *Daily News*, June 11, p. 10.



compassion, peace to all communities in conformity with the teachings of the Lord Buddha.³²¹ The missed act of extortion! – Three suspects who have attempted to extort money from a Monk in- charge of the Sri Vishnu Devalaya in Rangiri Dambulla temple has been arrested by the Police. The most critical part in this act of extortion is that the suspects had pretended as members of the Thowheed Jama'ath organisation. The act of extortion had been made through the telephone and the relevant conversations had been recorded as per the orders of the Police. What was revealed through those dialogues was that the suspects had done remarkably well in pretending as Islamic extremists and Muslims. Their accent is highly identical to the way in which a Muslim pronounces Sinhala. Investigations that have been conducted later had revealed that the suspects had a plan to grab money, even if it means the relevant monk is killed in that process. Had that plan materialised, that crime would have been attributed to the account of Thowheed Jama'ath. The possible consequence of it is the recurrence of a racial and religious disturbance.³²²

I took a number of decisions that were never taken by any politician in this country to save the forests in the country – Sirisena (by Aruna Dias) – President Maithripala Sirisena stated that the Buddhist monks should take the leadership to unite the country; he also added that Hindu, Islam, Christian and Catholic clergy too should take part in this task. But he expressed his concern that such a scenario where the religious leaders of all religious groups work united is not visible at present and there are differences between them. He queried as to how the country can be united in such a context. Sirisena also mentioned that the plan of the terrorists who carried out the Easter Sunday attacks have been realised and added that it is because the politicians have created differences in the country in terms of ethnicity and religion. He urged the masses not to allow any leeway for the emergence of a Muslim Prabhakaran by instigating violence between communities. ³²³

New laws are needed to eliminate fear and suspicions – Patali Champika Ranawaka (by Indika Polkotuwa) – Minister of Megapolis and Western Development Patali Champika Ranawaka stated that the Parliament should be forced to eliminate fear and suspicions present within the masses and the right of all respective adherents of different religions in the country should be guaranteed. Querying as to whether the next conflict in Sri Lanka originates based on religion, Ranawaka noted that ISIS organisation claimed the responsibility of the Easter Sunday attacks as an extension of the Crusades that dates back to thousand years. Ranawaka posited the view that the next challenge for the country is to avert a conflict based on religion. Noting that there might be various things in a religion, religious teaching or a religious scripture, he noted that these things might have been stated in various contexts. Pinpointing the fact that the

³²¹ *Dinamina*, June 11, p. 1, 6.

³²² *Dinamina*, June 11, p. 4.

³²³ *Dinamina*, June 11, p. 5.

Bible refers to an eye for an eye- a tooth for a tooth, he queried as to what would happen if things like that are materialised. He stressed that the three should be an ideology in the Muslim society where Sri Lankan Muslims are created as opposed to Arab Muslims.³²⁴

The concept of vultures (by Nishantha Kamaladasa) – There was no rallying behind of masses with Athuraliye Rathana Thera in the first few days of his fast. Gnanasara Thera intervened to fill that vacuum. The fast-gained vigour when it was declared by Gnanasara Thera in the endemic malicious way of him that if the two Governors Azath Salley and Hizbullah and Minister Rishad Bathiudeen did not resign before noon at the following day, there would be chaos in the country. Everything is not over as of yet. The threats made to Muslims are being made against individuals who expressed their ideas against racism. Minister Mangala Samaraweera is being targeted as he expressed the accurate idea that this country is not a Sinhala Buddhist country but a country that belongs to all ethnic groups. The woman who wore a garment with the picture of a steering wheel of a ship is still imprisoned due to a group of Buddhist monks and Buddhist masses who are either unaware of the distinction between the steering wheel of a ship and the Dharmachakra (Buddhist wheel of Dharma) or who could not wait to recognise such a distinction due to the hassle. The extremism on one side is being nurtured by the extremism of another side. ‘Muslim’ extremism depicted by Easter Sunday attacks provided the vigour to the ‘Sinhala’ extremism that is being unleashed today. A Sri Lankan identity can be created by defeating the ethnic extremism and the endeavours taken to get segregated along ethnic lines. Though the major part of that responsibility falls on the shoulder of the majority (Sinhala Buddhists), we concede to the fact that it is impossible to clap with one hand. Thus, adherents of other religions too should contemplate on the religious rituals and other activities of their respective religious groups. One step in this regard is to have a determination to confine the religious symbols, religious rituals and religious activities to residences and respective religious places of worship in the country; to prevent the open exposure of such things related to the religion to the extent that is possible.³²⁵

I condemn the opportunist politics – Kabir Hashim– Minister Kabir Hashim opined that mutual harmony which was collapsing with the Easter Sunday attack was moving back in a positive direction with the intervention of the Government and that the security forces were able to guarantee the security in a short period of time. He added that it was in such a backdrop that indications of a possible emergence of a racial riot as that of Black July was noted due to the conduct of some elements. He added that as there was a threat to the life and the property of entire Muslim community and the idea that Muslim politicians are interfering in the investigations on the Easter Sunday attacks, it was decided by him to resign from all portfolios. He stressed that he had no

³²⁴ *Dinamina*, June 11, p. 7.

³²⁵ *Dinamina*, June 11, p. 9.



idea to materialise narrow political agendas by giving rise to a politics characterised by religious fanaticism and racism.³²⁶

Respecting other religions is not a relinquishment of one's identity – Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith (by Thilakaratne and Galle North United) –Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith stated that a dagoba and the temple is the identity of this country. Cardinal also noted that if one were to go around the country in a helicopter, that person can witness a paddy field adjacent to tanks and a temple and dagoba as well. Cardinal also noted that he told even the Ambassador of United States of America to Sri Lanka that this is a Sinhala Buddhist country. Cardinal also noted that if one were to visit Anuradhapura, Sigiriya, Polonnaruwa, Dambadeniya and Tissamaharamaya, that person could clearly witness the Buddhist background in our culture. Noting that that is the heritage of this country, Cardinal mentioned that all masses who adhere to various religions should respect that identity; it was also stated by him that respect given to that heritage is not a relinquishment of one's own religion.³²⁷

Foundation for religious co-existence should be laid in the school (by Jayantha Senarath) – Religion has been the root-cause for many conflicts. The real motive even when it comes to ethnic conflicts is the differences in religions. The current percentage of Sinhalese in Sri Lanka is nearly 75 per cent and the remainder of the population is Sri Lankan Tamil, Indian Tamil, Sri Lankan Moor and other ethnic groups. Thus, the Non- Sinhalese population is a salient portion of the population. In terms of the religions, nearly 70 per cent is Buddhists and the remaining 30 per cent consists of Hindu, Islam, Roman Catholic and Christian and other religious groups. Thus, even in terms of religion, there is a sizeable Non-Buddhist population. We should conform to a process that nurtures co-existence between different communities. There is a close relationship between the Buddhists and Catholics and the reason for this is that the majority of Buddhists and Catholics are Sinhalese and they speak the same language- Sinhalese. The language spoken by Muslims (Tamil or Arabic) is not familiar to other communities and therefore it is a formidable challenge to build co-existence between them. The next important factor is the religion. Majority of Buddhists and Catholics does not have at least a minimum knowledge on Islamic faith and vice-versa. Thus, the nurturing of co- existence between communities is an uphill task given the fact that parallels between different religions cannot be recognised in this context. Everyone should have at least a basic knowledge about other religions and it is imperative to build co-existence. Religious difference alienates people until such a basic understanding is attained and it is highly likely to have a wrong idea about other religions in the absence of such an informed process. Moreover, it is a simple task to plant vicious fundamentalist idea of any religion in such a backdrop. The present situation in Sri Lanka is a result of the conduct of a group that had an attitudinal change based on the fundamentalist concept

³²⁶ *Dinamina*, June 11, p. 12.

³²⁷ *Dinamina*, June 11, p. 15.

via Islamic faith. It is the duty of all administrators and religious clergy to nurture religious co-existence in the society. The article claims it is hilarious for us to talk about religious co-existence, when we have schools segregated along religious lines as Buddhist schools, Catholic schools and Islamic schools. Religion is a factor that nurtures spiritual side of an individual. It is the aim of every religion to build a virtuous individual and it is the basic teaching of every religion.³²⁸

The advent of the neighbouring friend – A new array of questions emerged in the country after the Easter Sunday bomb attacks that were launched targeting Catholic adherents. There were allegations against the three Muslim politicians- Minister Rishad Bathiudeen, Governors Hizbullah and Azath Salley alleging that they supported the extremists. Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thera launched a fast demanding the removal of the trio and subsequently not only these three individuals but also all Muslim MPs relinquished their portfolios. That was a bad precedent which was criticised even by three Chief-Prelates of the Bhikkhu chapters. This not-so-good relationship that emerged with the Easter Sunday bomb attack should be ceased immediately. All Muslims in the country are not liable for this terrorist attack. Thus, it is the responsibility of everyone to not to push them into that direction. Especially, the Muslim politicians should not take decisions that push the ordinary Muslims to extremist directions.³²⁹

“The hour of compassion” should be held from Dondra Head to Point Pedro, without being confined to Matara – Mangala Samaraweera (by Shyam Nuwan Ganewatta) – The “hour of compassion” organised by the residents in Matara was held in front of the Matara bus stand. The particular programme was organised against extremists, racists and opportunists of all kinds. It is worthy to note that Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim masses in Matara area took part in this programme without any ethnic or religious differences. The residents held a demonstration against the Easter Sunday attacks and the emerging Sinhala and Muslim extremism in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday attacks and the opportunists who are attempting to capitalise on that situation. Minister of Media and Finance Mangala Samaraweera who joined the demonstrators opined that these programmes should be implemented island wide from Dondra Head to Point Pedro. He was also of the opinion that 95 per cent of residents in Matara are Sinhala Buddhists and that they have initiated the journey towards a new Sri Lanka by depicting compassion, peace to all communities in conformity with the teachings of the Lord Buddha.³³⁰

We resigned from the ministerial portfolios to allow the continuance of daily activities of people – Kabir Hashim – Minister Kabir Hashim has opined that the

328 *Divaina*, June 11, p. 6.

329 *Divaina*, June 11, p. 8.

330 *Divaina*, June 11, p. 9.



mutual harmony which was collapsing with the Easter Sunday attack was moving back in a positive direction with the intervention of the Government and that the security forces were able to guarantee the security in a short period of time. He has added that it was in such a backdrop that indications of a possible emergence of a racial riot as that of Black July was noted due to the conduct of some elements. He added that as there was a threat to the life and the property of entire Muslim community and the idea that Muslim politicians are interfering in the investigations on the Easter Sunday attacks, it was decided by him to resign from all portfolios. He stressed that he had no idea to materialise narrow political agendas by giving rise to a politics characterised by religious fanaticism and racism.³³¹

We are the majority in the world- Sirisena, Wickremesinghe, Rajapaksa or any other person cannot take decisions on the Muslim community – Former Eastern Province Governor Hizbullah (by R. Shreewelraja) – Former Governor of the Eastern Province M. L. A. M. Hizbullah noted that Muslims are the minority only in Sri Lanka and racists should know that Muslims are the majority in the world. He also stated that Sirisena, Wickremesinghe, Rajapaksa or any other person does not have the right to talk about the spiritual rights of the people. He also stressed that Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) organisation has mentioned that if the issue of Muslims in Sri Lanka were to continue, the oil supply would have to be confined to 23 per cent. He noted that Organisation of Islamic Cooperation organisation too has stressed that the security of the Muslims must be guaranteed and had warned that there is the risk of economic sanctions if it were not to happen. He also expressed concern that a Cabinet bereft of Muslim Ministers has been created after 90 years in Sri Lankan history.³³² Though we are a minority in Sri Lanka, we are the majority in the World – Therefore we do not need to succumb to influence of anyone (by M. S. M. Noordeen) - Former Governor of the Eastern Province M. L. A. M. Hizbullah noted that Muslims are the minority only in Sri Lanka and racists should know that Muslims are the majority in the world. He also stated that Muslims do not succumb to pressure of anyone. Hizbullah also made it an opportunity to state that the power of Muslims should be depicted at an election. He charged that Bhikkhus made false allegations against him in front of the Temple of the Tooth.³³³

Mangala Samaraweera attends “The hour of compassion” amidst torrential downpours (by Krishan Jeewaka Jayaruk) – The “hour of compassion” organised by the residents in Matara was held in front of the Matara bus stand. The particular programme was organised against extremists, racists and opportunists of all kinds. It is worthy to note that Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim masses in Matara area took part in this programme without any ethnic or religious differences. The residents held a

³³¹ *Divaina*, June 11, p. 9.

³³² *Divaina*, June 11, p. 15.

³³³ *Lankadeepa*, June 11, p. 1, 6.



demonstration against the Easter Sunday attacks and the emerging Sinhala and Muslim extremism in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday attacks and the opportunists who are attempting to capitalise on that situation. Minister of Media and Finance Mangala Samaraweera who joined the demonstrators opined that these programmes should be implemented island wide from Dondra Head to Point Pedro. He was also of the opinion that 95 per cent of residents in Matara are Sinhala Buddhists and that they have initiated the journey towards a new Sri Lanka by depicting compassion, peace to all communities in conformity with the teachings of the Lord Buddha.³³⁴

Buddhism is the only pacifistic faith: Champika (by Sandun A. Jayasekera) - Buddhism is the only religion that does not promote or encourage killings to propagate the religion, Minister of Megapolis and Western Development Patali Champika Ranawaka said. He emphasised the need to set up a special monitoring system to fully realise and assess the goal, strategies and plans of Muslim fundamentalist terrorists who wreaked havoc in the country. Addressing the Maha Sangha samuluwa held over the weekend at the BMICH, he underscored the rise in religious extremism in the Middle East and said ISIS was born in Iraq. “Misguided Muslim youth from Sri Lanka and other countries in Asia who left for ISIS were brainwashed and trained in warfare. They returned to their motherlands to promote, propagate and spread terrorism. That was how the Easter Sunday attacks happened in Sri Lanka,” he said.³³⁵

Understanding the problem between Sinhalese and Muslims (by Shivani de Zylva) - This short opinion piece claims that all conflicts stem from one underlying problem: the distribution of wealth and access to resources. While the Muslims came to Sri Lanka as merchants, the locals were people of agriculture. “While hundreds of years ago there was an economic gap between the Muslim bourgeoisie and the common Sinhala man, generations of inter-ethnic marriages, the settling of the Moors in Ceylon, and the commercial successes of the Sinhala communities have bridged this disparity,” the piece states. However, the perception that the bourgeoisie Muslim holds crude monopoly over the Sri Lankan economy still holds true. The author describes how Sinhala Buddhist nationalism grew as a reaction to colonialism, a side effect of which was the first recorded Sinhala-Muslim riot in 1915. Such riots are a result of manipulating frustrated working-class communities. In fact, the author calls them “a convenient and advantageous ideology for Sinhala business owners who sell their products under the veils of nationalism.” The piece notes that patriotic propaganda has had support from Buddhist clergy.³³⁶

³³⁴ *Lankadeepa*, June 11, p. 12.

³³⁵ *Daily Mirror*, June 11, p. A1, A4.

³³⁶ *Daily Mirror*, June 11, p. A10.

Sinhala-Muslim bond should continue - Mahanayake Theras (by Asela Kuruluwansa) - It was with the goal of protecting and promoting the centuries-old bond between the Sinhala and Muslim communities that the Maha Sangha of the three Nikayas decided to hold discussions with the Muslim ministers who resigned, the Mahanayaka of the Asgiriya Chapter of the Siyam Nikaya Ven. Warakagoda Gnanarathana Thera observed at the meeting between Maha Sangha heads and Muslim ex-ministers in Kandy yesterday. “Muslims have been representing the government since the state council was in existence in the country. Members of Muslim community made many sacrifices for the country from the time of the Portuguese, Dutch, and English up to the last Sinhala King,” the Anunayake Thera of the Malwatte Chapter said. Ven. Vijithasiri Thera said the resignation of Muslim ministers from the government was not favourable to the country’s image internationally. Lekhadhikari of Asgiriya Chapter Ven. Medagama Dhammanada Thera said a decision should be taken with regard to madrasa schools and the Sharia university, after having discussions with all stakeholders. The Thera said that the cooperation of Muslim ministers was also required on issues such as the common marriage law.³³⁷

It is crucial for all communities to live in fraternity without religious differences – Chief-Prelate of the Asgiriya Chapter (by Asela Kuruluwansa) - The Chief-Prelate of the Asgiriya Chapter Warakagoda Sri Gnanarathna Thera stated that Sinhala and Muslim communities had been living in the country peacefully for a considerable period of time. Thera also added that bond should be perpetuated. Thera also added that everyone should not forget that all are humans despite the racial and religious differences that we possess. Thera made these remarks when the Muslim Ministers who resigned from their portfolios paid a visit to meet the Chief Prelate himself and the Deputy Chief Prelate of the Malwathu Chapter. MP Rauff Hakeem who was present at this occasion opined that the Muslim MPs abide by the instructions of the Chief Prelates of the Bhikkhu Chapters.³³⁸

The hour of compassion! – A new programme has commenced in the South. That is to install national harmony and religious co-existence by carrying out marches. This can be named as a programme that was launched with the rallying of people. It is stated in the teachings of the Buddha that hatred is not extinguished from hatred. None of the religions in the world teach the adherents of those religions to practice hatred. The fact that a considerable number of people are active in the above programme explains the fact that there is a salient wave in the country against racism, religious fanaticism and opportunism. No developed country in the world links religion and ethnicity with the governance of the state. It is no secret that there was an arduous attempt to foment racism and religious fanaticism. It was also seen that that attempt became successful in some places and that is substantiated from the incidents that happened in Minuwangoda and North Western Province. The fact that “hour of compassion” was

³³⁷ *Daily News*, June 12, p. 1, 8.

³³⁸ *Dinamina*, June 12, p. 1, 6.



initiated from an area where 90 per cent of the population is Buddhists depict that the message of harmony and co-existence can be established throughout the country.³³⁹

Muslim Ministers who resigned paid a visit to meet the Chief-Prelate of the Asgiriya Chapter and the Deputy Chief-Prelate of the Malwathu Chapter (by J. A. L. Jayasinghe and Chamil Rupasinghe) – The Chief-Prelate of the Asgiriya Chapter Warakagoda Sri Gnanarathna Thera stated that Sinhala and Muslim communities had been living in the country peacefully for a considerable period of time. Thera also added that that situation should be perpetuated. Thera made these remarks when the Muslim Ministers who resigned from their portfolios paid a visit to meet the Chief Prelate himself and the Deputy Chief Prelate of the Malwathu Chapter. MP Rauff Hakeem who was present at this occasion opined that the Muslim MPs abide by the instructions of the Chief Prelates of the Bhikkhu Chapters. He also noted that Muslim MPs resigned from their Ministerial portfolios to avert the creation of a remoteness between the communities and added that there was no other aim in their resignation.³⁴⁰

Minister Mano Ganesan goes to probe on the issue of the Gurrukanda Temple (by Sithum Chathuranga and Romesh Madhushanka) – Minister of National Integration, Social Progress and Hindu Religious Affairs Mano Ganesan went to the Gurukanda temple to probe on the problematic situation that exists in the Gurukanda temple in Nayar, Mullativu. Minister paid his attention to the problematic situation that has emerged relevant to the Gurukanda Viharaya and the building of a Kovil in the Vihara premises.³⁴¹

Will always listen to Maha Sangha - Hakeem (by Asela Kuruluwansa) - “We are always ready to give an ear to the advice given by the members of Maha Sangha,” former Minister Rauff Hakeem yesterday said. He said that Muslim ministers had made a sacrifice by resigning from their portfolios for a brief period in order to protect and promote peace in the country, and that it was not pre-planned. He said that members of the Muslim community faced harassment in some areas of the country in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday attacks, citing Ven. Rathana Thera’s fast. These former ministers felt that parliamentarian Rishad Bathiudeen was being targeted as he did not support former President Mahinda Rajapaksa to gain a majority in parliament when the latter was made prime minister in October, last year.³⁴²

Hizbullah’s comments unacceptable - PM (by Disna Mudalige) - Comments made by former Governor of the Eastern Province M.L.A.M. Hizbullah are totally unacceptable, and it is our duty to preserve the Sri Lankan identity, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe told a meeting with prominent civil society representatives at Temple

³³⁹ *Dinamina*, June 12, p. 4.

³⁴⁰ *Lankadeepa*, June 12, p. 6.

³⁴¹ *Lankadeepa*, June 12, p. 12.

³⁴² *Daily News*, June 12, p. 1, 8.



Trees yesterday. He said that the campus being constructed in Batticaloa will be taken over by the government and insisted that degree awarding institutions can only be established by the state, and no other party can establish such institutions. During the meeting, he is reported to have reiterated that he accepts the recent statement issued by the Buddhist Sangha Sabha, which includes the chief prelates of the Three Nikayas. Wickremesinghe confirmed that he would take steps to form an inter-faith council for national religious reconciliation. “The Muslims are a minority only in this country, but a majority globally,” Hizbullah had said, adding that he had given the president two weeks to prove all allegations against him.³⁴³

Steps should be taken to alleviate suspicion on Muslims – Muslim politicians have called upon the Buddhist leaders to take steps to alleviate the suspicions cast on the Muslim people following the Easter Sunday attacks. The politicians made this request when they met Buddhist religious leaders. The Muslim leaders while explaining the context behind their resignations stated that they would consider taking up ministerial positions only if the suspicions cast on Muslims are alleviated.³⁴⁴

The permanent line dividing Sinhalese and Muslims – Former Minister Basheer Cegu Dawood has accused Islamic and Buddhist extremists of dividing the Sinhalese and Muslims. He stated that there was a threat that this division being permanent if not addressed immediately.³⁴⁵ Both parties should respect court order and act accordingly (by K. Kumanan) – Minister Mano Ganesan has urged both Hindus and Buddhists to heed to the court order and act accordingly on the issue pertaining to the Mullaithivu Old Chemmalai Neeraviyadi Vinayagar temple. Ganesan pointed out that the police should not hinder those who work according to the court order, and added that no renovation works should be carried out against the court order and without proper approval.³⁴⁶

Submission politics (by P. Manikkavasagam) –The commentary discusses the dominance of Buddhist chauvinism following the April bomb attacks. The commentary points out that it had been taken for granted by the Buddhist nationalists that they could act anyway they want against Tamil and Muslim minorities, as evident in the history. The commentary also states that while Muslims were being targeted, Tamil areas too were encroached by Sinhala Buddhists in the North and East.³⁴⁷

³⁴³ *Daily News*, June 12, p. 1, 8.

³⁴⁴ *Virakesari*, June 12, p.1.

³⁴⁵ *Virakesari*, June 12, p.15.

³⁴⁶ *Virakesari*, June 12, p.17.

³⁴⁷ *Virakesari*, June 12, p. 18.



