



UNDERSTANDING PRESS COVERAGE ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

#MINORMATTERS

PERIOD COVERED : JUNE 2020

INTRODUCTION

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

This report is the 14th 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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

METHODOLOGY

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

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

Press reports on religious freedom that appeared during June 2020 were monitored. The following 10 daily and weekend newspapers in the 2 local languages (Sinhala and Tamil) were examined (see table below).

| Sinhala Newspapers | Tamil Newspapers |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <i>Lankadeepa/Sunday Lankadeepa</i> | <i>Virakesari/ Sunday Virakesari</i> |
| <i>Divaina/Sunday Divaina</i> | <i>Thinakaran/ Sunday Thinakaran</i> |
| <i>Dinamina/Silumina</i> | <i>Uthayan</i> |
| <i>Anidda</i> | |

These newspapers were selected based on readership data in the National Demographic and Media Survey produced by Kantar LMRB for the year 2017. *Lankadeepa* and *Virakesari* have the highest readership among the daily Sinhala and Tamil newspapers respectively. *Divaina* has the second highest readership among the daily Sinhala newspapers. Meanwhile, *Dinamina* and *Silumina* were selected on the basis of them being state-owned newspapers.

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.

Despite the absence of readership data, the weekly publication *Anidda* was selected as its content generally differs from coverage in the mainstream press and can be considered to provide alternative insights into events.

Likewise, *Uthayan*, a Jaffna-based publication, was selected, despite the absence of its readership data, as it is a regional publication. As a state-owned newspaper was included for the Sinhala sample, *Thinakaran* was selected to represent a state-owned Tamil newspaper to maintain consistency, despite it having relatively low readership.

Travel restrictions and the police curfew implemented to control the spread of COVID-19 adversely affected the publication and distribution of some newspapers in June 2020. Most papers monitored for the month of June 2020 were e-papers. *Anidda* was not published/not available—either in print or as an e-paper—on 07 June 2020. Meanwhile, although physical copies of *Uthayan* were published, issues with transporting the publication meant that the paper was not distributed outside Jaffna, nor were e-papers produced. Consequently, *Uthayan* was not monitored for the month of June 2020.

In these newspapers, articles that **had a bearing on religious freedom** were selected to assess the tonality of the reporting. These articles included:¹⁰

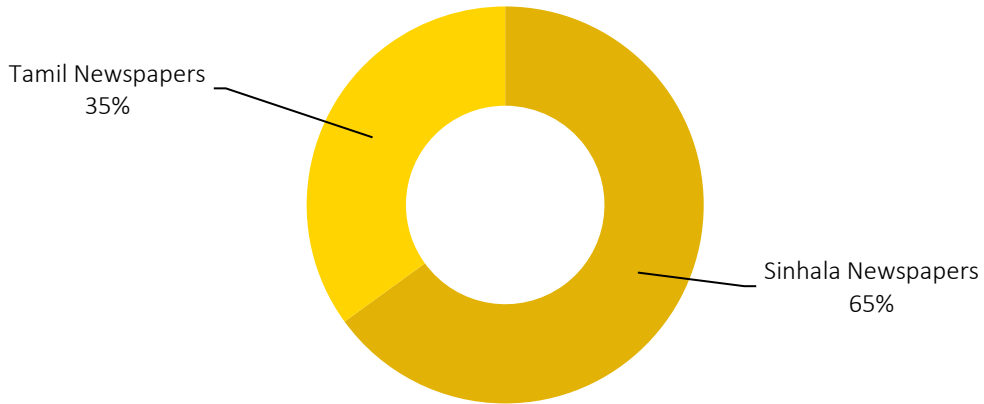
- ✦ Articles that referred to instances of physical violence that were religiously motivated, or targeted religious communities, figures or sites;
- ✦ Articles that referred to or contained speech prompting physical violence or threatening remarks targeted at religious communities, leaders or institutions;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