Ministers resigned for sake of country - Kabir Hashim - Former Minister Kabir Hashim said all Muslim ministers, including him, decided to resign from their portfolios for three main reasons. Firstly, they did not want to exacerbate communal tensions and destabilise the country. Secondly, there was a threat to the lives and property of the Muslim community due to extremist groups. Thirdly, there were allegations that Muslim politicians were obstructing investigations into the Easter Sunday attacks. There was no intention on his part to achieve petty political gain or motive by creating a religious or communal issue, Hashim said. Kabir Hashim in his statement said he would honour the counsel offered by the Venerable Mahanayake Theras and act accordingly in the future.³⁴⁸

Shrine to shine again (by Camelia Nathaniel) - St. Anthony's Shrine, Kochchikade, which was damaged in the Easter Sunday bomb blast, will be consecrated again today (12 June) at 5.00pm by Archbishop of Colombo Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith. He also said there would be a mass on 13 June, the feast day of St. Anthony. However, the traditional procession will not be held this year, in honour of the lives lost on Easter. When asked about the funding that went into the repair of the church, Administrator of Saint Anthony's Church Rev. Fr. Jude Raj Fernando said a fund was set up under the archbishop and devotees also contributed. Additionally, there were also government sources of funding. The navy is responsible for carrying out the repairs. The piece also elaborates on the history of the 185-year-old shrine, as well as its name-sake saint. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday, 9 June, visited St. Anthony's Shrine in Kochchikade soon after his arrival in Sri Lanka.³⁴⁹

PM condemns Hizbullah's remarks - Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe condemned the remarks made by former Eastern Province Governor M.L.A.M. Hizbullah. Hizbullah was reported to have said at a function that Muslims were a world majority and therefore they should not live in a country in fear and had also marked his speech with inflammatory language. The prime minister said everybody should identify themselves as Sri Lankans. ³⁵⁰

Let's live as brothers - Prelate tells Muslims (by J.A.L. Jayasinghe) - Chief Prelate of the Asgiriya Chapter Ven. Dr Warakagoda Sri Gnanarathana Thera yesterday stressed the need for the various communities of this country to live peacefully as brothers. Rauff Hakeem, addressing the Maha Sangha, said that there was no ulterior motive in resigning from their ministerial posts as published by many. It was a precaution, given the violence that Ven. Rathana Thera's fast could have incited, he said. Anunayake of the Asgiriya Chapter Ven. Dr. Amamaduwe Dammadassi Thera expressed concerns regarding all Muslim ministers joining the few that had allegations levelled against them, giving the public the wrong impression. Another Thera observed that the mass resignation only aggravated the socio-political climate of the country. Senior Member of the Sangha Sabha of the Asgiriya Chapter Dr. Muruddeniye Dammarathana Thera said that the Muslims in the East complained about Zahran to the police, but it appears that

³⁴⁸ *Daily News*, June 12, p. 3.

³⁴⁹ *Daily News*, June 12, p. 4.

³⁵⁰ *Daily Mirror*, June 12, p. A1, A2.



no action was taken on these complaints. Rauff Hakeem in reply said that they had told the prime minister about Zahran's gang. This matter was also discussed at the cabinet level. Rishad Bathiudeen talked about being displaced in the war and mentioned that he had helped to reconstruct several temples. A.H.M. Fowzie said that if there are charges against Dr. Shafi, let them first prove them and punish him.³⁵¹

UNP manipulating Muslim community for political purposes - Opposition Leader Mahinda Rajapaksa said yesterday that the UNP was using the Muslim community for their political purposes, especially given the approaching elections and that Muslim leaders, completely dependent on Muslim votes, want a government they can manipulate. He urged all leaders to act in a responsible manner. He said brutal terrorism that targets the followers of other religions has emerged from within the Muslim community today. "Buddhists, Hindus and Christians are joining hands in a common endeavour against that terrorism. Moderate Muslims should not be isolated from this unity of purpose that is being forged. Muslim religious leaders and intellectuals have admitted that as a result of the extremist ideologies that came into this country from outside, the Sri Lankan Muslim community had gradually isolated themselves from the rest of Sri Lankan society," he said. He said due to the emergence of exclusively Muslim political parties from the 1980s onwards, Muslims isolated themselves in the political sphere as well. ³⁵²

Some attempting to use my resignation to achieve narrow political ends: Kabir -Former Minister Kabir Hashim vehemently condemned attempts by persons with narrow political motives to use my decision to resign to create division among the citizens of this country. "I decided to resign from my ministerial portfolio with [the intention] to bring about peace and reconciliation between all parties and races and to help normalcy to return," he added. He said he had no intention of highlighting religious, extremist politics and achieving narrow political ends through such a course of action. He also said that he gives all due respect to the Buddhist clergy and will follow their guidance and respect their wishes.³⁵³

A healthy beginning – The editorial focuses on the meeting between the Muslim politicians and the Buddhist clergy. According to the editorial, the mistrust between Sinhalese and Muslims has resulted in the tensions. It points out that while the Muslims have been targeted on several occasions, the Sinhalese too viewed the community with suspicion. Therefore, it stated that the above meeting would be a good start to iron out misunderstanding between both communities.³⁵⁴

³⁵¹ *Daily Mirror*, June 12, p. A1, A2.

³⁵² *Daily Mirror*, June 12, p. A1, A2.

³⁵³ *Daily Mirror*, June 12, p. A4.

³⁵⁴ *Thinakaran*, June 13, p. 4.

Chemmalai Neeraviyadi temple: if it has ancient history, we will tell the truth to court – Minister Mano Ganesan stated that if it is confirmed that the Old Chemmalai Neeraviyadi Pillayar temple had ancient history, then his ministry would come forward to come as a party to the court case and inform the truth to court. Ganesan has urged both Hindus and Buddhists to heed to the court order and act accordingly on the issue pertaining to the Mullaithivu Old Chemmalai Neeraviyadi Vinayagar temple. Ganesan pointed out that the police should not hinder those who work according to the court order, and added that no renovation works should be carried out against the court order and without proper approval.³⁵⁵

Buddhists and Buddhism (by G.A.D. Sirimal Boralesgamuwa) - This short opinion piece states that calling this nation Sri Lanka, as opposed to a Sinhala Buddhist country, is inclusive of everyone. The author states that given that the word Buddhism is derived from the Sanskrit 'buddhi', which means wisdom, everyone possessing at least a little intelligence can be considered Buddhist. The piece also questions why Buddhists aren't called 'Gauthamists' since they follow the teachings of Lord Gautama Buddha. The author stated that if this view is accepted, the political cry of Buddhist monk and so-called Buddhists will stop.³⁵⁶

Why avoid wearing the black abaya/jilbab? (by Mohamed Zahran) - This short opinion piece questions an Islamic scholar's claim that black apparel is associated with terrorism, and therefore, Muslim women should wear colourful abayas. The author questions whether this is a solution to end extremism and observes that buying colorful abayas would be costly. Further, the author argues that black garments are less likely to get soiled. He further questions whether wearing black pose any threat to security. He further claims that a black abaya is more modest than a colorful one and asks whether "we" are trying to make a "wanton display of the Muslim women dressed in psychedelic colours". The author claims that the solution lies in strict laws that punish extremists.³⁵⁷

Unjustifiable cloud on Muslims following the Easter massacre (part I) (by Mohamad R.M. Farook) - This short opinion piece labelled the Easter Sunday terrorists as "apostates of Islam" and stated that the entire Muslim community was shocked and saddened by this event. "There is no room in Islam to hurt," the author stated, quoting the Qu'ran to support his claim. The piece added that awareness of Islam should be spread through discourse and media to avoid such misunderstandings. The piece claimed that it is unsurprising that the entire Muslim community is being erroneously blamed as Sri Lanka has a history of extremist Buddhist prejudice against Muslims. Christians, led by Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith, understood who the real perpetrators were. Therefore, the author stated that "this prevented any backlash on the Muslim community". Furthermore, the article condemned ISIS's rationale that this attack was

³⁵⁵ *Thinakaran, June 13, p. 12.*

³⁵⁶ *Daily News, June 13, p. 11.*

³⁵⁷ *Daily News, June 13, p. 11.*



revenge for America murdering Muslims worldwide. The author stated that ISIS had murdered more Muslims than any other party for not following their criminal ideology, “which is nothing but Satan inspired Jewish creation.” The piece also criticised the government for not foreseeing the anti-Muslim violence that resulted in the death of one Muslim individual. The police curfew only helped perpetrate the violence. The author mentioned the different stances on face covers in the Muslim community (depending on the interpretation of the Qu’ran) but stated that Islam does allow the face to be uncovered in times of national security.³⁵⁸

Pressure on Muslims: situation should be changed; EU, Britain requests president and prime minister (by Robert Antony) – The European Union (EU) and Britain has urged President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe to address the situation where Muslims are being pressurised. In a statement, the EU has stated that such a situation would affect peace and harmony of the country if left unaddressed.³⁵⁹

Political leaders should act with responsibility at the current context – The editorial explained the position taken by Muslim politicians, calling the Buddhist leaders to take steps to alleviate suspicion on Muslims. In addition, the editorial also urged Muslim leaders, and other political leaders to act in a responsible manner that does not aggravate the situation prevailing in the country.³⁶⁰

Actions of Buddhist monks that have become a curse to the country – Monitoring MP of the Hindu Affairs Ministry Velukumar has stated that the recent activities of certain Buddhist monks was a curse to the country as they had violated Buddhist principles and teachings. He urged the president and the Buddhist chapters to address the situation and control their actions. He pointed out that these monks were attacking other religions in the pretext of protecting Buddhism, which is against the Buddhist principles and teaching.³⁶¹

Convert Batticaloa campus into a state defence university - Sumathipala (by Dinuli Francisco) - UPFA Parliamentarian Thilanga Sumathipala said that he is ready to help provide financial support to convert the controversial Batticaloa campus into a state defence university. He added that they are reaching the target of collecting one million signatures in a petition demanding the transformation of the Batticaloa campus into a state defence university. The petition is to be handed over to the chief prelates, the president, the prime minister and other responsible authorities. The private members’ motion submitted by MP Sumathipala to parliament to convert the controversial Batticaloa campus into a state defence university was added to the parliament order book. The motion proposes that it is a national requirement to pay attention to the

³⁵⁸ *Daily News*, June 13, p. 11.

³⁵⁹ *Virakesari*, June 13, p. 1.

³⁶⁰ *Virakesari*, June 13, p. 4.

³⁶¹ *Virakesari*, June 13, p. 14.

Batticaloa campus and provide a viable solution to it. MP Sumathipala said that steps should be taken to establish confidence among the public regarding national security and to ensure that Sri Lanka would not face another atrocity in the future.³⁶²

EU ‘concerned’ about pressure on Muslim community - The European Union (EU) urged the government and all political leaders to “reassert the state’s commitment to mutual respect, tolerance and equal treatment under the law for all, irrespective of faith or ethnicity”. The EU statement was issued “in agreement with the embassies of France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Romania, Norway, Switzerland and the UK High Commission” and, said that they stand by all Sri Lankans working to preserve peaceful coexistence between all communities. The piece quotes the full EU statement.³⁶³

Buddhism always promotes non-violence - Ranawaka (Sandasen Marasinghe) - Megapolis and Western Development Minister Patali Champika Ranawaka stated that Buddhism is the only religion that never used violence or killing as a means of propagating the religion. He also said that Theravada Buddhism has been given “pride of place” the world over. The minister said that although Dubai, China, the US, and Taiwan are home to high rise buildings, the highest buildings were constructed in Sri Lanka some 2000 years ago. He pointed out that the ancient dagabas and massive irrigation projects were marvels in engineering feats. He added that the Sinhala language is the only language that has a Sri Lankan identity, in addition to being one of the oldest. Minister Ranawaka also said that the Sinhalese have with the longest written history, in the form of the Mahawansa. He said that Buddhism consists of more than 17,000 Gathas (stanzas) and none of them preaches about killing, harming or hurting anyone. He said all other communities can live peacefully enjoying equal rights.³⁶⁴

ACBC writes to president on Dr. Segu Shafi incident (by Lahiru Fernando) - President Maithripala Sirisena has not responded to a letter sent by the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress (ACBC) requesting to set up an independent commission to investigate Dr. Segu Siyabdeen Mohamed Shafi, ACBC President Jagath Sumathipala said. He said that if President Sirisena failed to positively respond to their request, the ACBC will set up its own independent commission to inquire into the incident. “This is a massacre and the situation is dangerous. Therefore, we cannot take this lightly. Such a suspicious incident should be investigated deeply and immediately,” he added. Sumathipala said the ACBC is also ready to help the victimised mothers in the Kurunegala area if the charges against the said doctor are proven. The Buddhist Rights

³⁶² *Daily News*, June 13, p. 12.

³⁶³ *Daily News*, June 13, p. 12.

³⁶⁴ *Daily News*, June 13, p. 12.



Commission which was formed last year will also visit the Kurunegala area to see the victims of this incident and to gather evidence from them, he further added.³⁶⁵

EU concerned about ‘pressure on SL Muslims’ - The delegation of the European Union (EU) yesterday said that it is deeply concerned of political and religious pressure being directed at Sri Lanka’s Muslim community. They stated that the pressure is undermining peace and reconciliation in the country. “Prejudiced and unsubstantiated allegations repeatedly published by media serve only to fuel intolerance,” the EU said in a statement. The statement also claimed that they “stand by all Sri Lankans working to preserve the peaceful coexistence between all communities, and expect religious and other community leaders to support them and speak out against violence”.³⁶⁶

St. Anthony’s shrine reopens - The Archbishop of Colombo Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith is seen blessing the devotees gathered at St. Anthony’s Shrine in Kochikade. The church that came under attack on Easter Sunday was reconsecrated after renovation and opened to the public yesterday.³⁶⁷

Muslim mothers being sterilised at Castle Street Hospital: MP Cassim (F. Aslam) - Former State Minister of Health MP Faizal Cassim said that it had come to light that Muslim mothers had been subjected to sterilisation at the Castle Hospital, Colombo. He further said they would be bringing this information to the attention of the Government Medical Officers' Association (GMOA) and also to parliament. "The doctors that performed these sterilisations had done so after pointing out that the health of these women were at risk as their bodies were weak after delivering their third child," he added. He also claimed that the allegations against Dr. Shafi were baseless. If he undertook these kind of operations then the ten persons who helped him carry out these operations must also be arrested, he added, claiming that these kinds of operations could not be carried out alone. ³⁶⁸

‘Have a single law for all Sri Lankans’ (by Sandun A. Jayasekera) - The Daily Mirror discussed the current political and economic situation of the country in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday bombings with the General Secretary of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) former Minister Dayasiri Jayasekera. In this interview, Dayasiri Jayasekera concedes that the government and Joint Opposition had a collective responsibility to stop the April 21 terror attacks, although “The Inspector General or Secretary of Defence Hemasiri Fernando should have informed the president on this important intelligence report and instructed him to convene a meeting of the National Security Council (NSC) as a follow-up action, but sadly this didn’t happen.” He compares this disaster to similar instances during the civil war. He also states that the SLFP has

³⁶⁵ Daily News, June 13, p. 12.

³⁶⁶ Daily Mirror, June 13, p. A1, A2.

³⁶⁷ Daily Mirror, June 13, p. A3.

³⁶⁸ Daily Mirror, June 13, p. A3.

warned about the radicalisation of Muslim youth before and that it is now necessary to have “a single law for all Sri Lankans, dismantle religious or language based schools, establish mixed schools and make sure that no political parties are formed based on ethnicity. Marriage must be banned before adulthood. The marriageable age is 18 years for both sexes.” Further Jayasekera claims that “Face veils like the burqa, niqab, hijab and chador or whatever garment that makes it difficult to easily identify a person must be banned after consultations with Muslim leaders.” He also states that due to the size of the country, the maximum number of children in a family should be limited to three. “Our Muslim brethren must not act like Arab Muslims. Sri Lankan Muslims are well integrated into the Sri Lankan society,” he adds. He conceded that search operations should have been carried out more carefully to prevent fearmongering. Jayasekera stated that the events at Kuliyapitiya began when “four Sinhala youth unleashed an unprovoked attack on two Muslim boutiques”. He then described in detail the events of the day and refuted the allegations that he had helped the instigators get out on bail.³⁶⁹

What on earth is happening to Sri Lanka? - This editorial states that Ven. Rathana Thera probably did not anticipate the solidarity of a mass resignation when he started his hunger strike. The piece states the reason given by Muslim ministers for their resignations: to ease communal tensions and expedite investigations. In order to mitigate the fallout from the crisis, the Maha Sangha representing the three Nikayas held a special meeting in Kandy where they expressed regret over the resignation of the Muslim ministers, the piece adds. The editorial also mentions the prime minister’s proposal of setting up of a religious reconciliation board. The author questions how effective is the writ of the government if it allows individuals, whoever they may be, to hold the government and by extension the entire country to ransom while our leaders are excelling in the art of spewing empty rhetoric and muddying the waters spreading more confusion.³⁷⁰

‘Moderate’ is a convenient garb for the pernicious (by Malinda Seneviratne) – This short opinion piece claims that criticism “made in English, in and out of the media (mainstream and social) are almost exclusively directed at the majority community, the Sinhala Buddhists.” The author claims that the women who have made complaints against Dr. Shafi have been “vilified”, especially as only a few have agreed to undergo testing. This is a difficult and personal decision to make, he claims. The author suggests that had a single non-Sinhala non-Buddhist woman complain about not being able to conceive after a Sinhala Buddhist doctor performed c-sections, human and women rights activists might not remain so quiet. The piece suggests that recent events have led to two things: “a) a crass generalisation and vilification of the majority community, and b) scandalous silence on all other factors including the threat at hand and the relevant complicity of the Hizbullahs’ of the Muslim community, apart from the odd and token reference.” The piece refers to fake ‘moderates, and characterises them as being ‘posh’,

³⁶⁹ *Daily Mirror*, June 13, p. A8.

³⁷⁰ *Daily Mirror*, June 13, p. A10.

or wanting to be so, and claim that they believe that the country should be run by “English-speaking, anglicised and the relatively wealthy class.” The author claims that many “consciously or unconsciously are ashamed of their own skin and DNA traces, and find the vilification of Sinhala Buddhists a means to self-isolation and self-alienation that makes them ladies and gentlemen’. In his concluding remarks the author states that “they rant and rave against isolation and alienation, but in fact isolate and alienate. Caricature is their watchword. And this is why those like Rev. Gnanasara and outfits like the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) are ‘heaven-sent’ to them. Such individuals and outfits, however rejected they may be by Buddhists, are used as proxies for that community. No caveats. No specifics. Totalising, instead.”³⁷¹

Ifthar get together for racial harmony – An Ifthar ceremony was held at the Kattankudy Pradeshiya Sabha with the participation of multi religious leaders and personalities. The event was held to promote harmony and co-existence among communities.³⁷²

Break the statues and come back to me (by M.F.M Basheer) – The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) told the Mawanella court that Zaharan had requested his allies to damage the Buddha statues in Mawanella. The CID also stated that the incidents of damaging Buddha statues were carried out under the complete supervision of Zaharan in December last year.³⁷³

Those who destroy places of worship are also terrorists – Not only those who kill humans, but also those who destroy places of worship are terrorists too, Housing Minister Sajith Premadasa said. He made this statement at the 2495th Semata Sevana event held to lay the foundation stone to provide housing for victims of the attack on Zion church in Batticaloa.³⁷⁴

We will destroy fundamentalism the same way we destroyed terrorism; Karu Jayasuriya tells Islamic ambassadors (by S. Thenmozhi) – Sri Lanka's Speaker Karu Jayasuriya meeting with ambassadors of 17 Islamic countries has assured that the island nation will combat extremism and emerge as a united nation. He stated that just as Sri Lanka neutralised terrorism and ensured security in a short time, the country will shun extremism and emerge as a strong unified nation.³⁷⁵

TNA should also be held responsible for actions of fundamentalists (by Sobithan) – Parliamentarian Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thera has stated that Hindus and Buddhists should unite to defeat Islamic fundamentalism in the country. He also pointed out that Muslim politicians like Eastern Province Governor Hizbullah had betrayed Tamils by appointing Muslim teachers. During his visit to Jaffna, the monk pointed out that both

³⁷¹ *Daily Mirror*, June 13, p. A10.

³⁷² *Virakesari*, June 14, p. 15.

³⁷³ *Virakesari*, June 14, p. 1.

³⁷⁴ *Thinakaran*, June 14, p. 17.

³⁷⁵ *Virakesari*, June 14, p. 5.



communities should unite to defeat Islamic fundamentalism in the commercial sector as well.³⁷⁶

Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith's request should be respected – The editorial explains the developments and violence targeted at Muslim community following the Easter bomb attacks. The editorial however pointed out the request made by Archbishop Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith to pray for peace and co-existence among people. The editorial therefore pointed out the importance of adhering to the request made by the Cardinal in order to ensure harmony.³⁷⁷ Hindu temples were not destroyed in retaliation for demolishing Dalada Maligawa - Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thera stated that they did not attack Hindu temples in retaliation to the attack carried out on the Dalada Maligawa. He also stated that Buddhist statues will not be built in Hindu areas. He added that they themselves will remove such statues built in Hindu areas, adding that the police was needed for this. He made this statement at an event held in Jaffna.³⁷⁸

Mawanella Buddha statue case: Suspects re-remanded till June 27 (by Saman Wijayabandara) - Mawanella Magistrate Upul Rajakaruna ordered the 15 suspects in the case relating to the vandalising of several Buddha statues in Mawanella between December 22 to 25, 2018, to be re-remanded till June 27. Earlier 13 suspects were produced in the Mawanella Magistrate's court. When the case was called on June 3 another suspect was produced before court by the Mawanella Police, who said he was produced for committing the wrongful act of withdrawing money from a private bank in Mawanella along with the two main suspects Mohamed Ibrahim Saheed Abdul Haq and his brother Mohamed Saddick Abdulla. The police also submitted a record obtained from the private bank in Mawanella. This suspect was identified as 24-year-old Hisbullah Khan Hamdi Ahmed. The suspects were brought to court in a prison bus under heavy police escort and the army too was deployed in the court premises for security. The suspects to be produced in court were all identified with their names and towns in the piece - among them were the mother and two brothers of the main suspect. The magistrate also ordered the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) to further interrogate the suspects detained by the CID. The court ordered the CID to destroy the explosives seized at the time the suspects were taken into custody. Meanwhile, the lawyers who appeared for the suspects found that the vehicle in which they came to court had a tyre deflated in the car park, when they returned after the court case.³⁷⁹

A religion cannot destroy a human being – A religion is there to guide humans – Archbishop Malcolm Ranjith (by Norman Palihawadana) – Archbishop Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith stated that a religion cannot destroy the life of a human being.

³⁷⁶ *Virakesari*, June 15, p. 1.

³⁷⁷ *Virakesari*, June 15, p. 4.

³⁷⁸ *Uthayan*, June 15, p. 1.

³⁷⁹ *Daily News*, June 14, p. 3.



Archbishop added that a religion is there to guide human beings. Stressing that religions cannot be used to carry out homicides, Archbishop added that perpetrators of the Easter Sunday attack are excused by him.³⁸⁰

‘Asking for trouble’ – The police arrested four individuals including an Army personnel who carried out a robbery at a house belonging to a Muslim lady in Akkaraipattuwa. These four individuals had entered the house in the guise of officers of national intelligence unit. These are heinous crimes that are akin to those carried out by the clan of Zaharan. The rogues who carried out the 1983 Black July too conducted themselves in a similar manner. Businessmen who became rich after robbing the property of Tamil masses are still alive. As there was no proper legal redress against the perpetrators of Black July, the fascist called Prabhakaran came into existence; the issue of Tamil people protracted to an international issue. The Chairman of Sri Lanka Jamiyyathul Ulama Organisation has stated in the Special Parliamentary Select Committee that was setup to probe on the Easter Sunday attacks that the seeds of ISIS ideology germinated in the country after the communal disturbances in Aluthgama. Sinhala- Muslim communal disturbances that initiated in Aluthgama spread to other areas like Digana, providing the necessary stimulation for the creation of an Islamic extremist bomb. Terrorism destroys the value of lives of all Sri Lankans including Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslims. That catastrophe is not limited to one ethnic or religious group. Thus, unless all Sri Lankans get together and defeat extremism, the future prospects of the country would be further slim.³⁸¹

A Presidential Commission must be set up to probe the conduct of Shafi – Gunadasa Amarasekera (by Erik Gamini Jinapriya) – The convener of the Federation of National Organisations Gunadasa Amarasekera, noted that the president should set up a commission consisting of independent experts to probe on the controversy regarding Doctor Shafi. Amarasekera added that setting up of an independent mechanism to probe on the charges against Doctor Shafi that he had intentionally damaged the fallopian tubes of mothers is crucial to change the perception of Sinhala masses on the state of investigations. Amarasekera also added that the incident of Shafi might be an extension of the programme that was alleged to have been carried out to sterilise men and women to alter the population ratio as noted by Madihe Pagnanaseeha Thera.³⁸²

I stated that the Muslims are the majority in the world to motivate our masses – Hizbullah (by Ajith Alahakoon) – The former Governor of the Eastern Province Hizbullah stated that although the Muslims are the minority in Sri Lanka, they are the majority in the world to motivate the Muslim masses who are scared. He added that Muslim people were frantic after the Easter Sunday attacks and that they did not even go to the beach let alone the boutique after the Easter Sunday attacks. Admitting that he

³⁸⁰ Divaina, June 14, p. 7.

³⁸¹ Divaina, June 14, p. 8.

³⁸² Divaina, June 14, p. 9.



went to a meeting that was convened by Zaharan in the run up to general elections in 2015, Hizbullah noted that Zaharan was a leader of a religious group called National Thowheed Jama'ath at that time period. Hizbullah made these remarks testifying before the Special Parliamentary Select Committee that was installed to probe on the incident of Easter Sunday attacks.³⁸³

Give due punishment to Shafi who was charged of sterilisation surgeries – Weerawansa writes to President – MP Wimal Weerawansa has urged the president to impose due punishments to Doctor Shafi who had been accused of conducting illegal sterilisation surgeries. Weerawansa has also notified that there does not seem to be any rendering of justice to the mothers who were affected due to the conduct of Doctor Shafi notwithstanding the fact that about a month had passed since the disclosure of information on Doctor Shafi. Weerawansa has also stressed the fact that evidence has been presented to show that Doctor Shafi deliberately harmed the fallopian tube of mothers, deviating from the general medical practice. He has also noted that the controversy around Doctor Shafi becomes further critical as he is someone who had contested the General election from the party of Rishad Bathiudeen who in turn is accused of supporting Islamic fundamentalist terrorism.³⁸⁴

The statement of Cardinal on bribes is an enlightening statement (Lankadeepa editorial) – The statements made by Archbishop Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith are garnering attention of everyone in the country at present. The statements made by the Archbishop are tied with his exemplary conduct that had a soothing effect in the country in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday attacks. Archbishop made a number of crucial statements recently. The idea expressed by him that Buddhism which is the spinal cord of the country should be safeguarded by all is a laudable statement. It is clear that the main reason for the religious leaders to condemn the present political system is the malfunctioning of the checks and balances system in the country.³⁸⁵

Is nationalism a curse or a blessing? (by Saman Pushpa Liyanage quoting D. R. Wijewardene) – Many who are Sinhalese by ethnic origin and Buddhists by religious belief acknowledge without any doubt that Sri Lanka is a Sinhala Buddhist country. But it has not been made mandatory in the Constitution; though a pledge has been given through the Constitution the state shall protect and foster Buddha Sasana, constitutionally this is not a state that is belonging to one religion. The former Governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka D. R. Wijewardene stated that attribution of a country to one religion or ethnic group is not something unusual; it is neither something detrimental to democracy. Nonetheless, he stressed that what is detrimental is that when unofficial religious police is given leeway to regulate, monitor and control the behaviour of citizens and to impede the liberty of citizens. According to Wijewardene, religious nationalism is when a particular community conducts themselves in the belief

³⁸³ *Divaina*, June 14, p. 10.

³⁸⁴ *Divaina*, June 14, p. 13.

³⁸⁵ *Lankadeepa*, June 14, p. 4.



that they are superior to other communities in the country. He also added that this superiority complex leads to a precarious sentiment and then in turn that leads to suspicion and protective measures. He stressed that when cultural nationalism intensifies, that leads to conflicts between ethnic and religious groups. Therefore, he added, that tolerance of other groups and the equality is relevant in the present Sri Lankan context.³⁸⁶

The suspects connected to Mawanella incident further remanded – The case on the vandalism of more than four Buddha statues was taken at the Mawanella District Magistrate Court. Mawanella Magistrate ordered to further remand them till 27th of June. Moreover, 15 suspects who are being detained and interrogated by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) were produced before the Magistrate. It was ordered to produce them for the observation of the Magistrate on 12th of September.³⁸⁷

The united struggle against extremism – There is no gainsaying in the fact that ISIS is behind the Easter Sunday attacks. They have provided not only the financial aid to the groups that support them, but it is also stated that the ISIS provided the military training to the ISIS-friendly militants. Moreover, ISIS has provided funds to maintain training camps in the country for the Islamic militants. Thus, it is crystal clear that the defeating of the ISIS terrorism as well as the Islamic extremism is a mandatory job.³⁸⁸

The fast of Rathana Thera was extremely detrimental to the country and now some Muslim businessmen are ready to leave the country – Lawyers for Democracy (by Muditha Dayananda) – Lawyer Namal Rajapaksa who is a member of the Organisation- Lawyers for Democracy noted that the fast of Rathana Thera resulted in a huge catastrophe in the country, in a context where the tension created by the Easter Sunday attacks was gradually receding. Rajapaksa was also of the opinion that Muslims had been living in the Sri Lankan society from the Anuradhapura era. Noting that some are boycotting Muslim businesses in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday attacks, he noted that some Muslim businessmen are trying to leave the country. Stressing the fact that the majority who work in the businesses owned by Muslims are Sinhalese, Rajapaksa noted that it is Sinhalese who lose their jobs when these businesses are closed down.³⁸⁹

I stated that the Muslims are the majority in the world despite being a minority in Sri Lanka to motivate Muslim masses who were scared – Hizbullah (by Sujith Hewajulige) – The former Governor of the Eastern Province Hizbullah stated that although the Muslims are the minority in Sri Lanka, they are the majority in the world to motivate the Muslim masses who were scared. He added that people in the Eastern Province were frantic after the Easter Sunday attacks. He also added that he urged the

³⁸⁶ *Lankadeepa*, June 14, p. 4, 17.

³⁸⁷ *Dinamina*, June 14, p. 3.

³⁸⁸ *Dinamina*, June 14, p. 4.

³⁸⁹ *Lankadeepa*, June 14, p. 8.



Muslims to get back to their trade activities. He also added that Sri Lanka is a Buddhist country and that he had mentioned it even in the Parliament. Admitting that he went to a meeting that was convened by Zaharan in the run up to general elections in 2015, Hizbullah noted that Zaharan was a leader of a religious group called National Thowheed Jama'ath at that time period. Hizbullah made these remarks testifying before the Special Parliamentary Select Committee that was installed to probe on the incident of Easter Sunday attacks.³⁹⁰

Zaharan has given 20 lakhs to individuals who vandalised Buddha statues- CID informs the Mawanella Court (by Nimanthi Ranasinghe, Mawanella Special) – Criminal Investigation Department (CID) informed the Mawanella Magistrate that Mohammed Zaharan had given 20 lakh rupees to one of the accused of the incident of vandalising Buddha statues in Mawanella. It was also stated by the CID that this money had been given to pay the fees of lawyers who are appearing on behalf of the accused to get them bail. It was also disclosed that the main suspects in the Mawanella incident had provided lectures on extremist ideologies at the training center of extremists that was discovered in Wanathawilluwa.³⁹¹

PSC on religious harmony meets (by Ariyapala Wansathilake) - The fourth regional conference of the Parliamentary Select Committee on communal and religious harmony in Sri Lanka will be held from 9.30 am to 2.30 pm on Monday, June 17, at Kurunegala Kandyan Reach Hotel with the patronage of Speaker Karu Jayasuriya. All parliamentarians in Wayamba will participate in this conference.³⁹²

A return to normalcy - This editorial states that churches are slowly resuming service, including the St. Anthony's Shrine in Kochchikade, which was reconsecrated recently, after bombings by "religious fanatics" destroyed it. The piece makes note that security at the church was tight during the annual feast of St. Anthony, and certain parts of the event were omitted, but spirits were high. The opening of the Kochchikade shrine for daily prayers and worship, no doubt, will act as a catalyst for normalcy on other fronts as well, the article states, citing other factors such as the opening of schools. The editorial claims that the sacrifice of the Easter Sunday victims seem to be fading away as death fasts and the "doings of rogue gynaecologists" take center stage. The piece ends by stating that more support, financial and non-financial, need to be extended to the survivors of the attack. "A return to normalcy should in no way detract us from our obligation towards the Easter Sunday victims for their signal role in rescuing the country from a worse catastrophe."³⁹³

Unjustifiable cloud on Muslims following the Easter massacre (part II) (by Mohamad R.M. Farook) - This short opinion piece claims that it is prudent for Muslim

³⁹⁰ *Lankadeepa*, June 14, p. 12.

³⁹¹ *Lankadeepa*, June 14, p. 1, 6.

³⁹² *Daily News*, June 14, p. 8.

³⁹³ *Daily News*, June 14, p. 10.

women to be without face covers if it is for the sake of 'public interest'. The author claims that Thowheed is "misrepresented and shamed" after the attacks. However, speaking on splits within this sect, the author says: "Yet all these groups erred in parts of their sermons and activities in one way or other as they discoursed solely on their personal understanding of Islam without an in-depth study of Islam from all relevant sources." Further, the author describes National Thowheed Jama'ath (NTJ) as a "terror- based un-Islamic outfit", stating that it was their bombings that showed the nation their true nature. Until then, even other Thowheed organisations would not have realised the "anti-Islamic ideology" of the NTJ. Further, the author calls Wahhabism 'a Western construct that twists the purity of Thowheed'. The author claims that by now, the Muslim community has learnt from "their selfishness, silence, indifference and inactions" regarding what was happening within their community before the attacks. Further, "Muslim politicians, community leaders, academics, professionals, activists and even the Ulama ...were espousing their personal notions and behaviours as Muslims and not what should be as per Islamic way of life". Instead of proposing solutions to stopping ISIS and preventing violence against Muslims, the piece points out, Muslims are being told to change their way of life to suit other cultures. The author also states that while terrorist or extremist groups should be disbanded, one must be careful that groups genuinely propagating the teachings of Islam should not be touched. "When the constitution guarantees religious freedom, how does the government trying to take away the personal laws of a religious community? Or is it only for Muslims?" the author questions. He adds that "the government should not make use of the present crisis to corner the Muslim community in various ways for pleasing the politico-racial element in the general populace and especially Sinhala-Buddhist racism." The author concludes by suggesting that there was a greater respect for Muslims from the Sinhalese and Tamil people in the past. This is because unlike in the past, many modern-day Muslims are "ignoring the foundational teachings of Islam." This is something that has to be rectified, the author concludes.³⁹⁴

Sinhala, only language that has Sri Lankan identity - Minister (by Sandasen Marasinghe) - Megapolis and Western Development Minister Patali Champika Ranawaka claimed that Buddhism is the only religion that never used killing as a means to spread the religion. He said Theravada Buddhism was protected by the Sinhalese in writing for the entire world. He added that the Sinhalese are very significant for many reasons. He said that Sri Lanka used to have the highest buildings 2000 years ago. Sinhala is the only language that has a Sri Lankan identity and it is one of the oldest languages in the world, Minister Ranawaka said. He said that the Sinhalese are the nation with the longest written history, in the form of the Mahawansa. "But all the other communities can live peacefully enjoying all the rights," Minister Ranawaka said.³⁹⁵

³⁹⁴ *Daily News*, June 14, p. 11.

³⁹⁵ *Daily News*, June 14, p. 12.



ACJU uses Al-Taqqiyya to mislead parliament: BBS - Issuing a statement, the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) yesterday said that the All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama (ACJU) President Rizvi Mufti had mislead the parliament, the media, the general public and the international community by using Al-Taqqiyya during his testimony before the Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC) probing the Easter Sunday attacks. Al-Taqqiyya is a precautionary dissimulation or denial of religious belief and practice in the face of persecution. The BBS alleges that Mufti has claimed that it was activities led by the BBS that led to innocent Muslim youth joining the Islamic State (IS). While giving a statement at the PSC, Mufti had said that Muslim youth were drawn to IS due to hate speech against the Muslim community. "It was the Ulama who aided the dissemination of Wahhabism in this country," the BBS further charged. The BBS urged the ACJU to stop spreading lies, unless they wanted the truth about Ulama to become public. They also pointed out that Zahran was a proponent of religious extremism even before the BBS was founded and claimed that they had documents to prove that the ACJU "was accused of all sorts of activities during the Easter Sunday attacks."³⁹⁶

De-radicalisation, a forgotten challenge in countering extremism (by Priyalal Sirisena) - This long opinion piece questions traditional anti-terrorism legislature, like the Counter Terrorism Act (CTA), and the methods use in the U.S.'s war on terror. "Terrorism based on radical Islamist perceptions dominates global terrorism," the author states, and since they are not geographically confined to one area, conventional modes of tackling terrorism are more likely to be unsuccessful. The author offers statistics on terrorism: "According to the global terrorism index, four Islamic terrorist groups: IS, Boko Haram, Taliban and Al Qaida are responsible for about 75 per cent of deaths caused by terrorism in 2016." The author further states that "religious radicalisation and falling victim to extremism could occur in Islamic communities comparatively easier, as a result of the nature of their communal structure itself. One reason is the in-built fundamentalist nature of Islam as nourished from the time of great wars of early Islamic civilisation". It adds that "while it is difficult to manipulate other religious texts to justify violence against 'others' or 'non-believers', the Quran itself provides texts justifying violence against non-believers". The feeling of religious insecurity and the perception of increasing threats against their religion also contributes to promote tendency to violence, the author states, describing Islamic communities. "Another reason is the homogenous nature of Islam in comparison to other religions which have a large number of subdivisions and branches of thoughts," the piece states, adding that such homogenisation contributes to the manipulation of individuals towards extremism, under the guise of a uniform identity. The author claims that such deep rooted radicalisation can't simply be dealt with by "deploying punitive measures and military machinery". Instead, those who have become radicalised need to go through programmes for socialisation and deradicalisation. The author then describes Kattankudy, "with women in black abayas, sign boards in Arabian, and a

³⁹⁶ *Daily Mirror*, June 14, p. A5.



landscape with date palm trees, visually opposing any merging with the Sri Lankan environment.” This is a recent development, the piece states, not a part of the early Muslim settlements in Sri Lanka. Education is a key tool for the “gradual eradication of these trends”, however “madrasa schools have allegedly become breeding grounds of a socially ignorant and intolerant young generation”. The piece concludes by suggesting various de-radicalisation efforts that could be implemented in the country, stating that “apart from state-led programmes, community initiatives are much preferred, where Islamic community and religious institutions could independently take the lead in designing and implementation of such initiatives”.³⁹⁷

In pursuit of a perceived enemy (by M.S.M Ayub) - This short opinion piece states that, given the questions a majority of non-Muslims are asking about the mass resignation of Muslim ministers, “it is clear that they are not in a position to put themselves in the shoes of the Muslims”. The author characterises the following interpretations of this mass resignation as negative: (a) that it is a racial approach to protecting members of their community, (b) that it is a show of unity at a time when some Muslims “are in hot water”, and (c) that it is tacit acknowledgement of guilt. Before Ven. Rathana Thera’s fast, nobody had complained to the Criminal Investigation Department, with tangible evidence, about any of the three Muslim politicians. The author also notes that Ven. Rathana Thera ended his fast before Minister Bathiudeen had resigned, against whom there were the most allegations. “Nobody should be accused of having terrorist links without tangible evidence because it would endanger his or her life,” the author states, describing the flimsy nature of the complaints received against the ministers following the fast. The author states that the Muslim community is “of the opinion that the allegations were a part of the anti-Muslim campaign started by certain opposition parties and their media supporters”. Explaining the reasoning behind the mass resignation, the piece states that “the decision was taken at a time when a countrywide anti-Muslim riot was about to break out following the demonisation and vilification by the media and the members of the opposition of Muslims and Islam”. The piece also notes that the focus has been taken away from the terror attacks, and that “Muslims now seem to be not much concerned about the extremists among them as the concern over their safety and the dignity of their faith have taken precedence”. The piece concludes by criticising the government and security forces for not preventing the terror attacks, and notes that most events in the aftermath have been highly politicised and inefficient.³⁹⁸

Ship’s wheel mistaken for dharma chakra: Detained woman files FR complaint (by Lakmal Sooriyagoda) - The woman who was arrested and detained for wearing a dress depicting a ship’s steering wheel (mistaken for a dharma chakra) filed a Fundamental Rights petition in the Supreme Court, seeking a declaration that the police have violated

³⁹⁷ *Daily Mirror*, June 14, p. A7, A8.

³⁹⁸ *Daily Mirror*, June 14, p. A8.



her fundamental rights guaranteed under the constitution. The petitioner, Abdul Raheem Masaheena, 47, a resident of Kolongoda, filed this petition seeking an order directing the attorney general and Inspector General of Police (IGP) to take steps to investigate, take disciplinary action and prosecute the respondents who were involved in the violation of her Fundamental Rights. In this application, the petitioner impugned her arbitrary arrest on May 17, subsequent detention, and degrading treatment, purportedly based on her choice of clothing. The petitioner has cited the Attorney General and the IGP and Officer in charge of the Hasalaka police station as respondents. The petitioner stated that between July 18 and June 3 she was remanded at the Badulla Prison. The petitioner further stated that her attire depicted a ship's wheel as opposed to a dharma chakra, and that she had no intention whatsoever of deliberately or maliciously acting in any manner that outraged "the religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs".³⁹⁹

RDA removes the nameboard of Gurukanda Ancient Viharaya- The name board of Hindu Kovil had been left intact (by Sithum Chathuranga and Romesh Madhushanka) – The officers of the Road Development Authority (RDA) removed the name board of the Gurukanda ancient Viharaya that was positioned in front of the Viharaya. The officers of the had briefed the Priest in-charge of the Viharaya that the name board is being removed as it had been stationed within the road development authority's limits without seeking permission; this is notwithstanding the fact that the name board had been stationed before ten years. The head Priest who expressed ideas stated that despite the fact that the name board was removed, a name board that was recently positioned in the vicinity of the Viharaya with the name 'Niravi Pillayar Kovil' in Tamil was not removed.⁴⁰⁰

This is a moment in which the message of Mahinda Thera is important (by Bingun Menaka Gamage quoting Aththanagane Rathanapala Thera) – All Sri Lankans lived peacefully in this multi-ethnic and multi-religious country. None out of the conventional Islam, Catholic and Hindu religions did not impede the co-existence in the country. What impeded that religious co-existence at present are the extremist fundamentalist teachings that are based on various political needs. Buddhists can never deviate from the core-values of Buddhist teachings whatever the circumstances are there at a given moment. The compassion and kindness are dire requirements at this stage and problems cannot be solved by adopting a behaviour dominated by malice. Politicians had been nurturing racism for their own survival throughout the history and it seems that the current politicians cannot evade that menace. The creation of a situation where the communities living in the same society are pitted against each other through the nurturing of racism is a primordial tendency. Constitution is the basic law of the country. Law cannot be differentiated on the base of ethnic lines as Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim. Law is there not for ethnicities but for the citizens; the citizens in a country

³⁹⁹ *Daily News*, June 15, p. 1, 8.

⁴⁰⁰ *Lankadeepa*, June 15, p. 1, 6.

must be governed under one law; in the absence of such a situation, there is injustice. If there are different laws for different ethnic groups, that itself generates racism. One example for this is the existence of a separate legal regime for Muslim marriages. Thesavalamai Law is also another example. A religion that cannot understand the value of life cannot be a religion. If there are brutal teachings like that, such teachings should be immediately banned. Media has a huge role to play in a context where the rulers act irresponsibly. Media should shift its conduct from further terrorising a society that is already been terrorised to a culture where the existing crises are sorted out.⁴⁰¹

Sinhala race should be safeguarded to safeguard Buddha Sasana and Sri Lanka from aliens – Kotugoda Dhammawasa Thera (by Hasitha Ranga Gunathilake) – The Chief- Prelate of the Amarapura Bhikkhu Chapter Kotugoda Dhammawasa Thera stated that Sinhala race should be safeguarded to safeguard Buddha Sasana and Sri Lanka. Thera also noted that many are scared and ashamed to say that Sri Lanka is a Sinhala country. Noting that our ancestors secured the country by waging wars with India, Thera noted that it is doubtful whether the invisible forces are behind the petty communal disturbances that are reported in the island. Pathegama Gnanissara Thera who was present at the meeting opined that it is mentioned even in stone inscriptions that Sri Lanka is a Sinhala Buddhist country. Noting that Sinhalese have been branded as an ethnic group that is lethargic, Thera noted that the Sinhalese awoke after the Easter Sunday attacks.⁴⁰²

The steering wheel of a ship and the Dharma Chakra have been misunderstood – A petition from a lady that her rights were violated because of the imprisonment (by Ranjan Katugampala and Thilini de Silva) – A Muslim lady has filed a fundamental rights petition in the Supreme Court alleging that her fundamental rights were violated as she was imprisoned by the Hasalaka Police who misunderstood the images in her garment as a Dharma Chakra. She has also mentioned that in fact she was wearing only a garment with the images of a steering wheel of a ship. She is seeking compensation for her arrest stating that the Police arrested her based on a misunderstanding.⁴⁰³

Poson: Renewed call for harmony - This editorial acknowledges the muted Vesak celebrations this year due to the Easter Sunday attacks. There were no pandals or lanterns, although even non-Buddhists joined in the celebration - “the core message was that terrorism and terrorists cannot hinder the will of the people to live in harmony and unity”. The piece goes on to state that the security situation has improved drastically since then, hence the statement by the prime minister regarding celebration for Poson full moon poya day. The editorial gives a brief explanation of the importance of Poson

⁴⁰¹ *Lankadeepa*, June 15, p. 4.

⁴⁰² *Lankadeepa*, June 15, p. 10.

⁴⁰³ *Lankadeepa*, June 15, p. 11.



and its history, and claims that “Poson has now become a major national festival that sees no racial or religious boundaries.”⁴⁰⁴

Unity and harmony vital to build the nation: PM - “Let us reflect upon unity and harmony that is essential for building our nation. May all be awakened by the dhamma on this full moon day of Poson,” Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe said in his Poson message. “Sri Lanka is a unique example in the history of the world, of a society that was revitalised by cultural, political and religious reforms that stemmed from the introduction of Buddhist philosophy,” he added. He also spoke about the historical significance of Poson, and stated that “the way Buddhism [was] established in our country proved that invasions, intimidation and violence are totally unnecessary for the facts to be imprinted on people.”⁴⁰⁵

Adhere to compassion, tolerance and non-violence: MR - “This Poson, it is timely for us all to once again adhere to the great principles of compassion, tolerance and non- violence that Buddhism has endowed us with. These principles are even more valid today than it has ever been. I urge all Sri Lankans to dig deep into this nation’s foundation and rigorously pursue these principles and values that encourage all Sri Lankans to peacefully and harmoniously co-exist,” Leader of the Opposition Mahinda Rajapaksa said in his Poson day message. He also spoke of the historical context of Poson, and how it shaped the country.⁴⁰⁶

Ports Ministry gives plot of land to renovated St. Anthony’s Church (by Yohan Perera) – The article reported that the ministry of ports and shipping has allocated a plot of land to St. Anthony’s Church, Kochchikade to set up a new car park. The church, which was damaged in the Easter Sunday bomb blast, was reopened for the general public on Wednesday (June 12), in time for the annual feast. The other special feature of the renovated church is the memorial which was built in honour of those who were killed in the attack on April 21. According to the Archbishop of Colombo Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith, a memorial is to be constructed at Katuwapitiya Church in Negombo, which was also damaged in the bomb attacks. Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith thanked certain government officials and authorities for their tireless efforts to restore the damaged church. A sum of Rs. 45 million was reportedly spent for the renovation of the church according to parish priest Fr. Jude Raj Fernando. The Navy was involved in the reconstruction efforts of the church.⁴⁰⁷

Singling out of Rishad Bathiudeen as a political target (by D.B.S. Jeyaraj) - This long opinion piece claims that “the orchestrated political campaign by the Mahinda Rajapaksa-led opposition in association with sections of the Buddhist clergy and mainstream media against three prominent Muslim politicians has ostensibly

⁴⁰⁴ *Daily News*, June 15, p. 8.