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

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

Overview

Percentage of Articles by Language

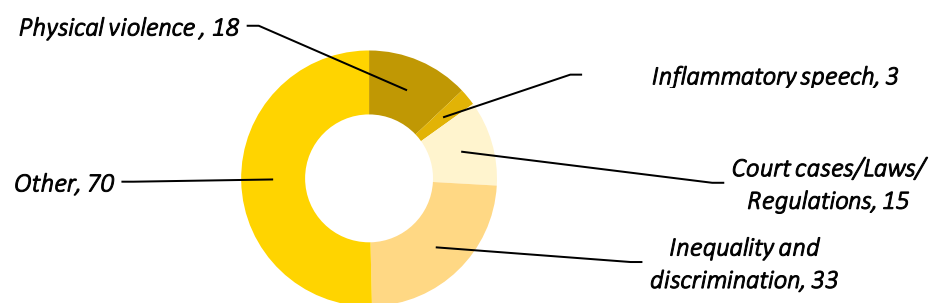


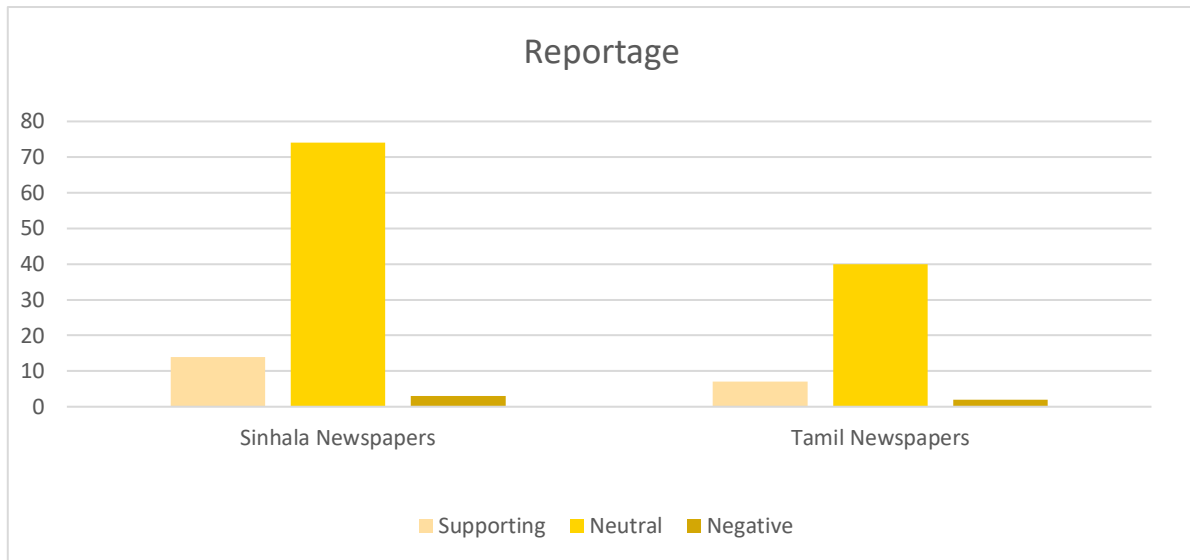
In June 2020, the Sinhala and Tamil newspapers monitored carried a total of 140 articles relating to religious freedom. Out of these, 65 per cent (91 articles) were carried in the Sinhala newspapers. Meanwhile, Tamil newspapers accounted for 35 per cent (49 articles) of the coverage.

Religious freedom was discussed under the following five themes:

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

Number of articles pertaining to religious freedom by theme



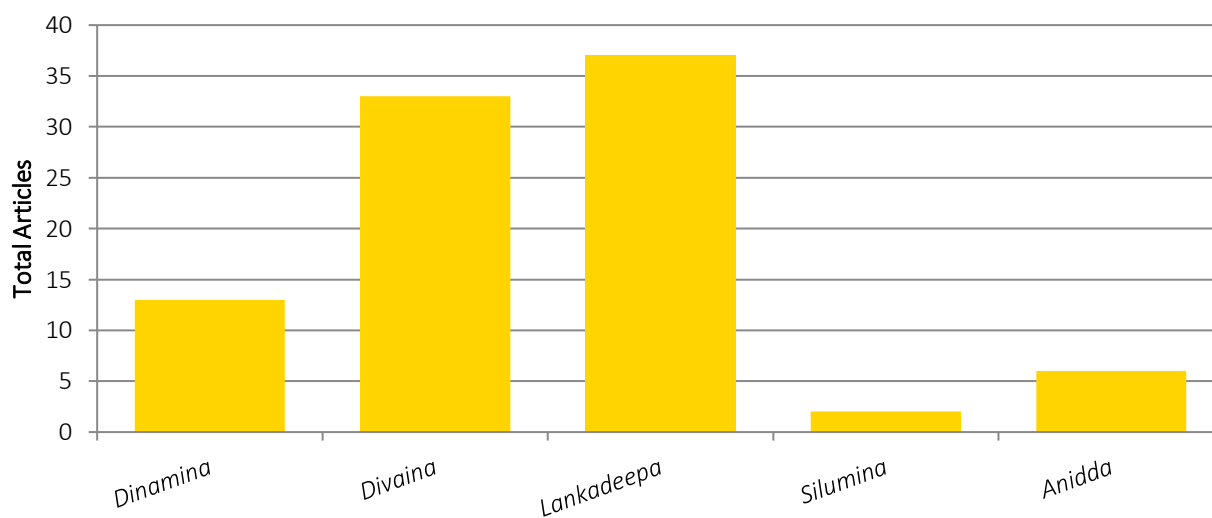


- ✦ Of the 91 articles in the Sinhala newspapers, three articles supported religious freedom, 74 articles were neutral, and 14 articles opposed religious freedom.
- ✦ Of the 49 articles in the Tamil newspapers, two articles supported religious freedom, 40 articles were neutral, and seven articles opposed religious freedom.