⁴⁰⁵ *Daily Mirror*, June 15, p. A1, A2.

⁴⁰⁶ *Daily Mirror*, June 15, p. A1, A2.

⁴⁰⁷ *Daily Mirror*, June 15, p. A4.



succeeded". In one clean sweep, the ultra-nationalist lobbyists appears to have "ethnically cleansed" the government of its Muslim ministers and deputy minister, the author states with reference to the mass resignation of Muslim ministers. "It is a defiant act of unity and solidarity in the face of unjust intimidation," the piece states. Further, the article states that "since the perpetrators of the violence were all young Islamic Jihadists, it was inevitable – though extremely unfair – that the Muslim community in Sri Lanka would be treated with suspicion". The singling out of Muslim ministers, specifically Bathiudeen, is simply the predictable political exploitation of this tense situation. Initially, five Muslim ministers were targeted, before it was narrowed down to three. Opposition party elements, some Buddhist organisations, and sections of the media went after these politicians with no tangible proof, the author states. The author gives a detailed description of Bathiudeen's political history, demonstrating how he opposed Rajapaksa not once, but twice (in 2014 when he crossed over to support Maithripala Sirisena at the 2015 presidential elections, and during the coup in 2018). He suggests that had this not happened, there would be no No-Confidence Motion (NCM) against Bathiudeen, and any criticism against him would be swiftly condemned by Rajapaksa and his supporters. The piece also suggests that the NCM was "overtly against Bathiudeen but the covert target was Ranil Wickremesinghe and the government." Referring to encounters that Bathiudeen has had with terrorist suspects, the piece claims that "it was easier to brand Bathiudeen as having terrorist links by utilising the guilt by association fallacy".⁴⁰⁸

In search of "moderate" Muslims (by Lionel Wijesiri) - This feature piece states that "Islamic extremism (or militancy) is damaging and endangering the place of Islam and Muslims in the world," adding that over half the deaths caused by terrorism are the result of four Islamic terror groups. "Most political analysts believe that if militant Islam were the problem, moderate Islam is the solution [...] However, some academics consider the "moderate" Muslim label offensive. They believe it implies ordinary Islam is not inherently peaceful. Some others believe it implies "moderate" Muslims are not "genuine" Muslims," the piece states. The feature states that while some Muslim leaders deny any connection between their religion and terrorism, it cannot be denied that many terrorists claim to act in the name of Islam. The piece describes four categories of Muslims: Jihadist Muslims, Islamist Muslims, conservative Muslims and pluralist Muslims. The author states that conservative Muslims (strict Muslims who do not believe in killing non-believers) are a bigger group than the first two groups, who kill and manipulate to spread Islam respectively. Pluralist Muslims are non-traditional Muslims, most of whom live in countries where Muslims are a minority and adhere to a broader interpretation of what it means to be Islamic. They are "inclusivists rather than exclusivists regarding the expression of their faith." The author introduces a recently developed fifth category: progressive Muslims. "A progressive Muslim does not believe in sectarian Islam (Sunni or Shiite or Salafi) but rises above all these sects and gives

⁴⁰⁸ *Daily Mirror*, June 15, p. A7.



importance to the Quran above everything else,” the piece states. Speculating on which category counts as ‘moderate’, the author quotes Indian philosopher Akeel Bilgrami, who said “moderates’ are committed to secularism while ‘absolutists’ are committed to ‘Sharia’”. The piece details the progressive Muslim movement and states that “Islam in the West is undergoing a little-noticed transformation. A natural process of adaptation and assimilation is doing more than any government to tame the threat posed by Islamic extremism.” The author states that “most of them [Muslim youth] have nothing to do with violent jihadist propaganda.” The piece states that a similar transition as that in the West can take place in Sri Lanka, adding that “the government needs to encourage this transition by focusing on upholding the law rather than try to force Muslims to change their beliefs. Attacks not only threaten lives and property, they also set back relations between Muslims and those around them.” The piece concludes by suggesting that moderate Muslims need to be involved in the fight to counter radicalisation, and that “the response to this threat should come from the grassroots and with mosques at the heart of the programme”.⁴⁰⁹

President’s Poson message: Co-existence, the cornerstone of the dhamma - In his Poson message, President Maithripala Sirisena stated that all Sri Lankans should embody compassion and peaceful co-existence in their lives, the cornerstone of Arahata Mahinda’s message of the dhamma. The article provides historical context on the importance of Poson in Sri Lanka. “A new epoch in the annals of the country, an education system under the patronage of the Maha Sangha took root, opening new vistas for a civilised culture with viharas, monasteries, temple caves and pirivenas being established”.⁴¹⁰

The genesis of Easter Sunday bombers lies in the religion (by Gamini Viyangoda) – Buddhism does not advocate violence either implicitly or indirectly. The ultimate goal in Hindu religion is to be united with the Maha Brahama. That is totally innocent and spiritual. Islamic faith controls the entire life of Muslim religious followers. The emancipation expected by Easter Sunday bomb attackers was not aimed at the well-being of the ordinary masses but the personal emancipation of themselves.⁴¹¹

75,000 rupees for a Divisional Secretariat for the Poson sermon (by Lasantha Ruhunage) – Sri Lanka is not a Sinhala Buddhist country according to the law. As per the Constitution of Sri Lanka, ‘The Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the State to protect and foster the Buddha Sasana, while assuring to all religions the rights granted by Articles 10 and 14(1)(e)’. Article 10 of the Constitution states that ‘Every person is entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including the freedom to have or to adopt a religion’.

⁴⁰⁹ *Daily Mirror*, June 15, p. A9.

⁴¹⁰ *Sunday Observer*, June 16, p. 1, 12.

⁴¹¹ *Anidra*, June 16, p. 4.



or belief of his choice'. In Article 14 of the Constitution, it is mentioned that 'Every citizen is entitled to the freedom, either by himself or in association with others, and either in public or in private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching. Thus, it is clear when one looks at the above articles that it is the responsibility of the State to secure the rights of other religions and also that citizens are entitled to religious freedom.⁴¹²

The issue on Sri Lankan Muslims (by Nirmal Ranjith Devasiri) – People following Islamic faith have been living in Sri Lanka for centuries. According to Lona Devaraja, Muslims were organised as religious community in Colombo even in the 9th century A.D. Moreover, there was a tendency of the spreading of this community to interior regions of the country due to commercial interests. The arrival of Portuguese had a significant impact on the Muslim community in Sri Lanka. It deprived the Muslims of the economic impact that they had before the advent of the Portuguese. It also deprived the Muslims the potential to develop as a religious-cultural group. In this context, the survival of the Muslim community depended on the strategically benevolence of the Kandyan Kings for the next few centuries.⁴¹³

Moderate political discussions are required (by Jayadeva Uyangoda) – It seems that extremist approaches are in high demand at present in the Sri Lankan society and this tendency is particularly seen in the Sinhala- Buddhist and Catholic societies. In the immediate aftermath of the Easter Sunday attacks, Catholic society responded to extremism in a moderate way. But it is examined that even the moderate sectors in the Catholic society succumbed to the extremist response that emerged from extremist Sinhala-Buddhist elements. The visit made by the Archbishop Malcolm Ranjith to meet Athuraliye Rathana Thera who was carrying out a fast in Kandy was the incident that represented the detrimental collapse of the Catholic society. The immediate response of the Muslim society in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday attack was shock and shame. Then it was transformed to a fear based on an immediate danger and a counterattack. But it can be examined that Muslims had some kind of relief in the weeks that immediately followed the Easter Sunday attack, as there was generally a non-extremist response. But at the same time, there was a question looming within the Muslim society; that was whether the relationship that existed hitherto between the Muslims and other religious communities had shattered. The support given by the ordinary Muslims and the Muslim clergy for the measures taken by the Government after imposing emergency regulations was an attempt to repair that shattering. But this was not properly realised by the Sinhala Buddhists. The volume to which the majoritarian extremist sentiment in the Sinhala Buddhist society escalated is depicted by incidents like the anti-Muslim

⁴¹² *Anidda*, June 16, p. 5.

⁴¹³ *Anidda*, June 16, p. 7.



attacks in North-Western Province and Minuwangoda and the fast staged by Rathana Thera.⁴¹⁴

The importance of the Poson Poya as the day of Sinhala Buddhists (by Bengamuwe Nalaka Thera) – Some dislike being called Sinhala- Buddhists; some are jealous of it; some envy it. Some of these people are organising spurious programmes called ‘the hour of compassion’. The Sinhala Buddhist community can be traced back to 2317 years. Muslims had the authority in trade in the period in which the Portuguese arrived in the country. Muslims who were expelled from maritime areas settled in Kandyan areas and the Eastern area due to the benevolence of the Kandyan kings. Dutch permanently settled the Tamils in Northern region of the country, who were travelling back and forth to those areas. South Indian Tamils were settled in Upcountry areas by the British. Thus, 400 years have not passed since the advent of the Tamils and Muslims in the country. Politicians are neglecting the Sinhalese to get the votes of the minorities. Moreover, they consider the voices raised by the Sinhala Buddhists on their race and religion as racism and voices raised by the Muslims and Tamils as their right. If this programme is allowed to be perpetuated, Sinhala Buddhist would be extremely helpless.⁴¹⁵

An Arabic culture cannot be there in Sri Lanka (by Samanthi Weerasekera) – Muslim Ministers who resigned en-masse recently visited the Chief-Prelates of the Malwathu and Asgiriya Chapters. The Chief -Prelates of the Asgiriya Chapter Warakagoda Gnanarathna Thera opined that all communities in the country should live in peace and harmony regardless of the racial and religious differences. Another monk who was present entertained the view that there should be an agreement on issues like Madrasa schools and Sharia University.⁴¹⁶

Supporting religious extremism in the name of reconciliation (by Wasantha Bandara) – A special conference was convened under the leadership of Speaker Karu Jayasuriya to get the necessary recommendations to guarantee national and religious harmony in the country. In a letter that has been sent to the Leader of the Opposition- Mahinda Rajapaksa, Easter Sunday attack has been identified as an unfortunate incident. Is it possible for politicians who do not have the stamina to openly declare truth on an incident in which the perpetrators are well-known. Moreover, in the recommendations made by the dignitaries who attended the meeting, there is also reference to the fact that the terms Muslim terrorism and Islamist religious terrorism should not be used to describe the present situation. Muslim community gets disheartened when such terms are used. Moreover, the religious dignitaries who attended that conference have been assigned a special task. That is to disclose whether there is any extremist ideology in Buddhist or Hindu religious teachings where monotheism is advocated and where it is advocated that non-believers in monotheism

⁴¹⁴ *Anidda, June 16, p. 7.*

⁴¹⁵ *Divaina, June 16, p. 4.*

⁴¹⁶ *Divaina, June 16, p. 19.*

should be deemed as enemies. Moreover, it has recommended to allow the existing Madrasas to continue their operations and not to allow the creation of new madrasas. It must be noted that some groups are trying to bring a separate law to regulate Madrasas based on this recommendation.⁴¹⁷

There are five more Saharans in Sri Lanka (by Keerthi Warnakulasuriya) – The Police has been on alert about Mohammed Zaharan even in 2018 and there had been an attempt to arrest him. But he was not arrested till the Easter Sunday attack was carried out. The Government was keener on Gotabhaya Rajapaksa and Makandure Madush. Thus, the Government was not focused on the operation to make Kattankudy an Islamic province with the help of the aid from Saudi Arabia. The Government did not recognise that the fact that a Saudi Arabian Prince came to open the 58th Mosque in Kattankudy is a serious incident and that there is a possible danger behind it. Former Governor of the Eastern Province M. S. M. Hizbullah is saying that Muslim community should not be scared and that they should stand united, challenging the majority in the country.⁴¹⁸

Kurunegala rice dansala is a living example of showing the value of national harmony (by M. A. R. Manukulasuriya) – There is a rice dansala in Kurunegala was organised by three individuals belonging to three different communities. The dansala has its inception in 2000 and it was initiated at a time in which there were communal disturbances in Mawanella. The communities who lived in the Kurunegala decided to commence a dansala to avert such incidents in the future. There are only a limited number of countries in the world where one can witness a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural background. Our country is a country that has been blessed to be a country like that. The diversity between the communities beautify the national cultural heritage.⁴¹⁹

Making gabby statements is not prudent – It was with the arrival of the Mahinda Thera that Sri Lankans got the opportunity to follow Buddhism. Buddhism is a religion that acknowledges the religious co-existence based on equality. On the one hand there is a conducive environment in which the Buddhism can be realised in its pristine form. Shock waves of the Easter Sunday attack carried out by extremist terrorist who suffered from religious fanaticism has not gone away completely. What should be strived hard is to avert such an eventuality in the future. Former Governor of the Eastern Province Hizbullah made a statement stating that “though Muslims are a minority in Sri Lanka, they are a majority globally and also that Muslims do not succumb to any influence by anyone”. This statement should be properly analysed. Why does Hizbullah emphasise that Muslims are the majority? Why does he say that Muslims would not succumb to any pressure? There might be indecent fringe elements in any ethnic or religious group. But intellectuals do not reckon that a particular entire ethnic or religious group is extreme

⁴¹⁷ Divaina, June 16, p. 19.

⁴¹⁸ Divaina, June 16, p. 3 (II).

⁴¹⁹ Silumina, June 16, p. 3.



in thinking, based on the fact that there are extremist fringe elements in that particular identity group.⁴²⁰

The intervention of religious leaders that altered the plans to make chaos in the country (by Upul Wickremesinghe) – Many contemplated that the country would undergo a serious chaotic situation in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday attacks. There was also the possibility of far more greater damage due to racist acts and acts related to religious violence than that by the Easter Sunday bomb. Fortunately, the country was not pushed to such a stage and the all due honour of that should be given to Archbishop Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith. Though a number of sporadic incidents were reported, it did not develop to a grand scale catastrophe. But there are several other problems. The entire Muslim community is under a tremendous pressure. This is due to the fact that allegations were made against several Muslim politicians that they supported the Islamist extremism. This further exacerbated when a large number of Muslims were arrested during the operations conducted by the security sector.⁴²¹

Cardinal visits Zion church (by Sivam Packiyathan) - Irrespective of race, religion or cast, Jesus Christ died on the cross for the redemption of the people, and rose again from the dead on Easter Sunday to protect the people, Archbishop of Colombo, Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith said during his visit to Batticaloa. The cardinal visited the Batticaloa Zion church which was attacked on Easter Sunday. He was accompanied by the Bishop of Batticaloa, Rev. Dr. Joseph Ponniah, when he met with Pastor of the Zion Church, Roshan Mahesan. The cardinal also handed over a donation to assist the renovation efforts of the Zion church and conducted a prayer service in memory of the victims. He also took time to meet the injured while assuring them of his continued assistance, and prayers for their speedy recovery and the repose of the souls of those who had passed away. ⁴²²

Abuse of ICCPR has ‘chilling effect’ on fundamental freedoms (by Aanya Wipulasena) - Two Fundamental Rights (FR) petitions were filed at the Supreme Court for the release of Abdul Raheem Masaheena and award-winning author and poet Shakthika Sathkumara. Both arrests were made under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the concerned parties claimed that it was a gross abuse of an act introduced to promote and protect human rights. Sathkumara was arrested in early April after a group of monks from Polgahawela took offence to a short story he wrote about sexual abuse and pedophilia involving a member of the Buddhist clergy. Sathkumara’s accusers claimed that the short story insulted Buddhism. Meanwhile, as the Muslim community faced a vicious backlash in the wake of the Easter bombings, with fear and suspicion rampant in many areas of the island, Masaheena was arrested on May 17 under the same act for wearing a kaftan decorated with the logo of a

⁴²⁰ *Lankadeepa*, June 16, p. 4.

⁴²¹ *Lankadeepa*, June 16, p. 26.

⁴²² *Sunday Observer*, June 16, p. 3.



ship's helm, which the police officer who arrested her mistook for a dharma chackra. The police said they received several complaints from the public the morning Masaheena was arrested. The FR petition states that Masaheena, who was fasting during the month of Ramadan when the incident took place and does not communicate in Sinhala, was questioned at the police station (which she struggled to comprehend) and forced to sign a statement written in Sinhala. Her daughter was later told she will not be given bail and the case will be taken up by the Mahiyanganaya magistrate. During her detention at the Badulla Prison she has been threatened by prisoners and jailors with assault for insulting Buddhism. Reflecting on the two cases, Lawyer and Human Rights activist Gehan Gunatilleke said not one person involved in incitement to violence in Aluthgama, Digana or Kurunegala has been convicted under the law. "The ICCPR Act does not deal with mere offence or insults. This is a tragic case of abusing a scarcely used provision of law for a purpose not even covered by that law," he explained. Masaheena in her petition states that her arrest, detention and the conduct of the respondents (the Attorney General, Inspector General of Police and arresting officer) were arbitrary and malicious and did not follow due process or the law.⁴²³

Keep it clean: A reflection (by Bishop Duleep De Chickera) - This short opinion piece briefly describes the ways in which Muslims have been mistreated since the terror attacks, including the boycott of their shops. The author also points out how some Muslims even destroyed a mosque in a desperate attempt for survival: "The 'perceived enemy' seemed to be pointing at the 'real enemy' so that social anger would be directed elsewhere." The author further states that "intra-Muslim violence brings neither credit nor credibility to anyone. It only spreads what it expects to stop." The piece states that security measures were necessary after the terror attacks, but that if they are performed efficiently, the ethnic identity of citizens will not matter. "If not, and our security establishment is biased or weak, nationalists and propagandists will take over, and the ethnic identity of citizens will be made to matter," the piece adds. However, unbiased security forces aren't enough, the president, legislators and public officials in charge of state institutions need to ensure the freedom and equal treatment of all as well. "For instance, shops that refuse to serve some cultures, would be prosecuted and lose their licenses," the article states. However, given the conduct of our leaders so far, the author notes, this is not likely to happen. The author maintains that standing up against racists, and prosecuting them, are "unconditional obligations of any democratic leadership". The author tacitly refers to Ven. Gnanasara Thera's release as proof of how little the government seems to care about minorities. The piece suggests that this sort of inequality has been present in our country since long before the terror attacks, and that this state of affairs was "exploited by extremists to legitimise anti-Muslim animosity".⁴²⁴

Let's pray for peace, unity and harmony (by Sivam Packiyathan) - "We do not expect incidents such as April 21 Easter Day attacks in future in Sri Lanka or in any

⁴²³ *Sunday Observer*, June 16, p. 4.

⁴²⁴ *Sunday Observer*, June 16, p. 9.

other country. Let us all pray for peace, unity and harmony,” said the Archbishop of Colombo, Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith. The cardinal visited the bishop’s house in Batticaloa accompanied by the Bishop of Batticaloa Rev. Dr. Joseph Ponniah and the Vicar General Rev. Fr. A. Devathanan. They visited the Batticaloa Zion Church and expressed their deep sorrow over the victims of the bomb blast. “Everybody should be able to live with dignity and freedom. The renovation by the army engineering division is greatly appreciated and we thank them very much for their dedication,” he said. He handed over a cheque to renovate the church and conducted a prayer service in memory of the victims of the bomb blasts.⁴²⁵

Country needs a candid and brave leader - Karu Paranawithana (by Ajithlal Shanthaudaya and Jayantha Nanayakkara) - The country needs a candid and brave leader who has an understanding of the issues faced by the country and the world, Skills Development and Vocational Training Deputy Minister Karunaratne Paranawithana said. He said that boycotting Muslim shops and avoiding interacting with Muslims is nothing but extremism. Parawithana asserted that no problem would be solved through extremism, and that the country needed a strong national leadership to overcome these problems. We need a leader who is forthright, brave knowledgeable and conscious of the culture and history of the country, he stressed. He further said that the country is yearning for a leadership that can think afresh about resolving issues pertaining to national unity, political stability, the economy, the environment and education.⁴²⁶

RDA removes name board of Mullaitivu Gurukanda Vihara (by Sithum Chathuranga) - The name board of the Gurukanda Rajamaha Vihara in Mullaitivu has been removed by officers of the Road Development Authority (RDA). The officers informed the Chief Incumbent of Gurukanda Rajamaha Vihara, Ven. Colombo Medhalankarakiththi Thera that it was removed according to a complaint lodged by the public. This board had been put up about ten years ago without obtaining permission from the RDA. The Thera said that a group of people had removed the name board of the Gurukanda Vihara without removing the name board in Tamil as the Mullaitivu magistrate had given permission recently to name the Hindu temple of the vihara ‘Neeravi Pillair Kovil’. The chief incumbent said that the vihara concerned was registered at the Ministry of Buddha Sasana and hence its name board can be displayed.⁴²⁷

Mass resignation of Muslim ministers and an analogy of parochialism (by Ranga Jayasuriya) - This short opinion piece implies that the mass resignation of Muslim ministers was done “in bad faith”, especially since it took place barely six weeks after “Islamic terrorists” created carnage in the country. The piece details the allegations

⁴²⁵ *Daily News*, June 17, p. 5.

⁴²⁶ *Daily Mirror*, June 17, p. A4.

⁴²⁷ *Daily Mirror*, June 17, p. A6.

against Muslim ministers: “The collusion of some top Muslim politicians in Wahhabisation and Arabisation of local Muslims were alleged for long and overlooked for political convenience”. Further, the author also notes allegations against Bathiudeen (regarding connections to terrorists) as well as Hizbullah (regarding the legality of the Batticaloa campus). The author suggests that Ven. Rathana Thera’s hunger strike “drew support from more than the traditional Sinhalese Buddhist audience”, citing the cardinal’s visit to the fasting monk. The author also adds that “another ultimatum issued by Ven. Galagodaatte Gnanasara raised the prospect of a fresh communal backlash.” Some argued that the calls for the resignation of Muslim ministers were racist. Such sentiments are “hogwash”, the author states. The author notes that “the same folks, NGO captains, social media warriors and a few everyday Joes who think parroting the same garbage makes them posh,” did not make the same excuses for Ravi Karunanayake when he was accused of being involved in the bond scam. It is for the courts to decide whether any of these politicians are guilty, the author affirms. Further, the piece states that Ven. Rathana Thera was not suggesting that Muslim ministers under scrutiny be locked up. “Instead, he demanded that they resign for the obvious fact that those allegations themselves were a big enough stain on the integrity of public office they held.” The piece states that it was the refusal of these ministers to resign, and the weak leadership of the president, that led the Sinhala nationalist right to take to the streets. “Their tactics may not be healthy for a pluralistic democracy, but their demand was reasonable,” the author states. The mass resignation also functions as a calculated move to shift blame and distract the Muslim community from introspection. “The radicalisation and Arabisation in the name of ‘true Islam’ were embraced and facilitated by most Muslim politicians and community elders,” the author states. The author claims that Muslim leaders did nothing while the ACJU campaigned against reforms in the Muslim marriage and divorce law and demanded the legalising of female genital mutilation. “Communal backlash and collective demonisation of Muslims after the Easter Sunday mayhem is deplorable and should be avoided at all cost. Still, that reaction is predictable and not unique to Sri Lanka,” the article claims. It adds that “the government in Colombo should do more, to protect Muslims from revenge attacks and to confront rising Islamophobia.” The piece also accuses Muslim ministers of playing the victim for foreign audiences to turn them against Sri Lanka. The piece concludes by recounting the mass resignation of Tamil politicians right before the war, and the destruction it (and other events) led to.⁴²⁸

All citizens in Sri Lanka are equal citizens –The former Governor of the Eastern Province Hizbullah stated in a public meeting that was held in Jumma Mosque in Kattankudy that though Muslims are a minority in Sri Lanka they are the majority globally. It was also reported that Hizbullah also said that Muslims should not succumb to influence of anyone. The time period that we are passing at present is a period where there are traces of fire underneath the ashes. Everyone should acknowledge that

⁴²⁸ *Daily Mirror*, June 17, p. A9.



possible catastrophes were averted due to colossal interventions. Thus, there is the dire need of a programme that nurtures the co-existence in the country. Thus, provoking statements are akin to undeclared bombs at this juncture. It is in this context that one should realise the statement of the former Governor of Eastern Province deeply. Though it might have not been his intention, the consequence of his statement is the provocation of ordinary masses; no one has the right to drag the country that has been brought to calmness after an arduous effort to a plunge. The ultimate aim of Hizbullah in making such a statement should be contemplated? What does he aspire by saying that “Muslims are the majority in the world”? The bulk of the citizens in this country are not racist or are they suffering from religious fanaticism. They are hell-bent on eking out a living to feed their families. They are not indulged in a discriminatory conduct based on once religion or ethnic group. It is being clearly exemplified by the history that can be traced back to hundreds of years. But there are cheap politicians who are hell-bent on achieving their objectives by violence and disharmony; they are there in every ethnic group. They are adding petrol to the conflagration. That is why their odd statements should be set aside with contempt.⁴²⁹

Beyond Zaharan – Zaharan and his clan destroyed not only human lives from the Easter Sunday bomb attacks; they also dealt a huge blow on the religious co-existence that existed in the country. Their brutal attack created adverse relations between the Muslim fraternity and other communities. Buddhist masses could not celebrate the Vesak festival as they wish due to the series of bomb attacks carried out by Zaharan. Moreover, Catholic and Muslim communities had to celebrate their religious festivals in a limited way. But it is heartening to see that the daily life of the masses is returning to normalcy due to the laudable conduct of the armed forces. The Poson festival was celebrated in grand style with the participation of hundreds of thousands of devotees. Nonetheless we should not go astray as the conduct of the extremists has not ended completely. Meanwhile a story that clearly exemplifies national harmony was heard from Kurunegala. That is about a dansala held in the area. This dansala is organised by three businessmen of Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim ethnicity.⁴³⁰

A country without discipline cannot be uplifted – Palpola Vipassi Thera (by Kamani Alwis) – Palpola Vipassi Thera urged the masses to refrain from condemning and insulting other ethnic and religious groups. Thera also noted that terrorists are there throughout the world. Thera also urged the masses to refrain from blaming the entire Muslim community merely because the terrorists carried out terrorist attacks. Thera also made it an opportunity to note that Mohideen Baig gained popularity by singing Buddhist songs. It was also emphasised by the Thera that all communities in the country should live in peace and harmony.⁴³¹

⁴²⁹ *Lankadeepa*, June 17, p. 4.

⁴³⁰ *Divaina*, June 17, p. 8.

⁴³¹ *Dinamina*, June 17, p. 7.



The meeting between Chief Prelates of the Bhikkhu chapters and Muslim MPs- The real story that was not told by the media (by Asela Kuruluwansha) – All Muslim Ministers resigned from their Ministerial portfolios on the very day in which the former Governors Hizbullah and Azath Salley tendered their letters of resignation to the president. In spite of the fact that the fast initiated by Rathana Thera was terminated, the resignation en-masse of the Muslim Ministers created another issue; it is in this context that the Chief Prelates of the Bhikkhu Chapters congregated in Kandy to discuss on this issue. It was the opinion of Buddhist clergy belonging to all three Bhikkhu Chapters that the resignation of Muslim Ministers against whom there was no allegation cannot be approved; it was also stressed that they should take back their Ministerial portfolios and work for the progress of the country. The Deputy Chief-Prelate of the Malwathu Chapter was of the opinion that a clear fault line is created between the Sinhala and Muslim societies due to the fact that Ministers against whom there were no allegations take decisions in collaboration with Ministers against whom there were allegations. This was followed by a meeting between the Bhikkhus of all Bhikkhu Chapters and Muslim MPs and it was open to the media. It was here that MP Rauff Hakeem noted that Muslim politicians are not conducting themselves in the deviation of instructions of the Buddhist clergy and that they are obedient to the grievances of the Buddhist clergy. Thus, it was also instructed by Theras to MPs to not to make any statements to the media after the meeting; the Muslim MPs followed this instruction well; nonetheless some media outlets reported this incident as if the Muslim MPs were pissed off after the meeting with the Buddhist clergy and it is because of that reason that they do not make any statements to the public.⁴³²

More pressure on Neeravippitti Pillayar temple by Sinhalese - Yet another protest was held at the Mullaithivu Neeravipitti Pillayar temple by Sinhalese claiming that the premises belong to the Garukanda vihara. The protest was led by monks. The protestors were reportedly brought to the premises from Anuradhapura in three buses.⁴³³

Sinhalese and Monks protest at Neeraviyadi Pillayar temple (by K. Kumanan) – Sinhalese and Buddhist monks staged a protest at the Mullaithivu Old Chemmalai Neeraviyadi Pillayar temple. The protest was staged against the removal of the name board 'Gurukanda Raja Maha Vihara'. The board was removed by the police and Road Development Authority as it was put up without the approval of the latter.⁴³⁴

Leaders of all three religious groups join in protest to upgrade Kalmunai North Pradeshiya Sabha – Chief priest of the Kalmunai Subathraramaya Ven. Ranmuthugala Sangarathna thera, Head of the Hindu Priest Federation of Sri Lanka (East) Sri Sri K.K.

⁴³² *Dinamina*, June 17, p. 9.

⁴³³ *Uthayan*, June 17, p. 1.

⁴³⁴ *Virakesari*, June 17, p. 2.

Sachithanatham Sivamguru and Rev. Thangamani Kirubainathan of Periyaneelavanai took part at the protest.⁴³⁵

Statue of Mary vandalised - The statue of Mother Mary at the Maniyamthottam area in Jaffna was vandalised by unknown persons. Jaffna police has launched investigations into the incident.⁴³⁶

Leaders of all three religious groups join in protest to upgrade Kalmunai North Pradeshiya Sabha - Chief priest of the Kalmunai Subathraramaya Ven. Ranmuthugala Sangarathna thera, Head of the Hindu Priest Federation of Sri Lanka (East) Sri Sri K.K. Sachithanatham Sivamguru and Rev. Thangamani Kirubainathan of Periyaneelavanai took part at the protest.⁴³⁷

Poson events organized by Tamils and Muslim communities - A special event organised by Tamils and Muslims was held in Kalmunai. The event saw the participation of religious leaders from all religions.⁴³⁸

We will bring Neeraviyadi Pillayar temple issue to Parliament today— TNA (by N. Thanuja) – The TNA has stated that it will bring the Neeraviyadi Pillayar temple issue to the notice of parliament. The temple is embroiled in controversy where the Hindu state that it it's traditionally their place of worship while the Buddhists claim it is an ancient Buddhist place named Gurukanda.⁴³⁹

Major General Darshana Hettiarachchi who opens the pathway for genuine reconciliation – Peace dawned in the country after wiping out the LTTE terrorism that affected the country for 30 odd years. Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims lived happily in the country. The deviation of the minds of ordinary Tamil masses from Tamil separatism was one of the main aspects that were considered during the Rajapaksa regime. The strategy adopted in this regard was to deploy the armed personnel themselves who carried out the war against LTTE. But the Tamil politicians were voicing concerns all these things were going on smoothly; they had the demands of the removal of armed forces from North and the release of lands of Tamil civilians. But these demands had to be retracted when Zaharan Hashim launched a brutal attack targeting Tamil Christians; the Tamil politicians had to state that the Sri Lankan armed forces are needed in North. Sri Lankan armed forces were not deterred from the derogatory remarks made by Tamil politicians. They were keener on to extend their assistance to innocent Tamil civilians. It is the military personnel who has come to extend their helping hand, even in the instances where the innocent Tamil civilians were affected by the castes that has engulfed the North; when the innocent Tamil civilians were denied entry to the village

⁴³⁵ Virakesari, June 18, p. 1.

⁴³⁶ Uthayan, June 18, p. 10.

⁴³⁷ Thinakaran, June 18, p. 1.

⁴³⁸ Thinakaran, June 18, p. 10.

⁴³⁹ Virakesari, June 18, p. 2.

Kovil due to caste differences, it is the military that went to the extent of building a Kovil in the area.⁴⁴⁰

Not a prudent move - This editorial focuses on a statement made by former Minister Rauff Hakeem to an Indian newspaper claiming that the Muslim community, as a whole, will henceforth not vote for any political party at elections. The piece states that this is a set back for those who want to forge inter-communal unity as “there can be no reconciliation by the exclusion of one particular community from the scheme of things”. The editorial also mentions that the minister added that in the future “they (all Muslim parties) would contest as a single entity through a grand alliance”. The piece questions if this means that the Muslim parties won’t support a candidate from the two major parties at the upcoming Presidential election, and, if so, whether they are going to back a candidate of their own. “No doubt Hakeem’s decision will lead to further polarisation of the communities based on race and religion,” the editorial states, adding that “with formation of an alliance of Muslim parties, there is bound to be a breakaway of the Muslim vote from the national polity making the Sinhalese to go it alone at the hustings”. This polarity is bound to show up in other aspects, particularly community life, the piece states. “The Muslims, unlike certain Tamil parties which espoused separatism, always harboured the national feeling,” the editorial claims, expressing disappointment at the current turn of events. “Even presently, there are parliamentarians from the Muslim community who were elected from Sinhala majority electorates,” the editorial adds. Unlike when Amirthalingam and his Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) resigned en-mass by refusing to take the oath under the Sixth Amendment, the Venerable Mahanayake Therasa pleaded with the Muslim ministers not to resign, showing the “Sinhala-Muslim unity” in the country. The editorial acknowledges that the “somewhat unfair accusations made by opposition politicians” and Ven. Rathana Thera’s hunger strike didn’t make things easy for people. “The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) had all along been accused of using its Parliamentary strength as a leverage to obtain top ministerial posts and other favours,” the editorial states, questioning whether Muslim ministers are going to give this all up by isolating themselves and their communities. “There is little doubt that even in the future the SLMC and other Muslim parties could be the deciding factor in the formation of Governments,” the editorial states, again questioning whether they are willing to give up their “king maker” position.⁴⁴¹

The citizen’s choice (by Walter Fernando) - This short opinion piece states that regardless of race, religion or any other consideration, “The first choice of a citizen should be loyalty to his country”. However, today in some instances, religion is given preference over national interest, the author states. “This may be acceptable or tolerable in countries where close to 100 per cent practice the same faith, and even here, it is very common for Sunnis to kill the other Muslims,” the piece adds. According

⁴⁴⁰ Divaina, June 18, p. 14.

⁴⁴¹ Daily News, June 18, p. 6.



to the media, the author claims, “prominent personalities” in the Muslim community are banding together, indicating that religion comes before national interests. The piece further states that: “We citizens are comforted that the Muslims want to speak with one voice that makes it easy to deal with this community. But the irony is that they want the rest of the community to recognise their religious identity, which has nothing to do with the ordinary citizenry who are practicing their faiths privately and not expecting nor demanding public acknowledgement.” Religion is a private conviction, the author states, questioning whether people should “allow any religious beliefs to force or coerce any citizen directly or indirectly to acknowledge the presence of any religion”. The piece concludes by suggesting an open discussion might help clear up this confusing situation.⁴⁴²

Statue of Virgin Mary vandalised by miscreants (by S. Nitharshan) - A statue of the Virgin Mary has been damaged by miscreants dashing it on the roads in Ariyalai, Jaffna. The police said the incident had taken place in the early hours on Sunday at Maniyam Thottam-Udayapuram Beach Road. Fisherman walking by at around 1 a.m. had seen the statue intact. As such, the incident must have taken place afterwards, the police said. The police also said that the fisherman had seen a car being parked near the statue from where they were fishing.⁴⁴³

“Every right must have a remedy” - Dr. Deepika Udagama (by Gihan de Chickera) - This piece is an interview with Dr. Deepika Udagama, the chairperson of the Human Rights Commission in Sri Lanka (HRCSL). In this interview, Dr. Udagama states that the two weeks of calm after the terror attacks suggest that people have matured and learned from past experiences, adding that the communal tension that erupted later on was “orchestrated violence, not spontaneous retaliatory violence. These manufactured cycles of hatred could have had political and commercial purposes.” She adds that, similar to the way in which all Sinhalese people were viewed as bigoted, and all Tamil people were viewed as LTTE during the war, the Muslim community is now being stereotyped. Dr. Udagama also criticises the role of the media in fear mongering and sensationalism. Further, she called the police out for their unpreparedness during the communal violence, stating that “even if there was orchestrated or pre-planned violence, effective law enforcement could have prevented it”. Dr. Udagama also gives her thoughts on further investigation, the ban on social media, the role of the government in protecting the rights of citizens, the death penalty and constitutional reform.⁴⁴⁴

The 48-hour notice to Jaffna Muslims (by K.K.S. Perera) - This short opinion piece describes how Tamil militant groups carried out attacks against Muslims in Jaffna during the war, all under the indifferent eyes of the government. The author gives a brief history of violence against Muslims in the country during the war, and how many

⁴⁴² *Daily News*, June 18, p. 7.

⁴⁴³ *Daily Mirror*, June 18, p. A6.

⁴⁴⁴ *Daily Mirror*, June 18, p. A8, A9.



in the North were driven out. Most of the Muslims were resettled in Puttalam district, with Kurunegala, Gampaha and Colombo accommodating a fair number of refugees, the author states. Even during the cease-fire, the LTTE did not stop perpetrating violence against Muslims, instigating retaliatory anti-Tamil attacks. The author also talks about his experience meeting a former refugee from Mannar. "It is the duty of Sinhalese people to ensure the security of Muslim brethren," the author states, adding that "Any attempt at boycott of ethnically identified trading organisations would have adverse results on economy as a whole".⁴⁴⁵

'Communal, religious harmony enabled developed countries forge ahead' - Since the country, which was making an economic recovery, suffered a major setback due to the Easter Sunday terrorist attacks, we have to overcome current challenges through fostering communal unity and harmony, Speaker Karu Jayasuriya said. He was speaking at the Kurunegala district seminar of the Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC) on communal and religious harmony. Speaker Jayasuriya said he greatly appreciated the ability to immobilise terrorism within a short period and the support extended against terrorism by the majority Muslim community. Leader of the Opposition Mahinda Rajapaksa who also participated in the seminar said it was only through mutual understanding that the scar on centuries-old Sinhala-Muslim amity caused by the Easter Sunday attacks could be erased. The PSC set up under the leadership of the speaker had issued a 'Diyawanna Declaration' embodying 24 recommendations and the support received from all parties towards this declaration could be considered as a major victory.⁴⁴⁶

The objection of Tamil organisations for two more Viharas in Mullaitivu (by Dinasena Rathugamage) – Objections have arisen from Tamil organisations about another vihara in Mullaitivu. A group including Hindu clergy in Mullaitivu had met and had declared that Samudragiri Vihara that had been built by Army in Mullaitivu area is not needed to the area. The group had also stated that no Buddhist monk is residing in the vihara at present and also that a Priest in charge of a number of temples in Vavuniya is claiming ownership of the Samudragiri Vihara.⁴⁴⁷

What is the correlation between national security and co-existence? Is it hatred or else friendship? (by Chamindri Saparamadu) – Many notable facts on the national security and co-existence emerged during a discussion that was held recently. The main point that was pinpointed here was that the agenda of the national security of the country and the agenda of the national co-existence should not be implemented as diametrically opposite projects. Due to many rational and irrational reasons, it is obvious that the national security of Sri Lanka is a project of the Sinhala Buddhist majority. It seems that the objectives of the national security are contrary to the

⁴⁴⁵ *Daily Mirror*, June 18, p. A 14.

⁴⁴⁶ *Daily News*, June 19, p. 2.

⁴⁴⁷ *Divaina*, June 19, p. 3.



objectives of the national co-existence due to the attitude that national security is attached only with one community. Every violent act is attributed as a project of Sinhala Buddhists. This was noticed even during the Easter Sunday attacks. Even after the ISIS claimed the responsibility of the attacks, some were indicating that Sinhala Buddhists were perpetrators of this terrorist acts. This simple understanding on violence is contrary to all evidence and reasoning and is also not in compliance with historical and political perspectives of violence. For an example, Sinhala Buddhists were victimised due to the attacks that were carried out in Aranthalawa, Temple of the Tooth, Sri Maha Bodhi. There are opinions that the formulation of the national security agenda takes place giving priority to concepts and rituals of the majority ethnicity. What can be said with regard to the linking of giant image of lion that represents the majority community in the country and singing of only Sinhala patriotic songs in festivals in symbolic representation of the victories of the security forces is a undeveloped social characteristic; it leads to a tendency where other communities are kept out of those celebrations. The other issue is that the composition of security forces does not reflect the ethnic composition in the country and therefore the predominant majority of the armed forces are made up of Sinhalese.⁴⁴⁸

That is extremism and so is this (by Asela Kuruluwansha quoting Prof. Upali Abeyarathna) – The slogans in the world have changed. The statement made by Marx that all have-nots in the world must get united had been shifted to a statement where it is said that all Sinhalese must be united; this is applicable not only with regard to the Sinhalese but also Tamils and Muslims. One other thing that can be observed in this regard is the tendency to attribute wrongs on others whenever an attempt becomes unsuccessful; thus, there are situations like the boycotting of Muslim businesses saying that we have become poor due to Muslims. In the same manner in which Islamic fundamentalism emerged through Zaharan, it is the Sinhala Buddhist extremism that surfaces with the conduct of monks like Galagodaaththe Gnanasara Thera; This conduct is completely at odds with the teachings of the Buddha. Catholic faith as well as the Islamic faith is a religion that caused killing of people. Given the fact that these are monotheistic religions, it is completely a normal situation where conducts of respective adherents are against other religions, within the belief that they have in one god. Religious leaders in the country should refrain from doing political work; they should instead be confined to their religious work.⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁸ Divaina, June 19, p. 8.

⁴⁴⁹ Dinamina, June 19, p. 4

Sri Lanka has a ‘minority problem’ (by Ranga Jayasuriya) - This short opinion piece claims that Sri Lanka’s “ethnic diversity, though many prefer to feign as a strength, has always been a challenge and at times a burden.” An example of this is the civil war. Regarding the country’s two insurgencies, the author states that “Mahinda Rajapaksa should be applauded for having political will to end the monstrosity in the North, and Ranjan Wijeratne for ending the barbarism in the South”. However, the “encumbrance of the ethnic diversity has not changed. If anything, the policymakers should be concerned about the prospect of ‘the minority problem’ acquiring another dimension: an Islamist militancy and Wahhabi religiosity.” While the Easter Sunday attacks uncovered decades of radicalisation, “it also created extremely polarising conditions that could probably drive more Muslim youth into religious terrorism”. The author warns that “if the current trend of ethnic polarisation and collective demonisation of Muslims persist, the next batch of Muslim youth would be blowing up to settle domestic scores.” The piece states that if unchecked, the events in the country will lead to another civil war. The root of Sri Lanka’s ‘minority problem’ is that “both the successive governments, and minority leaders have refused to acknowledge Sri Lanka’s demographic reality.” Likewise, the country’s “Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists” have trouble acknowledging that Sri Lanka is for all communities. The author puts the responsibility of ending anti-Muslim sentiment on the government, stating that it “should exhibit a political will to enforce them [laws] irrespective of the ethnic, religious or political affiliations of the perpetrator.” Similarly, “a concerted campaign should be launched to reverse Arabisation and restore the primacy of Sri Lankan Muslim culture and values”.⁴⁵⁰

Zaharan openly said those who are not Muslims should be killed; Sufi representative tells PSC (by R. Yasi) – Alhaj Abdul Jawath Alim, a representative of the Sufi Muslims told the Parliamentary Select Committee that Zaharan had openly stated that those who are not Muslims should be killed. He pointed out that there were many who followed Wahhabism in the country and there was danger that it would turn into terrorism.⁴⁵¹

Avoid actions that surface conflicts – The editorial discusses the current political developments following the Easter Sunday attacks. According to the editorial, the developments following the incidents have created tensions between communities, especially Buddhists and Muslims. The editorial urges all people and parties to refrain from actions that would create divisions and conflicts.⁴⁵²

Asgiriya chapter’s efforts to trigger racial tensions - Chief Prelate of the Asgiriya Chapter, Ven. Warakagoda Gnanarathna thera has urged the people to boycott Muslim owned shops and refrain from eating in Muslim hotels. He stated that the Muslims were to destroy other communities and pointed out that a Doctor had been accused of killing thousands of children by sterilising women.⁴⁵³

⁴⁵⁰ *Daily Mirror*, June 19, p. A11.

⁴⁵¹ *Virakesari*, June 19, p. 1.

⁴⁵² *Virakesari*, June 19, p. 4.

⁴⁵³ *Uthayan*, June 19, p. 1.

Multi religious co-existence discussion – A meeting to rebuild racial reconciliation and co-existence was held at Theegavapiya. The discussion was organised by the Addalaichenai All-Religious Group with the support of National All-Religious Council.⁴⁵⁴

Why should all true Buddhists unite? (by Robert Antony) – Minister Mangala Samaraweera has urged all Buddhists to defeat efforts of Talibanising (fundamentalism) of Buddhism and to unite. He says no Buddhist would think of stoning anyone to death.⁴⁵⁵

Rathana Thera is conspiring to trigger Tamils against Muslims (by R. Yasi and M.R.M Waseem) – All Ceylon Makkal Congress (ACMC) Trincomalee District MP Abdullah Mahroof has accused MP Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thera of triggering the Tamil people against the Muslims. He stated that the monk had stated that Muslims had taken over Tamil lands in the East and thereby creates a rift between the communities.⁴⁵⁶

This is a time when religious leaders should act with responsibility – The editorial discusses the current situation where there is suspicion and tension between communities after the Easter Sunday attacks. The editorial therefore states that the religious leaders have an important role in dousing the hatred and tensions among communities and urged leaders to work together.⁴⁵⁷

The country should move forward according to the advice of the Maha Sangha – President – President Maithripala Sirisena has stated that if rulers follow advise of the Maha Sangha it would not travel in the wrong decision. He stated that the government should implement policies which are based on Buddhist principles. He stated that the reason for all religions to be able to live independently in Sri Lanka is because the country has policies based on Buddhist principles.⁴⁵⁸

Paranoia after Easter, disturbing - Psychiatrists (by Nadira Gunatilleke) - A group of psychiatrists expressing their serious concern on continuing events in Sri Lanka following the Easter Sunday attacks, said that the atmosphere of mass hysteria where hatred, fear and paranoia are being perpetuated by various interested parties is disturbing. Certain groups of people are being ostracised and discriminated against without adequate evidence, based on race and religion. Social media and other propaganda have already passed judgement on certain alleged incidents and a large number of people are rushing to endorse and spread these stories which when looked

⁴⁵⁴ *Virakesari*, June 19, p. 16.

⁴⁵⁵ *Virakesari*, June 20, p. 1.

⁴⁵⁶ *Virakesari*, June 20, p. 3.

⁴⁵⁷ *Virakesari*, June 20, p. 4.

⁴⁵⁸ *Virakesari*, June 20, p. 6.

at objectively are but mere fabrications and rumors, they said in their statement. They also referred to mob mentality.⁴⁵⁹

A legal system that is suitable for every community in the country must be passed taking a lesson from Zaharan – Minister Patali Champika Ranawaka (by Pushpakumara Jayarathna) – Minister of Megapolis and Western Development Patali Champika Ranawaka stated that pressure should be exerted on to pass a strong legal system that is suitable to every community in the country and in which no outsiders can influence, taking a lesson at least from Zaharan. Noting that Islamic community came to Sri Lanka for trade as opposed to invaders, he opined that it was the Portuguese as opposed to Sinhala masses who launched a number of strong attacks against the Muslims at that time. Mentioning that Sufi Islam was the religion that operated in the country from the past, he noted that public Jam'aath campaign that came from India was instrumental in directing Muslim masses towards Arabisation; he noted that thus the Sri Lankan Muslim identity was lost. Opining that Arabisation of Islam created suspicion and fear within other communities, he noted that if all are Sri Lankans, we all should wear clothes that are ideal for the country and should consume food that is Sri Lankan and also that we should act according to the common law of the country. Ranawaka stated that a country should have a common legal system as opposed to a system that differs according to the community.⁴⁶⁰

The fact that the Sinhala race is getting extinct is a substantiated fact – Udaya Gammanpila (by Erik Gamini Jinapriya) – The leader of the Pivithuru Hela Urumaya Udaya Gammanpila noted that it has been substantiated by the facts and figures of the 2012 Census that Sinhala race is a race that is getting extinct. Noting that according to the 2012 Census, 75 per cent of the population in the country is Sinhalese, 11 per cent is Sri Lankan Tamil, 4 per cent is Indian Tamil and 9 per cent is Tamil, he also pointed out that 71 per cent of the child population is Sinhala, 12 per cent Sri Lankan Tamil, 5 per cent South Indian Tamil and 12 per cent is Muslim. He also pointed out the fact that whereas the Sri Lankan Tamil, Indian Tamil and Muslim components of the child population have increased, the percentage of Sinhala component of it has gone down from 75 per cent to 71 per cent by 4 per cent. He opined that it is the Muslim community that shows the highest growth rate and it has increased from 9 per cent to 12 per cent; noting that though at a glance this seems to be a small increase, the reality is that it is an increase of more than 33 per cent. Gammanpila also noted the fact that the rapid growth of the Muslim population is something that has been noted for decades. He also opined that given the tendencies in the child population, Muslim population would exceed 12 per cent in the next ten years. He also noted that for the first time in history after

⁴⁵⁹ *Daily News*, June 20, p. 3.

⁴⁶⁰ *Lankadeepa*, June 20, p. 10.



independence, the Sinhala component of the child population is showing a reduction. He added that these figures indicate that the extinction of Sinhala race has commenced.⁴⁶¹

CID records over 750 statements regarding Dr. Mohamed Shafi - The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) investigating the allegations against Dr. Siyabdeen Mohamed Shafi of the Kurunegala Hospital has recorded a total of 758 statements so far, Police Spokesman SP Ruwan Gunasekera said yesterday. According to Gunasekera around 600 women and Kurunegala Hospital staff members are among those who gave statements to the CID. A large number of women who suspect they have been subjected to sterilisation since they had trouble conceiving after their first cesarean delivery have come forward to lodge complaints after the police urged the public to come forward with any complaints against Dr. Shafi. The 42-year-old surgeon is currently under detention after his arrest on May 24 over earning assets through suspicious means.⁴⁶²

The Easter attack victims no one speaks about (by Shivani De Zylva) - This short opinion piece points out that Muslims were also among the victims of the Easter Sunday attacks, a fact that everyone seems to have forgotten. "Sri Lankan 'nationalists' spared no time in jumping into conclusions about the affiliation of every Muslim citizen with global terrorists," the piece states, before identifying Muslim members of the Cinnamon Grand Hotel staff, as well as one Muslim guest, who were killed in the blast. Further, the author identifies a few other Muslims killed in the terror attacks. "They are victims just as much as the rest and have been accused, threatened and thrown into a new battle," the piece states. The author also mentions the anti-Muslim riots that destroyed Muslim homes, shops and mosques. "By discriminating [against] them, threatening them, and inducing fear and anger within the Muslim community, are we not making our island a breeding ground for more terrorists?" the piece questions, referring to the boycott of Muslim shops. "Stand against this ignorance and instead stand with your friends and neighbours," the author states, urging all Sri Lankans to support this community and show them that it is their home.⁴⁶³

The enemy at the gate could be a blessing (by Malinda Seneviratne) - In this short opinion piece, the author agrees with sentiments expressed by UNP parliamentarian Ranjan Ramanayake, who claimed that Muslim politicians have not shown any remorse or humility about what was done in the name of Muslims by a tiny minority of that community. The author states that "the terrorism unleashed on Easter Sunday was planned and executed by those who were (in their minds and in their convictions) of the Islamic faith," but concedes that "a significant section [of the Muslim community] would not identify with them". The author adds that "regardless of the shameless communalism of Muslim politicians, everyone in other religious and ethnic communities should do everything possible to a) ensure the safety of Muslims and b) to allay all fears they may harbour". The author expresses disappointment at a statement made by the

⁴⁶¹ Divaina, June 20, p. 5.

⁴⁶² Daily News, June 20, p. 6.

⁴⁶³ Daily News, June 20, p. 9.



chief prelate of the Asgiriya Chapter, and states that “the call for attacking Muslims should be roundly condemned”. Further, the author comments on the statement released by the European Union concerning recent events, stating that “they’ve taken a leaf from the Hizbullah strategy: ‘everyone is to blame but all Muslims are innocent!’”. The USA is even worse in this regard.⁴⁶⁴

Religious controversy in Mullaitivu: Buddhist vihara erected in Hindu Kovil premises (by Shanmugam Thavaseelan) - This feature piece states that “the erection of a massive Buddhist vihara by the Sri Lanka Army in the Saptha Kannimar Kovil complex has [hindered] religious rituals in the said Kovil”. Reportedly, although the matter had been brought to the attention of various parties following the resettlement, no action has been taken, the author claims. The temple complex where religious rituals were conducted in the traditional manner was acquired by the army during the war and a Buddhist vihara had been built by them in the temple complex. Further, the author claims that the army has made it a practice to erect Buddhist viharas in various places acquired by them during the war in the Mullaitivu District.⁴⁶⁵

‘Sri Lanka becoming a failed state by prioritising religion’ (by A.H.A. Hussein) - Although the government brought to an end the weapon struggle, it has failed to win over the hearts of the war-affected people since its emphasis has been on prioritising religion, former Eastern Province Chief Minister Zainulabdeen Nazeer Ahamad said. “As a result, Sri Lanka is about to occupy first place in the list of failed states,” he said commenting on the current racial discord prevailing in the country. “The hegemonic regime together with the religious fanatics will ultimately lead the country to further disaster and in order to prevent this disaster, the activists in the Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim communities should act fast to prevent the calamity,” he added. ⁴⁶⁶

Not a single NTJ mosque, organisation registered - Haleem (by Camelia Nathaniel and Sandasen Marasinghe) - Not a single mosque or organisation has been registered with the Muslim Affairs Department under the name of the National Thowheed Jamath (NTJ) to date, said Postal Services and Muslim Affairs Minister M.H.A. Haleem. Making a special statement in parliament yesterday, he refuted all allegations made by former Governor Azath Salley before the Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC) probing the Easter Sunday attacks, accusing him of deliberately making baseless and false statements. According to Haleem, mosques or shrines are registered based on the Waqf Act. “It is once the Waqf Board has evaluated the application for the registration of a mosque and given its recommendations that the Muslim Affairs Ministry issues the registration certificate. I very responsibly state that no minister or ministry staff member could influence the Waqf Board in any manner,” Haleem said. He noted that Azath Salley has been levelling false allegations against his brother Fahim and himself

⁴⁶⁴ *Daily Mirror*, June 20, p. A12.

⁴⁶⁵ *Daily Mirror*, June 20, p. A15.

⁴⁶⁶ *Daily Mirror*, June 20, p. A15.

and claimed that it was a vindictive act against him for having rejected his request to be appointed to the Haj Committee. “During the previous government, when he was a member of the Haj Committee, it is a known fact that he carried out a massive financial fraud. That is why I rejected his request,” Haleem noted.⁴⁶⁷

Will the government stop bowing down to trouble makers? - The opinion article cites the issue at the Neeravipitti Pillayar temple, which is embroiled in controversy as Hindus and Buddhists claim that the temple is their traditional place of worship. The article however cites recent incidents where Buddhist monks have been at the forefront of national politics and forcing the government to take action on their demands. The article states that Buddhist monks should follow the path of Buddha, who preached patience and forbearance instead of triggering hatred.⁴⁶⁸

Committing suicide is anti-Islam – Ameer Ali (Duminda Sampath) – Former State Minister Ameer Ali stated that according to Islamic faith, the commission of suicide is a serious sin. Ali also opined that a group that is keen on increasing its vote base by being anti-Muslim and that is attempting to have political gains by being averse to the minorities keeps on alleging the Muslim society about the Easter Sunday attacks. He also noted that the Muslim society never thought that Sinhala political leaders and Buddhist religious leaders would depict an anti-Muslim sentiment to this extent. Noting that the Muslim society did not demand a separate state, Ali noted that there was no one to talk on behalf of the Muslim people. He opined that the Muslim Ministers resigned from the posts as they did not want the emergence of a conflict between Sinhala and Muslim masses. Emphasising that it was the Sinhala politicians and religious leaders who put the entire Muslim community into the terrorist group despite the fact that only three Muslim families were involved in terrorism, he noted that there is no one to talk about it. He also pointed out that he thoroughly opposes the creation of an Arabic culture in the country. Pinpointing that it is wrong to name roads in Arabic language, he noted that he is a Muslim who does not know Arabic. He also pointed out that 95 per cent of Muslims are not conversant in Arabic language.⁴⁶⁹

Why terrorist elements shall be nipped (by S.M.J. Neangoda) - This long opinion piece focuses on the Easter Sunday terror attacks and what it means. “Racial and religious conflicts erupted on many occasions during the past ten years, like the incidents that took place in Beruwala, Digana and Mawanella can be considered a prelude to the major terrorist attacks,” the author states. The author claims that Mawanella had been a “hotbed of extremist Muslim activity”, and that evidence suggested that a group of Muslims had gone to a war zone in Syria where Islamic militants have been fighting to get training. The piece also notes that several Buddhist and Hindu statues had been vandalised in Mawanella by “Muslim militants”. Bomb-

⁴⁶⁷ *Daily News*, June 21, p. 8.

⁴⁶⁸ *Uthayan*, June 21, p.8.

⁴⁶⁹ *Dinamina*, June 21. p. 4.



making material and weapons were also found in an eighty-acre coconut estate in Wanathawilluwa, Puttalam District. “So many mosques within the country which belongs to the National Thowheed Jamath organisation had been in the know of the plans and are responsible for the Easter bombings,” the author claims. Further, the author notes the connections of the bombing to ISIS. “It is easy to figure out that the plans to be put in operation in Sri Lanka is part of a global Muslim terrorist campaign and has the imprint of IS,” the author adds. The author claims that all religions should be monitored by one ministry and states that “Muslim terrorist ideology had been spread through training camps in several parts of Sri Lanka including Madarasa schools numbering 317.” The author cites certain Muslim religious leaders who have been propagating extremism. The author claims that “the establishment of the Sharia and Islamic study University at Batticaloa [...] is totally unacceptable in this majority Buddhist country and is alien to our culture”. The author suggests that the campus should be brought under the normal university administration system. The piece elaborates on terrorist training camps in the country and states that “there are reports that around one hundred Sri Lankan Muslim fighters are in Syria and Iraq which has IS connections”. The author also briefly discusses the anti-Muslim attacks in the aftermath of the terror attacks, mentioning that Muslim shops and houses were attacked and set on fire.⁴⁷⁰

Asgiriya Prelate’s rhetoric draws criticism (by Kamanthi Wickramasinghe) - This feature piece focuses on Ven. Warakagoda Sri Gnanarathana Thera, the incumbent Mahanayake of the Asgiriya Chapter, and the criticism he has received for a speech he made. The article quotes the controversial parts of his speech, namely the part in which he denounces Dr. Shafi for sterilising Sinhala women, and advocates the boycotting of Muslim shops. “At a time when religious hatred is pushing beyond limits to incite communal violence, it’s the responsibility of religious leaders and authorities to spread love and peace,” the piece states. The rest of the article contains quotes from figures who share these concerns, including Ven. Dambara Thera, Sri Lanka Muslim Council Spokesman Hilmy Ahamed, Executive Director of the Centre for Policy Alternatives Dr. Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu, UNP Parliamentarian Dr. Harsha De Silva, National Bhikkhu Front Secretary Wakkamulle Uditha Thera Fr. Sarath Iddamalgoda.⁴⁷¹

Meting out justice to victims of Easter Sunday attacks (by M.S.M. Ayub) - This short opinion piece focuses on the countless innocent victims of the Easter Sunday terror attacks, and its aftermath. The author notes that the president demanded “the annulment of the Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC) probing the Easter Sunday attacks.” According to the author, the president, the Joint Opposition and the Sri Lanka claim that they are concerned about intelligence officers being exposed during the proceedings. The author believes that this is a childish defense. The Podujana Peramuna

⁴⁷⁰ *Daily News*, June 21, p. 11.

⁴⁷¹ *Daily Mirror*, June 21, p. A8.



government led by the prime minister do not think this is a concern, as those summoned will be well-known intelligence officers. The author claims that the president suspects that the idea of establishing a PSC and opening it to the media was executed with the intention of tarnishing his reputation. Further, the author states that although the PSC was set up to investigate the Easter Sunday attacks, it is now being used to delve into other issues, such as Arabisation. The author agrees that adapting elements of the Arab culture, such as face veils, distances Muslims from other communities. However, this is “hardly related to the terror attacks,” the author states. The author concedes that including Arabic on sign boards and planting date palms in Kattankudy, actions that Hizbullah was questioned about by the PSC, may give the wrong impression given the current climate of the country. However, once again, the relevance of these issues to the Easter attacks is not clear. The author also points out that Ratnasiri was questioned over a circular regarding dress codes in public institutions, which may be an issue of national integration, but is not linked to the Easter Sunday attacks. However, the PSC has shed light on how and why Zahran Hashim orchestrated the terror attacks. The author states that only a judicial process can find the guilty parties who did not prevent the terror attacks, despite receiving intelligence reports about it. The PSC finding could help this process. This would be the justice that the victims of the attacks deserve, however, the media has completely diverted attention of the authorities and general public, resulting in the harassment of the Muslim community. The presidential elections promise more of the same behaviour.⁴⁷²

Muslims must not be pushed into extremism - Bimal - It is the responsibility of society not to segregate the Muslim community by condemning them all as extremists, which would only serve to distance them from being moderate and push them towards extremism, warned JVP MP Bimal Rathnayake. He also urged the Muslim community to change certain customs, such as child marriage and polygamy. Participating in the debate on the Extraordinary Gazette Notification issued to ban the National Thowheed Jamath (NTJ) and two other organisations, Rathnayake said, “It was revealed before the Parliament Select Committee (PSC) investigating the Easter Sunday terror attacks that Islamic extremists which carried out the suicide bombings lured more people to their ideology after communal violence in Digana and Ampara in 2018. I am not saying that Islamic extremism in this country was born after the Digana incident. It was there for a long time. For example, the Ceylon Thowheed Jamath (CTJ) Secretary Abdul Razik who testified before the PSC on June 20 made irrelevant remarks about the Buddha. He even rallied to say that Muslim men have a right to marry child brides. Hence, Islamic extremism was present, but no one noticed it and took any action.” However, he noted that every citizen should be vigilant and not push Muslims towards extremism by spreading hatred and racism.⁴⁷³

⁴⁷² *Daily Mirror*, June 21, p. A13.

⁴⁷³ *Daily News*, June 22, p. 8.

Racist, anti-religious campaigns which foments terrorism - P. Mankkavasagam - The commentary states that despite efforts to establish harmony and understanding between communities, racist and anti-religious campaigns continue to be carried out even by a group of politicians. The commentary points out that such action creates inconveniences to minority communities. The commentary urges that those who indulge in campaigns against Muslims should be considered as violating civil and political rights of the country.⁴⁷⁴

Asgiriya Prelate says his speech was misinterpreted (by Nadeeka Bandara) - Asgiriya Chapter Mahanayake, Ven. Warakagoda Gnanarathana Thera said yesterday that he was not involved in any politics and did not harbour hatred against any community in this country, although some people attempted to misinterpret a speech he had made recently. The Mahanayake Thera said in a special statement that he expects the Sinhalese, Tamils and the Muslims to live in peace and unity as they have been doing in the past. Media reports said that while addressing a gathering at the Kithsirimevan Temple the Mahanayake Thera had spoken against the United National Party (UNP) and urged devotees not to patronise Muslim-owned restaurants. Reports said that he also suggested stoning as a punishment for a controversial Muslim doctor who had been accused of sterilising women against their will to death. Minister of Finance Mangala Samaraweera had hit back against the alleged controversial statement made by the prelate and State Minister Harsha de Silva had requested him to retract the statement.⁴⁷⁵

Buddha statue vandalised in Weligama (by Sunil Dharmabandu De Silva) - A Buddha statue was vandalised by an unknown individual in Weligama, Matara. It was reported that two big stones had been used to damage the statue. The two stones were found beside the damaged statue, which is nearly 63-years-old. A 73-year-old resident woman who has been attending to the statue for the past five years said that she discovered that the statue had been damaged when she arrived at the place around 4 a.m. The acting officer in charge of the Weligama police said that there is a dispute between two factions for the land where the statue has been placed. He said a proper investigation needed to be conducted to ascertain what happened.⁴⁷⁶

Maha Sangha: Test of leadership - This editorial piece states that Buddhists, in the country and worldwide, were shocked and dismayed “

⁴⁷⁴ *Virakesari*, June 22, p. 17.

⁴⁷⁵ *Daily Mirror*, June 22, p. A1, A2.

⁴⁷⁶ *Daily Mirror*, June 22, p. A6.



statements made by a very senior prelate of the Sri Lankan Buddha Sasana.” This is the Buddhists celebrated this Posen, the piece states. “We have heard a sangha leader over the highly controversial opposite of the “ancient, historic, inception of Dharma-infused governance” that preach the most socially destabilising and potentially violent forms of human behaviour, the very opposite of what the Buddha preached,” the piece claims. The editorial elaborates stating that this prelate advocated the boycotting of the businesses of an entire community, and “indirectly seemed to preach vengeful murder, even recommending a most brutish method of murder as well – stoning to death.” The piece also questions the role of media in this situation, wondering whether it was shame that led to them downplaying “these, perhaps unguarded, shockingly inflammatory, remarks by a religious leader who is normally supposed to guide the nation”. The piece speculates the “degree to which this irrational and harmful preaching will further entrench not just attitudes of communal mistrust and enmity but also lawlessness and violent behaviour.” The editorial points out that this is not the first instance of such incidents among the clergy and adds that “the Maha Sangha hierarchy has so far not thought fit to contradict such exhortations and even hate speech by their juniors.” The piece calls for introspection and action within the majority community, warning that otherwise “there will be created an impression that not only is the saffron robe above the law of the land but, that some of its wearers are transgressing their own law, their very own dhamma.”⁴⁷⁷

‘Wrong for Muslim women to wear veil covering face’ (by Uditha Kumarasinghe) - General Secretary of the Ceylon Thowheed Jamath (CTJ) Abdul Razik, testifying on Thursday before the Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC) probing the Easter Sunday attacks, said that he condemned ISIS and had always stated in public that ISIS was a terrorist group. Razik told the PSC that he has copies of newspaper statements and audio clips of his statements condemning the ISIS and anyone resorting to arms to propagate religion. Dr. Jayampathy Wickramaratne said that former Western Province Governor Azath Salley, giving evidence before the PSC, had insisted that Abdul Razik should be behind bars to ensure communal harmony. Further, Razik said Wahhabism was not terrorism and added that if anyone engaged in terror activities in the name of Wahhabism, they condemn it. However, Minister Karunanayake said that many who had testified before the PSC and several others in public have identified the CTJ as an agent of Wahhabism. Razik rejected the claim and said that it was they who had pointed out that it was wrong for Muslim women to wear veils to cover their faces. He said that they had met intelligence officials in 2016 and alerted them of Zahran Hashim’s preaching which they felt was promoting extremism and calling for the murder of non-Muslims. He admitted that the CTJ had links with the Katuwapitiya suicide bomber Achchi Mohammodu Hasthun and Sara Pulasthini who died during the fight between STF commandos and Islamic extremists in Sainthamuruthu on April 28, 2019. Razik said that they never received aid from foreign countries or INGOs. Minister Karunanayake questioned Razik as to why he had made controversial statements denigrating Buddhism. He said that they prepared a lecture containing some facts against Buddhism when certain extremist Buddhist groups were condemning Islam. Razik admitted that

477 Sunday Observer, June 23, p. 10.



he made a mistake and added that he had already apologised at several public forums that he had made a mistake. 478

The genesis of the Easter Sunday bombers lies in the religion (by Gamini Viyangoda) – We are aware of the fact that at least 90 per cent of the Muslims in this country condemn the Easter Sunday bomb attacks. Though the non-extremist Muslim population in fundamental Islamic countries is less than this, the majority even in those countries would not approve brutal acts like these. The peace-loving Muslims are of the opinion that Islamic faith did not induce the Easter Sunday attackers to become suicide bombers. That is because it is stated in the Quran not to destroy one's own life. Thus, it is indicated that Islam is a religion of peace and there are many other teachings in the Quran that advocate on peace. This is the same with regard to Christianity. There are many references in the new testament about this. For an example in Matthew 5: 9, it is stated that "blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God". It is also stated in Mathew 5: 43-44 " 479

AG has the responsibility to disclose the massacre of Sinhalese by Shafi (by Erik Gamini Jinapriya quoting Lawyer Kalyananda Thiranagama) – Lawyer Kalyananda Thiranagama stated that it is disclosed through facts that had surfaced that there was a planned programme to sterilise the Sinhala ethnicity. Noting that not only Shafi is involved in this programme, he noted that it was disclosed in a previous instance that a male Doctor and a female Doctor in Peradeniya Hospital performed sterilisation surgeries. He also added that a similar incident was reported from the Dambulla hospital relevant to Muslim lady Doctor and also from the Kurunegala hospital itself in 2016. He stressed that all these point out that there is a well-planned programme to cause the extinction of Sinhala race in the country. Mentioning that there had been no legal action against Shafi as of yet, Thirangama opined that investigations should be conducted involving all the hospitals that Shafi had worked before.480

Here is the living evidence of racism of Shafi (by Tharanga Rathnaweera) – Mothers who lost fertility due to the curse called Shafi makes complaints to the Kurunegala hospital even to this day; they weep and cry due to the loss of children. I felt sorry for the Sinhala race when I noticed those young mothers who had been accompanied by either their husbands or mothers; that is because those mothers had been subject to sterilisation by extremist assassin doctors, without being aware of their fate; the heart is full of sorrow and anger when it is observed as to how Sinhala politicians are hell- bent on to rescue that Doctor who performed surgeries to make the whole race infertile. It is reported from the Kurunegala hospital that Doctor Shafi had removed even the

478 *Sunday Observer*, June 23, p. 12.

479 *Anidda*, June 23, p. 4.

480 *Anidda*, June 23, p. 5.



wombs of some Sinhala women during the surgeries conducted in the abdominal region; hospital sources point out that such a surgery should be done with the sanction of a specialist and also that Doctor Shafi had performed them without any such sanction. Complaints are also being made at the Kurunegala Hospital that Doctor Shafi had performed LRT surgeries without the consent of either the expectant mother or her husband.⁴⁸¹

This is a building of settlements for extremism (by Saman Gamage) – We were heading to Kallaru forest region adjoining Wilpatthuwa forest; we were in pursuit of another Arabia that emerges from this forest area. Our heroic soldiers made innumerable sacrifices to rescue these areas. We witnessed their sacrifices and such lives are different from stakeholders who are avaricious towards a pile of minority votes. It would not be wrong to say that there is Bathiudeenisation of adjoining forests of the Wilpathhuwa forest that goes even beyond Arabisation. Is this building of settlements in the area an early measure in pursuit of the Islamic state that is anticipated in 2025 in this country?⁴⁸²

Why did the Chief-Prelate of the Asgiriya Chapter say like that? (by Samanthi Weerasekera) – In the aftermath of the Easter Sunday attack, Archbishop Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith urged the people to maintain peace. Even the Buddhist clergy led by Chief-Prelates of the three Bhikkhu Chapters told that the peace in the country should be maintained. Despite the attempts by the religious leaders to establish peace and harmony in the country, there did not seem that the leaders of the State or other politicians were engaged in a genuine attempt to root out the brutal acts of extremists. It was in this context that the Chief-Prelate of the Asgiriya Chapter Warakagoda Sri Gnanarathana Thera we should act strongly to safeguard the Sinhala race and Buddhist faith. Thera also opined that the masses should be alert on the strategies that were adopted secretly to destroy Sinhala -Buddhist community. What is implied through these statements is not that other ethnicities and religious groups should be discriminatively treated; it meant that all Sri Lankans stand united to defeat extremists. Information is being divulged on the fact that there was an extensive plan to destroy the Sinhala race and to subject them to genocide.⁴⁸³

The name board of the Kovil is left intact – The name board of the temple is removed- Here are the piles of lies fabricated by extremists on the Gurukand temple (by Tharanga Rathnaweera) – Gurukanda Rajamaha Viharaya gained popularity in the past period of time with the eruption of a tense situation there when Tamil extremists forcefully tried to build a Kovil in the viharaya premises. Though Sinhala Buddhists flocked together to rescue the viharaya from extremists, the pressure that is exerted by the extremists had not subsided. Recently, the name board of the viharaya has been taken off. The fact that a Devalaya is there in a temple is not a fact to be

⁴⁸¹ Divaina, June 23, p. 12.

⁴⁸² Divaina, June 23, p. 12.

⁴⁸³ Divaina, June 23, p. 19.



surprised. But the forceful attempt to build a Kovil in the premises of the temple must not be allowed; we cannot sit still as a coward ethnicity by allowing the extremist politicians to rob Sinhala Buddhist heritage.⁴⁸⁴

The nature of the law that was brought to avert the racist groups that create tensions in the country (by Subashini Jayaratne) – International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) No. 56 of 2007 is an Act that is highly discussed at present, particularly in the wake of Easter Sunday attacks. It was under this Act a Muslim woman was arrested on the charge of wearing a garment that had an image of a Dharama Chakra, despite the fact that the image in the relevant garment was actually a steering wheel of a ship. It is also reported that actions are being taken under the ICCPR Act on the senior journalist Kusal Perera on the charge that he fomented sentiments of religious fanaticism in an article written to Daily Mirror. Moreover, a reputed writer called Shakhthika Sathkumara was arrested on the charge that the content of a short story published by him on Facebook can induce the tensions in the society. The special feature under this Act is that it is only in limited instances that one can gain bail under this Act and that too from a Magistrate Court; thus, the Bail Act No. 30 of 1997 is not operative in this context.⁴⁸⁵

Azath Salley pledged that the two leaders of the clan that vandalised Buddha statues would be brought to the Police – Former DIG Kegalle Palitha Siriwardhana (by Srinath Prasanna Jayasuriya) – Former Deputy Inspector General of Police (DIG) Palitha Siriwardana stated that Azath Salley pledged that he would hand over the two leaders of the clan that vandalised Buddha statues in Mawanella to the Police through a Maoulavi. Siriwardhana also noted that that pledge never materialised. He also noted that they were able to discover the fact that Zaharan was there behind the clan that vandalised Buddha statues in Mawanella and also were able to discover information on the two leaders of that clan by December last year. He was also of the view that had Azath Salley kept himself to his pledge to handover the two suspects, the Easter Sunday bomb attack could have been averted; this is because, he noted, that the those two suspects were aware of the hideouts of Zaharan as they had maintained continuous links with Zaharan.⁴⁸⁶

A sermon on stoning (by Sarath de Alwis) - This short opinion piece condemns the sentiments expressed in the ‘anusasana’ of the Ven. Warakagoda Sri Gnanarathana Thera, Mahanayake of the Asgiriya Chapter, stating that “listening to the sermon of the erudite ecclesiastic who is emblematic of the faith that is now referred to as Sinhala Buddhism, it is evident that the Sinhala Buddhist mental makeup is well and truly fossilised in the stone age”. The author states that while the prelate did not advise

⁴⁸⁴ *Divaina*, June 23, p. 14.

⁴⁸⁵ *Silumina*, June 23, p. 11.

⁴⁸⁶ *Lankadeepa*, June 23, p. 16.



people to stone anybody, “he seemed titillated by the idea”. The author also asserts that “reason and ‘bana’ are not always synonymous”. The author analyses what the chief prelate says in his speech, noting that he only says ‘Muslim’ once, henceforth using “the third person pronoun ‘they’ [...] to identify the adversary of all Buddhists”. The author also states that “the constitutional primacy accorded to Buddhism has been in practice a carte blanche for the institutionalised clergy to hold its grip on public credulity by wielding power without responsibility or accountability”. We are not a theocracy and we must resist any move to make it one, the piece adds. “We can at least strive to elect politicians who may be Sinhala Buddhists, but are practitioners of universal values,” the author urges, adding that “the current cosy cohabitation between the Sangha institution and the political class is the result of the adulteration of positive Buddhist values over the years since Independence”. The author asserts that all citizens have the same freedoms and rights, and must abide by the same laws, including the prelate. “What is pivotal to our well-being is the clear separation between organised religion and the government,” the author states.⁴⁸⁷

‘Rathana Thera attempting to create rift among people’ (by Hasfer A. Haleem) - Athuraliya Thera is trying to bring about a split between the Tamils and Muslims in the North and East, while engaging in the same ploy with the Muslims and Sinhalese in the South, Trincomalee parliamentarian Abdullah Maharroof said in a media release issued yesterday. He said that while the regime of good governance brought about happiness and peace of mind in all parts of the country, certain saboteurs, as partners of the regime, were bent on creating discord in the country and disturbing the freedom achieved thus far. “Our religion does not accept terrorists and those who engage in sabotage. God does not forgive those who commit suicide and our religion does not accept those who commit suicide,” he said. “Further, the security of society should be based on the prevailing conditions in the country. The existence of the Muslims should be guaranteed by the president and the prime minister. Innocent Muslims have been arrested under the Prevention of Terrorism Act and this has created economic difficulties for their families as well as psychological stress. These people should be released forthwith,” he said in his report.⁴⁸⁸

Mansoor calls to resolve Kalmunai DS issue without conflict (by M.S.M. Haniffa) - It is absolutely necessary to solve the Kalmunai North Divisional Secretariat issue without creating a controversy between the Tamils and Muslims, Digamadulla District parliamentarian M.I.M. Mansoor said. In a communiqué issued yesterday, he said that the hegemonic forces were yearning to create a controversy between the Tamils and Muslims to attain their political objectives. “As such, the Tamils and Muslims should realise the true situation and reach a compromise and the issues could be solved only through such a mechanism. Moreover, we should not allow the hegemonic forces to

⁴⁸⁷ *Sunday Observer*, June 23, p. 14.

⁴⁸⁸ *Daily Mirror*, June 24, p. A1, A2.



intervene and attain their political objectives as this was a ploy orchestrated to disrupt the Tamil – Muslim unity. Therefore, he stated that “we have to act with composure without succumbing to the pressure exerted by them [hegemonic forces]”.⁴⁸⁹

Legitimate rights of minority communities should be safeguarded: Sampanthan (by M. Mubarak) - If the minority communities in this country are to lead a sustainable, peaceful life, their legitimate rights should be protected, Trincomalee District parliamentarian and TNA National Leader R. Sampanthan said. He said that all political leaders in the country should collectively forge ahead on their political journey, failing which the country may encounter divisions. Further, the costumes worn by different communities should be protected, and they should not be denied their legitimate rights. Moreover, the issues faced by Tamils should be solved. According to Sampanthan, the issues faced by the minority communities have not diminished since achieving independence, and this situation should be rectified.⁴⁹⁰

‘Tamil and Sinhala traders’ association should be established jointly’ (by Abdulsalam Yaseem) - A traders’ association should be established by coordinating the Tamil and Sinhala traders, parliamentarian Ven. Rathana Thera said at a meeting in Trincomalee. He discussed the issues faced by the Tamil community and said that in order to rectify the situation a Tamil and Sinhala traders’ association should be established and that progressive Muslims, who were opposed to terrorism and extremism and loved their country, should be absorbed into this association.⁴⁹¹

A protest which ended without a conclusion – (by Rishad A. Cader) - The commentary discusses the protest launched by a group of religious leaders to upgrade the Kalmunai North Sub Divisional Secretariat’s office. The protest saw the support of several Buddhist monks including that of Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thera and Bodu Bala Sena General Secretary Ven. Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara Thera. The Muslims too launched a protest against the upgrade. Both protests were temporarily called off following assurances.⁴⁹²

A relationship characterised by amity (by S.M.J. Neangoda) - This long opinion piece begins with a brief history of communal unrest in the country, particularly the Sinhala- Muslim conflict and nationalism, starting from 1915. The author also notes that, during British rule, “Coast Moors from South India, some of the most fanatical and intolerant of Muslims, came to Sri Lanka in large numbers,” but adds that Ceylon Muslims looked down on them. The author then explains how this led to riots, specifically the June 1915 riot, which is rooted in the 1912 Gampola riot. The author explains in great detail how

⁴⁸⁹ *Daily Mirror*, June 24, p. A1, A2.

⁴⁹⁰ *Daily Mirror*, June 24, p. A3.

⁴⁹¹ *Daily Mirror*, June 24, p. A3.

⁴⁹² *Thinakaran*, June 24, p. 7.

the communal violence was a result of both the British government and certain immigrant Muslim mosque owners trying to restrict Buddhist parades during religious festivals. The author mentions of both the damage done to a mosque during the riots, as well as their retaliatory attacks against the Sinhalese. The article concludes by referring to the recent terror attacks in Sri Lanka and stating that “it is the responsibility of religious leaders and law enforcement authorities to take stringent, adequate and timely measures to identify and deal with them.”⁴⁹³

Attempts to undermine the charges of sterilisation against Shafi by futile investigations – Athuraliye Rathana Thera (by Ranil Dharmasena) – Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thera stated that the Government is trying to cover the charges leveled against Doctor Shafi on the sterilisation of mothers by conducting spurious investigations. Thera also stated that the Police is conducting investigations on it by completely being a political puppet. Thera also pointed out that there is really a problem if 1,000 mothers out of 8,000 mothers who underwent a surgery by Shafi do not get a second baby. Thera also stressed that though Muslim women too had been subject to this surgery, they had been conceived again and none of them had complained that they did not conceive again. Thera also opined that there had been a plan to cause the extinction of the entire Sinhala race and added that this trend had been there from 1995.⁴⁹⁴ It is the health ministry that is paying incentive allowances for sterilisation surgeries as opposed to the extremists – Udaya Gammanpila (by Erik Gamini Jinapriya) – MP Udaya Gammanpila noted that the family planning was promoted in 1980s in Sri Lanka when the population growth rate of the country was 2 per cent. Noting that the population growth rate at present is 0.8 per cent and that of Sinhalese is 0.5 per cent, he stated that Sri Lanka should reconsider about family planning. He noted that masses perceive that Doctor Shafi is the most brutal terrorist (than Zaharan even) and added that if 1,000 mothers become sterilise out of 4,000 mothers who were subject to surgeries, that means 25 per cent of those who underwent a surgery by Shafi had become sterilised. He stated that forceful sterilisation of an ethnic group is a genocide and therefore laws should be brought to impose death penalty for an individual who carried out forceful sterilisation. It was also revealed by him that the Ministry of Health pays an incentive allowance for carrying out sterilisation surgeries and not an extremist organisation. Delving on to depths, he pointed out that it is the Family Health Unit under the Ministry of Health that pays an incentive allowance to individuals who undergo sterilisation surgeries and the individuals who induce them to do so.⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹³ *Daily News*, June 25, p. 9.

⁴⁹⁴ *Divaina*, June 25, p. 1, 4.

⁴⁹⁵ *Divaina*, June 25, p. 13.



Sri Lanka a Buddhist country - Prelate (by Jayarathne Wickremaraghi) – The Anunayake of the Asgiriya Chapter, Chief Incumbent of the Kurunegala Ethkanda Rajamaha Vihara, and senior lecturer of the Sri Lankan Pali and Buddhist University Ven. Anamaduwe Dhammadasa Thera said that Sri Lanka is a Buddhist country, even though prominent ministers in the country were not ready to accept it. He stressed that Sri Lanka has been a Buddhist country for centuries, and that it should be protected while upholding the rights of other communities and religions. He pointed out that the concept of reconciliation should be used to create an atmosphere of peace for all communities without jeopardising the rights of the Sinhala Buddhists. The Thera further said that the rights of all other communities should be protected for the well-being of the country.⁴⁹⁶

Islamophobia is pushing Muslims to the wall (Ranga Jayasuriya) - This long opinion piece claims that the Easter Sunday attacks “compelled local Muslims to engage in self - introspection of the unfolding wave of radicalisation and Arabisation of their community”, a welcome development “in an otherwise heinous carnage.” The author stresses the importance of this turn of events given the radical elements in society that the greater public turned a blind eye to up until now. However, the author notes that “the Easter Sunday carnage also unshackled the inhibitions of an articulate group of closeted bigots to spew anti-Muslim hate with a straight face.” Worse still, “a government which is liable in a colossal intelligence failure leading up to the attack now finds itself being incapable of confronting a rejuvenated campaign of Islamophobia.” The author calls out the high priest of the Asgiriya Chapter, Ven Warakagoda Sri Gnanaratna Thera, for his statement about boycotting Muslim shops. Unfortunately, no politician, other than Mangala Samaraweera, condemned these sentiments. “Political connivance has also given mainstream credence to once fringe racism,” the author states, citing Ven. Rathana Thera’s hunger strike, and his “plans to launch a Sinhala and Tamil business front against Muslim- owned businesses”. The author discusses the toll events have taken on Muslim businesses, and states that “this organised campaign Islamophobia is designed to push the Muslims to the wall. And this is dangerous stuff. It should be desisted with, condemned and cracked down with all might.” The author states that the Muslim community is open to change, including “reforms in a wide range of areas such as the Muslim centric government agencies, which are encroached by Wahhabis, regulation of Muslim international schools, madrasahs and new mosque; de-wahabbification and de-Arabisation of local Muslims; and security and intelligence reforms to keep vigil on fringe groups.” However, “the on-going Islamophobic campaign is not just distracting, but also testing the Muslim community’s desire to change.” Home-grown Islamic extremism driven by local grievances is the last thing Sri Lanka needs right now, the author adds. Additionally, the author compares the anti-Muslim campaign in Sri Lanka to “the build-up of the mass demonisation of Rohingyas in

⁴⁹⁶ *Daily Mirror*, June 25, p. A5.



Myanmar". The author also warns that "the government's passivity is contagious and can be seen in the way law enforcement agencies react to Islamophobia. Unless properly handled now, the current campaign of Islamophobia will undermine the entire law enforcement mechanism at one point of time in the near future."⁴⁹⁷

All stakeholders work together: UN Human Rights Commissioner advises – (by Robert Antony)

- United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet has expressed her concerns over attacks on Muslims and statements made by certain religious leaders that support these violence acts. She expressed this statement at the 41st sessions of the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva. She urged all leaders and religious leaders to join forces to address this issue.⁴⁹⁸

We will work hard to eradicate Islamic fundamentalism – Gnanasara Thera says after visiting Katuwapitiya St. Sebastian's church – General Secretary of the Bodu Bala Sena organisation, Ven. Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara Thera stated that he would work hard to eradicate Islamic fundamentalism from the country. He made this statement after visiting the Katuwapitiya St. Sebastian's church that was one of the churches attacked on Easter Sunday.⁴⁹⁹

We will completely eradicate fundamentalism (by N. Thanuja) – General Secretary of the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS), Ven. Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara Thera states that the BBS will completely eradicate Muslim fundamentalism from the country. He stated that a declaration would be made to this effect at the conference in Kandy which is to be held soon.⁵⁰⁰

SLPP attempts to 'ban' Muslim traders from Dankotuwa Pola: Wennappuwa PS chairman summoned before court (by Prasad Purnimal) - The Marawila Magistrate's court yesterday ordered the chairman of the Wennappuwa Pradeshiya Sabha to appear before court on Friday (June 28). The order was made over a written request made by the chairman asking the police to temporarily ban Muslim merchants from taking part in the Dankotuwa weekly fair. The magistrate's court issued the order after the Dankotuwa police acted swiftly to avert communal tensions caused by the Sri Lanka controlled Pradeshiya Sabha's (PS) move to exclude traders of one community. Police sources told the Daily News that Officer in charge Thilina Hettiarachchi and officers of the Dankotuwa Police, on advice by higher officers, had gone to the courts to seek judicial guidance on this sensitive matter. "I asked them to temporarily remove Muslim traders from taking part in the Dankotuwa weekly fair in order to prevent possible escalation of clashes in the area, so as to prevent a bigger crisis," he claimed. "I made this request in response to various public complaints and Podujana Peramuna (SLPP)

⁴⁹⁷ *Daily Mirror*, June 25, p. A10.

⁴⁹⁸ *Virakesari*, June 25, p. 1.

⁴⁹⁹ *Virakesari*, June 25, p. 15.

⁵⁰⁰ *Virakesari*, June 26, p. 3.



concerns communicated to me verbally as well as in writing,” Wennappuwa PS Chairman Susantha Perera said. “My decision is temporary. I have arranged a meeting with religious leaders of all faiths, monks and political leaders to discuss the matter,” he added. He further said that after the Easter Sunday bombings, Muslim traders did not turn up at the Dankotuwa Pola until the police asked them to come, and that there are many sections that have become agitated about it. One petition called for the exclusion of Muslim trader was signed by a large number of persons and stated that it was an issue of ensuring “Sinhala dominance” in the Dankotuwa Pola. The Dankotuwa Police said that it was ready to ensure security and peace at the pola. Wennappuwa PS Opposition Leader Shirone Fernando told the Daily News that his party [the UNP] fully opposed the ‘ban’ move as one that would disrupt ethnic relations and worsen the situation. JVP district coordinator Ajith Gihan also stated that the ‘ban’ move was a racially motivated one and aimed at causing communal tensions. He said that the JVP fully opposed the move by the PS chairman. Meanwhile, SLPP members defended their chairman’s ‘ban’ move as one that was “temporary” and was meant to avoid communal tensions.⁵⁰¹

Court orders the Pradeshiya Sabha Chairman who urged the Muslim traders to halt the trade activities in the Dankotuwa fair to come to Court (by Prasad Poornamal) – Marawila Magistrate ordered the Chairman of the Wennappuwa Pradeshiya Sabha to appear at the Court on 28th of June. This is over an incident where it is alleged that the relevant Chairman had requested the OIC Dankotuwa to halt the trading activities of the Muslim traders in Dankotuwa fair. The Chairman of the Pradeshiya Sabha noted that there was a problem in the security in the fair after the Easter Sunday attacks and that there was a strong opposition within the religious leaders, masses and traders in the area for the carrying out of trade activities by Muslim traders in the Dankotuwa fair. Acknowledging that he urged the OIC to halt the trade activities of Muslims in the fair temporarily, he stated that it was the Police who brought back the Muslim traders to the fair in a context in which they did not turn up at the fair after the Easter Sunday attacks.⁵⁰²

It is our responsibility to achieve a programme where the country moves along a common legal system after eliminating sentiments of racism and religious fanaticism – Tilvin Silva (by Muditha Dayananda) – The Chief Secretary of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) Tilvin Silva noted that the Easter Sunday bomb attack should be converted into a blessing that induces us to move the country along a common legal system, after eliminating sentiments of racism and religious fanaticism. He also added that some politicians are using the Easter Sunday attacks to gain political advantage in a future election. He also added that the Sri Lanka has a long history in terms of the racist struggles and struggles on religious fanaticism. It was also noted by him that the

⁵⁰¹ *Daily News*, June 26, p. 1, 6.

⁵⁰² *Dinamina*, June 26, p. 1.



country had to undergo a devastating 30-year war due to those conflicts. He noted that there should be a uniform nature along with the multi-cultural social fabric of the country. Adding that there should be only one law in the country despite the presence of number of religions and ethnic groups, Silva noted that the marriage law in the country differs from the ethnicity to ethnicity. He also added that there should be a uniform education system in the country.⁵⁰³

May the curse of the god fall on Doctor who sterilises mothers – Kotapola Amarakiththi Thera (by Sugath Premathilake) – Kotapola Amarakiththi Thera stated that Isalmist extremist organisations are taking steps to cause the extinction of the Sinhala race. Thera also stated that if a Muslim Doctor had taken measures to cause the extinction of Sinhala race, the relevant investigations into the incident must be carried out properly, expeditiously and with transparency. Noting that according to the sources of information, those investigations are not conducted in a proper manner, Thera added that the curse of the god should fall on the Doctor who took steps to destroy an ethnic group by sterilising Sinhala mothers.⁵⁰⁴

Ban on Muslim traders: Wennappuwa PS chairman noticed (by Sheain Fernandopulle) - The Marawila Magistrate's court yesterday issued notice on Wennappuwa Pradesiya Sabha Chairman K.V Susantha Perera and five others on their decision to ban Muslims to trade at the Dankotuwa pola, the police said. The notice was issued after the Dankotuwa Police informed the court, based on a complaint lodged against the Wennappuwa Pradesiya Sabha Chairman's request to issue an order preventing Muslims from trading at the Dankotuwa market. Accordingly, the court issued notice on the relevant individuals to appear before the court on Friday (June 28), asking them to explain on what grounds they had taken a decision to ban Muslims to trade in the Dankotuwa market.⁵⁰⁵

Looking down the barrel of elections: Good governance as sacrificial lamb (by Sanjeewa Fernando) - This short opinion piece discusses the Easter Sunday attacks in the context that it occurred at a time when major political parties in the country were bracing themselves for the upcoming elections. "Even before the bombings there were signs that all three camps i.e. the UNP, SLFP and the SLPP were eager to mollycoddle the ultra-national Buddhist sections," the author states. The author adds that "in such a backdrop, it was clear that the Easter Sunday bombings would serve as a definite clincher in terms of the swaying of the Sinhala Southern polity towards a nationalist chauvinist standpoint." The author criticises the government's passivity regarding "anti- Muslim phobia". The author suggests that this response is due to fear over alienating the voter base so close to the elections. The author questions whether things would have

⁵⁰³ *Lankadeepa*, June 26, p. 18.

⁵⁰⁴ *Divaina*, June 26, p. 15.

⁵⁰⁵ *Daily Mirror*, June 26, p. A3.



been different if the terror attacks had happened in 2015: “Would the security forces have been reduced to mere onlookers, while the rioters torched and destroyed property belonging to the ordinary Muslims? Would government officials have been able to dictate terms as to what dresses people should wear, as they did in this instant? I hardly would think so.” The author claims that “the definite and distinct racial bigotry and intolerance that gripped the Sinhala (as well as Tamil) society” is rooted in political dynamics. “The acknowledgement that a candidate with a more racially tolerant outlook would find it challenging to overcome one with a ultra-Sinhala Buddhist backing had begun to shape up the collective psyche of the South,” the author adds. The author blames the president and prime minister for this, stating that “not only have they allowed the racial and religious bigotry that was checked in 2015 to sneak back in to the socio-political landscape yet again; they have allowed such forces to hold to ransom the very ideals for which they stood up then.” In support of this argument, the author cites “raving monks” who insult the judiciary without any repercussions, calls for resignations based on ethnicity and officers charged with grave human rights abuse who hold top positions in the military. “Easter bombings and the after math of violence, Islamophobia and paranoia has only aggravated what was always underneath; communalist and opportunistic politics of the three main leaders who call themselves national leaders,” the author states, adding that even moderate Muslims are being pushed to the fringe as a result of the terror attacks.⁵⁰⁶

‘Village-based temples need govt. support’: PM launches health insurance for bhikkhus (by Amali Mallawaarachchi) - Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe officiated the launch of “Budu Puth Suraksha” health insurance scheme for bhikkhus at Temple Trees in Colombo. The health insurance scheme was initiated as a part of the three-pronged programme “Shasana Suraksha” implemented by the government to foster the Buddha Sasana. The ceremony was organised by Buddha Sasana and Wayamba development ministry. Speaking at the ceremony, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe said that the health insurance scheme would be extended to all religious leaders. He observed that the life insurance scheme was introduced for the protection of the Buddha Sasana. Premier Wickremesinghe pointed out that the present government had spent approximately Rs. 7000 million for the betterment of the Buddha Sasana. He said that no other government had ever spent that much funds for the development of the Buddha Sasana. The premier said that the government should support the development of village-based temples in the country. Prime Minister Wickremesinghe also pointed out that the “Budu Puth Suraksha” insurance scheme provided facilities for the parents of bhikkhus as well.⁵⁰⁷

Don’t allow to undermine the probes on Shafi because of the wealth, power and political affiliations – Athuraliye Rathana Thera (by R. M. W. Bandara) – MP

⁵⁰⁶ *Daily Mirror*, June 26, p. A10.

⁵⁰⁷ *Daily News*, June 27, p. 10.



Athuraliye Rathana Thera stated that he would act responsibly to expose the brutal attempt taken by a Doctor to trigger the extinction of an ethnic group. Thera also noted that Sinhala mothers had not conceived after the performance of surgeries by Doctor Shafi.⁵⁰⁸

Anti-Muslim campaign carried out following Easter Sunday attacks - Amir Ali – Speaking at parliament UNP MP Amir Ali stated that some political forces launched an anti-Muslim campaign following the Easter Sunday carnage to meet their political goals. He was participating in the debate on extending the State of Emergency for one more month. “Rishad Bathuideen was named a terrorist. Now the Army Commander has told the Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC) that he had no influence from Bathuideen to release terrorists. That testimony ended allegations against Bathuideen. Some political forces try to make a rift between communities. The cardinal, too, has asked to reveal the names of those who led the people against the Muslims. Those responsible for the crime should be brought before the PSC. The PSC should continue,” Ali said. “About 2,375 people are in custody for the Easter Sunday attacks and of them, around 100 are in remand. These are unjust arrests. Muslims had no links with Zahran’s terror groups. It is the Muslims who provided information about Zahran and his men. For the political advantage, the Muslims are harassed. All these are done for the narrow political gains. The PSC must investigate all these. Justice should be done,” he added.⁵⁰⁹

There was no provocation of masses: the Divaina newspaper that disclosed on the sterilisation surgery incident performed a national responsibility – Lawyer Terry Fernando (by A. J. A. Abeynayake) – Lawyer Terry Fernando stated that what the Divaina newspaper did through the disclosure of the incident of sterilisation surgeries is not a provocation of masses but the performance of the duty that they are supposed to perform as a media institution. Lawyer made these remarks at the Kurunegala Magistrate Court when the case on Doctor Shafi was taken for discussion. He also stated that the mothers who underwent surgeries conducted by Doctor Shafi did not know that there had been a crime like that until it was exposed through Divaina newspaper. CID informed the Court that Doctor Shafi had induced the Sinhala and Tamil mothers to get the caesarean surgeries done and also that he took steps to prevent Muslim mothers from getting a caesarean surgery. It was also disclosed by the CID that it had been revealed that when the babies born to Muslim mothers were taken out of the wombs, Doctor Shafi used to praise the God.⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁸ *Divaina*, June 27, p. 13.

⁵⁰⁹ *Daily News*, June 28, p. 10.

⁵¹⁰ *Divaina*, June 28, p. 7.

**Presidential election for a Sinhala Buddhist theocratic state with gallows** (by Kusal Perera) -

This long opinion piece states that Sri Lanka may be heading towards a Sinhala Buddhist theocratic state, citing the wrongful arrests of Dr. Shafi, writer Shakthika Sathkumara, and a Muslim woman wearing an outfit with a picture of a ship's wheel. "All these complaints against all individuals have been initiated by Sinhala Buddhist extremism, or in line with such extremism," the author states. "Here in Sri Lanka, it is the ideology of the Sinhala Buddhist state that protesting anti-Muslim Buddhist monks and high priest of Asgiriya stand for, Minister Mano Ganesan accepts and even Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith agrees with," the author adds. This is something that has been going on since the country achieved independence, the author claims. The author gives a brief history of political activity following independence, and how the Sinhala Buddhist agenda became intertwined with it. "The two major political parties in the South, the UNP, and especially the SLFP, came to represent Sinhala Buddhist dominance in electoral politics," the author states. The author adds that Sinhala Buddhist dominance was "given a savage lift with the organised pogrom against Tamil people in '83 July". Furthermore, the civil war saw the "Sinhala Buddhist social psyche gaining importance, defined in terms of patriotism." The author also states that "Sinhala Buddhist businesses and the trader community in urban centers wanted control of the cash flow, not through competing, but through political power". The author claims that the JHU first brought Buddhist monks into direct politics and gave them acceptance and credence in this field. "The totality of Sinhala Buddhist political dominance in the state was very much in the open with selective treatment of suspects in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday terror attacks that led to anti-Muslim violence especially in the Kurunegala district," the author claims. The author notes that the ICCPR Act is being abused and notes that this is just "the preface to this presidential election endorsing a Sinhala Buddhist theocratic state with the death penalty announced after 43 years and perhaps becoming a slogan for social cleansing." 511

Wennappuwa PS chair, five before Marawila Magistrate: Court stays 'Muslim ban' at Dankotuwa pola (by Rukshana Riswie and Prasad Poornamal) - Marawila Magistrate and District Judge Keminda Perera ordered the Wennappuwa Pradeshiya Sabha (PS) chairman and the Dankotuwa Police to allow people of all communities to engage in trade at the Dankotuwa public fair. The court order comes days after Wennappuwa Pradeshiya Sabha Chairman Susantha Perera issued a letter asking the police to disallow Muslim traders from continuing their participation in the weekly market fair in Dankotuwa. PS Chairman K.V. Susantha Perera and five others were asked to appear in court over their decision to temporarily ban Muslim traders from setting up stalls in the weekend fair in Dankotuwa. The court directive follows a police complaint against the PS chairman, who is a member of the SLPP. Earlier this week, the PS chairman had sent a letter to the officer in charge of the Dankotuwa police requesting the police to temporarily disallow Muslim traders from trading at the fair ostensibly in order to ensure that there were no public disturbances. The case was fixed for July 23. In the letter addressed to the police, the chairman alleged that since the Easter Sunday attacks, traders and those visiting the fair had objected to Muslim traders setting up stalls at the weekly fair, which is maintained by the PS. Meanwhile, Finance Minister

511 *Daily Mirror*, June 28, p. A10.



Mangala Samaraweera, in a tweet, described the PS chairman's action as: "Apartheid in Wennappuwa; Muslim traders 'banned' in weekly market by @PresRajapaksa controlled local council. Shame!"⁵¹²

More than 700 mosques not registered with Muslim Religious Dept.: Hashim (by Ajith Siriwardana and Yohan Perera) - It was revealed at the Parliament Select Committee (PSC) appointed to probe the Easter Sunday attacks that there were more than 700 mosques that were not registered with the department of Muslim religious and cultural affairs. Testifying before the PSC yesterday, Muslim Religious Affairs Minister M.H.A. Haleem's private secretary, his brother Fahim M. Hashim, said that there were 2,599 mosques registered with the department while 80 of them were Thowheed mosques. He said however, that the mosques were not categorised when registered as Thowheed and so on. Mr. Hashim said that 382 mosques had been registered after 2015 including 6 Thowheed mosques. In response to a question raised by Minister Ravi Karunanayake, he said 317 madrasas had been registered with the department and that they included Arabic schools as well. Mr. Hashim said that there were 215 Arabic teachers in Sri Lanka as at April 21. Responding to a question posed by Ravi Karunanayake that the public administration minister had claimed that there were 860 Arabic teachers, he said he was not aware of it and that only 215 had registered with the Muslim Affairs department. Mr. Hashim, who refuted allegations made by former Western Province Governor Azath Salley while testifying before the PSC on an earlier occasion, said that he was engaged in character assassination and that there was no basis to his allegations.⁵¹³

Wennappuwa Sathipola Muslim traders' issue resolved: Police take firm stand (by Pranavesh Sivakumar, Prasad Purnimal) - PS Chairman of Wennappuwa and SLPP politician K.V. Susantha Perera imposed a temporary ban on Muslims doing business at the Dankotuwa weekly fair. He cited the prevailing security situation as the reason and claimed that it was a temporary measure. Mohammad Ismail, a vendor at the fair blamed opportunistic individuals and claimed that the entire Sinhala community was not at fault. Amidst continuous harassment from mobs asking them to remove their stalls at the fair, Ismail and other Muslim vendors in the area lodged a complaint with the police. Muslim vendors then continued to do business at the fair under police protection. However, according to Ismail, when members of the mob informed the PS chairman of Wennappuwa of the situation, he wrote to the police and requested that Muslim vendors be removed from the area. The police sought the opinion of the judiciary. Marawila Magistrate and District Judge Keminda Perera ordered the Wennappuwa PS chairman and the Dankotuwa police to allow people of all communities to engage in trade at the Dankotuwa public fair. The chairman and six other defendants appeared in courts represented by 26 lawyers. They were released without bail and the case was adjourned to June 23. The article quotes a human rights

⁵¹² *Daily News*, June 29, p. 1, 8.

⁵¹³ *Daily Mirror*, June 29, A3.



lawyer on the constitution and its anti-discrimination measures. SLPP politicians stated that the PS chairman's actions weren't connected to the party. 514

Dalai Lama opposes Asgiriya prelate's anti-Muslim remarks - Unconditionally condemning the Chief Prelate of the Asgiriya Chapter Ven. Warakagoda Sri Gnanarathana Thera's controversial statement on avoiding Muslim owned shops, the Dalai Lama said that all traditions should be respected. "Certainly, it is wrong," the Dalai Lama said when asked about Ven. Warakagoda Sri Gnanarathana Thera's statement during an interview with the BBC. He said that he was 'totally committed' to the promotion of religious harmony. "We should make distinctions (between) faith and respect. I am a Buddhist. My faith is Buddhism. But I equally respect all these traditions," he said. Addressing a gathering at an event in Dondamwala Diyakelinawewa Kithsirimevan Raja Maha Viharaya, Ven. Warakagoda Sri Gnanarathana Thera made headlines when he said that Muslim owned shops should be avoided. Ven. Sri Gnanarathana Thera also said that a group of women had said the doctor should be stoned to death. "I don't say that. But that is what needs to be done," he said. 515

Blasphemy and the prisoner of religion (by Raisa Wickrematunge) - This short opinion piece focuses on the arrest of writer Shakhthika Sathkumara and claims that he has "been deprived of his liberty by the state, for what appears to be the crime of blasphemy." The author claims that "in Buddhism, unlike other religions of the world, the idea of blasphemy is entirely and unsurprisingly absent." This is because of the concept of 'Ehipassiko' – an invitation to investigate and evaluate the Buddhist doctrine. "Buddhism empowers the individual, with his capacity for critical reasoning and willpower, to be at the center of the liberation project," the author claims, stressing that blasphemy is antithetical to Buddhism. "In this light, depriving a writer of his liberty for expressing an idea about Buddhism is not only damaging to the very central tenet of the Buddha's emancipatory venture, it is deeply antithetical to the Buddhist approach to knowledge and intellectual disputes," the author states. There is sadly no discussion at all about Sathkumara's artistic intentions or purpose, the author adds, claiming that this is an important factor when judging crimes in the Sangha. The author calls on the government to protect the doctrine of the Buddha, especially from the "so called protectors of Buddhism", and to "free us from the ugly stain of having 'prisoners of Buddhism' like Sathkumara".516

Janaposha free meal centres shut by anti-Muslim threats: Racism conquers charity (by Aanya Wipulasena) - This feature piece focuses on the Janaposha Foundation, which has established several free meals centers in the country. "Five days a week the foundation gives away 1,300-1,400 plates of rice- with a dhal or vegetable curry, fish and papadam, for lunch. For breakfast, bread and dhal curry, and a cup of tea

514 *Sunday Observer*, June 30, p. 2.

515 *Sunday Observer*, June 30, p. 3.

516 *Sunday Observer*, June 30, p. 8.



with milk,” the author states. However, she notes that at one of the centers, “where there were usually at least 40-50 people enjoying a decent meal, on that day there were only about eight.” The decision to suspend food services was made by the foundation after a newspaper, the same one which spread the rumour about the illegal sterilisation of women, allegedly called on the authorities to probe a ‘Muslim foundation’ that provided free meals to people at hospitals. The newspaper article went on to question the motive behind the Janaposha program and speculate whether the meals being served were given “to sterilise women”. The author quotes the General Manager of the foundation, M. A. Sahabdeen, who said that he “had no intention of suspending the program, but we had to due to security reasons. We are not bankrupt. We have funds to continue our work, but under these circumstances, we can’t.” The author points out that the company is legally registered and passed all health and food inspections. The author quotes several individuals who regularly ate at the center. MP Lokuge, who was quoted in the article slandering the foundation, claimed that he had not stated the center was suspicious and said that the journalist’s question had been framed. The author states that this is not the first time that this paper and journalist have written against the validity of the free-meals program.⁵¹⁷

Buddhism practiced by Asgiriya Chapter is where the Lord Buddha was killed by stoning (by Gamini Viyangoda) – The first act that is banned under Buddhism is killing. Lord Buddha has decided to include it as the first precept out of the five precepts in Buddhism. That is because the essence of Buddhism is non-violence. The Chief Prelate of the Asgiriya Chapter Warakagoda Gnanarathna Thera made an interesting “sermon” recently. It is as follows. “Muslim masses do not like us... I am also asking you to boycott their shops and also not to eat from their shops. This is because it is a well-known fact. It is clearly seen that they are a group who gave toxic food to Sinhala masses and a group that attempted to destroy Sinhala masses... Also, that everyone is aware of the heroic act done by a Doctor in Matale. Hundreds of thousands of our children are being destroyed. Traitors of that type must not be allowed to live freely. A group of Buddhist lady devotees stated that these men should be stoned. I am not telling that, but it is what that ought to be. Many data presented in the “sermon” of the Chief-Prelate are surmises that are popular in the South. Most of the allegations referred to by Thera had not been substantiated yet. Moreover, the facts that the Thera referred to on the Muslim Doctor are being substantiated as utter lies. The fact that Thera makes extremely inaccurate statements such as “hundreds of thousands of our children have been destroyed” reflects the extreme foolishness and wickedness of the Thera. On the other hand, Thera depicts an extremely non-Buddhist, cruel nature, when he makes statements like “what ought to be done in respect of the Muslim Doctor is killing him by stoning”.⁵¹⁸

⁵¹⁷ *Sunday Observer*, June 30, p. 10.

⁵¹⁸ *Anidda*, June 30, p. 4.



Wennappuwa PS Chairman who tried to remove Muslim traders from Weekly fair (by Rekha Nilukshi Herath) – The Chairman of the Wennappuwa Pradeshiya Sabha (PS) had informed the Officer-in-charge of the Dankotuwa Police Station to ban the Muslim traders from the weekly fair in Dankotuwa. Even the President does not have the power to give such an order as issuance of such an order is contrary to the Constitution. P.S Chairman had also mentioned in the letter that the residents of the area and the traders of the weekly fair are not happy with the fact that Muslim traders conduct their trade activities in the weekly fair; it is also mentioned in the letter written by the PS Chairman to the OIC Dankotuwa Police that the peaceful situation in the weekly fair would be disrupted by the arrival of Muslim traders in the weekly fair. On an inquiry as to this, the relevant P. S. Chairman stated that the Buddhist clergy in the area and the traders in the weekly fair continuously protested demanding the removal of Muslim traders from the weekly fair.⁵¹⁹

The Muslim issue and the emergence of new collective identity politics (by Nirmal Ranjith Devasiri) – The emergence of new collective identity politics was prompted by the categorisations presented by the imperial governance and also due to rise of the politics of common man. Religion, ethnicity, language, imagined history and cultural uniqueness became the identity markers of this new identity politics. The genesis of this identity politics lies in the cultural revival movements that emerged at the end of the 19th century based on language and religion. Thus, the demarcations of ethnic identities became more vivid during this time and therefore only the communities in the fringes were able to traverse between these demarcations.⁵²⁰

For the NGOs that are hell-bent to put down the Chief-Prelate of the Asgiriya Chapter (by Maduruoya Dhammissara Thera) – A statement of the Chief-Prelate of the Asgiriya Chapter had been distorted inaccurately and maliciously. Mahanayaka Thera had started this particular address claiming that “Muslim masses love us”. But several media outlets reported it in a distorted way saying that Thera stated that “Muslim masses don’t love us”. If the people who distort the statement of the Chief-Prelate are genuinely concerned about reconciliation, they could have extracted the statement made by the Thera that “Muslim masses love us”.⁵²¹

Time has dawned now for a new Panaduravadaya (by Professor Ariyasena Silva) – Prophet Mohammed stated that all humans should practice one religion and killed those who did not do so. No one liked it. It is true that Islam was propagated through the power of the swords by capturing large countries. Those who practiced Islam were subject to extremely severe laws and even death penalties had been imposed in those countries. Our country too has been subject to Islamisation. If the Sinhala population

⁵¹⁹ *Anidda*, June 30, p. 4.

⁵²⁰ *Anidda*, June 30, p. 7.

⁵²¹ *Divaina*, June 30, p. 5.



were to reduce in this manner, this country would too become another Syria or Afghanistan before the lapse of 100 more years.⁵²²

The Eravur Grand Dagoba on which chili was cultivated after flattening it (by Nimal Jayarathne) – The destruction carried out by extremist fundamentalist belonging to various communities by demolishing dagabas, chethiyas, Buddha statues and archaeological sites has become a catastrophe now. The destruction caused to the ancient dagaba in Mawadiwembu is a sight that cannot be easily bearable. The centre and the upper parts of the dagoba had been completely destroyed and chilli, capsicum and several other vegetables had been grown on the surrounding areas. We wish to emphasise that many archaeological sites and ancient dagobas in the Eastern Province have been subject to destruction. It was opined by Dimbulagala Rahulalankara thera that the base of the Sinhala Buddhist identity lies in the ancient dagobas, archaeological sites, temples and viharas. Thera further noted that the current government is responsible for the destruction of ancient dagobas, viharas and archaeological sites and pointed out that the reason for it is that the government had been giving appointments to individuals who do not know anything about the value of the archaeological sites. At present, some extremists are demolishing the Buddhist cultural heritage with the assistance of Tamil and Muslim officials.⁵²³

The struggle pertinent to Kalmunai Divisional Secretariat against Muslim authority (by Wasantha Chandrapala) – Kalmunai Tamil villagers got on to the road recently as there was no response for their grievances for 30 years. This struggle was to transform the Kalmunai North Divisional Secretariat to a fully pledged divisional secretariat. The ones who were in the forefront of the struggle were the religious leaders. They staged a fast and the Head Priest of the Sri Subadraramaya in Kalmunai Ranmuthugala Sangharathna Thera, Kurukkal of the Kalmunai Sri Murugan Kovil and the Chairman of the Tamil Chamber of Commerce took the leadership in the fast. The unstinted support of the residents in the area too was extended to the fast. Kalmunai North Sub- Divisional Secretariat was inaugurated in 1987. Nonetheless, the approval of the ministerial board had been given to convert 28 Sub-Divisional Secretariats to Divisional Secretariats. But this never materialised due to the opposition of the Muslim politicians. Athuraliye Rathana Thera who came to the place where the fast was organised had a discussion with them and subsequently Thera had a discussion with the Muslim residents in the area. Nonetheless, after days from the commencement of the fast, Muslim residents in the area initiated a satyagraha claiming that they oppose giving financial and land powers to the Kalmunai North Divisional Secretariat. This satyagraha was led by MP H. H. M. M. Harees. He was of the opinion that the Sub-Divisional Secretariat in Kalmunai was forcibly setup when the LTTE was ruling the area. He also added that the Sub-Divisional Secretariat in Kalmunai already has all the powers but land powers; he opined that the land powers are demanded for the Sub-Divisional

⁵²² *Divaina*, June 30, p. 5.

⁵²³ *Lankadeepa*, June 30, p. 18.



Secretariat in Kalmunai North to forcibly take the lands of the Muslim masses. He stressed that that is why they oppose upgrading of the Kalmunai North Sub-Divisional Secretariat.⁵²⁴

The racist malady of Wennappuwa Chairman that was remedied by the Court (by Prasad Poornamal) – The Chairman of the Wennappuwa Pradeshiya Sabha has sent a letter to the Officer-in-charge of the Dankotuwa Police Station stating that Muslim community conducting trade activities in the Dankotuwa weekly fair would be removed from that and also that weekly fair premises would be temporarily banned for those traders. He had mentioned that the reason to take such a decision is to maintain the peaceful condition in the fair premises and also to perpetuate the peaceful situation that exists in the country. Some Muslim traders conducting trade activities in the fair had been doing it for the past ten years. The other traders in the weekly fair and the customers who come to the fair were very familiar with these traders. It had been revealed that these traders had been selling items like tamarind, gamboge to eke out a living. On an inquiry as to this the relevant PS Chairman was of the opinion that Muslim traders did not come to the weekly fair after the Easter Sunday attacks. He was also of the opinion that the religious leaders in the area, the traders and the area residents vehemently objected the trading activities of the Muslims in the area. He stated that this decision was taken as a temporary measure to guarantee a peaceful situation. When this issue was taken up at the Marawila Court, the Magistrate ordered the Wennappuwa Pradeshiya Sabha and the Dankotuwa Police to facilitate the Muslim traders to conduct their trade activities freely.⁵²⁵

The story of Kurunegala sterilisation surgeries that was disclosed in the Court (by Gayan Kumara Weerasinghe) – The true story of the Kurunegala Doctor had been revealed at the Kurunegala Court now. Though it was stated that, the Kurunegala Doctor performed more than 8,000 caesarean surgeries, it had been disclosed now that the Doctor had performed only a small number of surgeries. The number of caesarean surgeries performed by him in the Kurunegala Hospital adds up to only 4,372. Though it was stated that more than 1,000 mothers made complaints against Doctor Shafi, Criminal Investigation Department states that there are only a few complaints that are actually stating that they did not conceive after the performance of surgeries; the majority of the mothers who made complaints stated that they made complaints to verify whether they too had been subject to low-fertility as revealed by the media. Thus, it has been found out that only 147 mothers had actually complained that they did not conceive. One doctor had stated that Doctor Shafi depicts a special compassion on Muslim mothers; it was also stated that by him that Doctor Shafi kept on refraining from carrying out LRT surgeries on Muslim women but carried out LRT surgeries on Sinhalese mothers.⁵²⁶

⁵²⁴ *Lankadeepa*, June 30, p. 20.

⁵²⁵ *Silumina*, June 30, p. 3.

⁵²⁶ *Silumina*, June 30, p. 11.