Coverage in Sinhala newspapers

| Sinhala Newspapers | No. of Articles | Reportage | | |
|--------------------|-----------------|------------|-----------|-----------|
| | | Supporting | Neutral | Opposing |
| <i>Dinamina</i> | 13 | 1 | 11 | 1 |
| <i>Divaina</i> | 33 | 1 | 22 | 10 |
| <i>Lankadeepa</i> | 37 | 1 | 34 | 2 |
| <i>Silumina</i> | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| <i>Anidda</i> | 6 | 0 | 6 | 0 |
| Total | 91 | 3 | 74 | 14 |

Sinhala Newspapers



The Sinhala press featured 91 articles that had a bearing on religious freedom. 3 articles supported religious freedom, 74 articles were neutral, and 14 articles opposed religious freedom.

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

✦ An article in *Divaina* regarding an almsgiving at Kaduruwela Jayanthi Temple on 5 June 2020. The article noted that mosques had contributed to the almsgiving and featured the Maha Sangha expressing their gratitude to the Muslim donors. A statement from Chief Incumbent of the Jayanthi Temple, Ven. Kaduruwela Dhammapala Thero framing this as an

example of peaceful coexistence, which was preferable to harping on religious and racial divides in the nation.¹¹

Lankadeepa and *Dinamina* articles written appreciation of the late Father Ernest Poruthota praised him for working to further understanding and tolerance between different races and religions in Sri Lanka. The *Dinamina* article was titled ‘Father Poruthota who even encouraged young Muslims to be part of the Youth group’¹².

Meanwhile, the **14 articles that opposed religious freedom** are as follows:

- ✦ A long opinion in *Silumina* titled ‘Historical Devanagala sacred grounds, now under attack by extremists’ attributed the ‘attack and vandalism’ of the Devanagala Rajamaha Temple to ‘religious extremists’.¹³
- ✦ An article in *Divaina* on the conviction and incarceration of Ven. Uwatenne Sumana for possession of weapons and ammunition featured a quote from Chief Sangha Nayaka of the Southern Province Ven. Dr. Omalpe Sobitha Thero noting that the nation was eager to see the fate of the mosques where swords, kris knives, axes and machetes had been found. The Thero expressed doubt as to whether the tools were intended to cut grass as had initially been stated.¹⁴
- ✦ An article in *Divaina* titled ‘The Government must take immediate measures to rescue the sacred Devanagala precincts from Muslim extremists’ featured a quote from Ven. Pahiyanigala Ananda Sagara Thero accusing ‘marauding Muslim extremists’ of vandalising the Devanagala Temple in Mawanella.¹⁵
- ✦ A long opinion in *Divaina* highlighted an ‘American report’ which had ‘vilified’ Buddhist monks by accusing them of religious extremism. The author alleged that the report had ‘ignored’ the actions of ‘Muslim extremists’ and the Easter bombings.¹⁶
- ✦ An article in *Divaina* featured a quote from former Chief Minister of the Northern Province, C.V. Wigneswaran stating that the Tamil community must come together as there are a great number of people who support the establishment of Sinhala-Buddhist hegemony in the country.¹⁷
- ✦ A long opinion in *Divaina* recounted violence propagated by the LTTE, including attacks against Buddhists monks (Aranthalawa massacre) and Buddhist pilgrims (in

¹¹ *Divaina*, June 06, p.15.

¹² *Dinamina*, June 19, p.12; *Lankadeepa*, June 20, p.12.

¹³ *Silumina*, June 07, p.19.

¹⁴ *Divaina*, June 07, p.01.

¹⁵ *Divaina*, June 13, p.07.

¹⁶ *Divaina*, June 13, p.09.

¹⁷ *Divaina*, June 15, p.11.

Anuradhapura and Kandy). The author then stated that Muslims can now be seen ‘propagating their brand of terror in our island’.¹⁸

- ✦ An article in *Lankadeepa* titled ‘Extremist sect member who ignored Police orders apprehended’ described the arrest of a 34-year old resident of Matale who failed to stop when ordered to halt at a checkpoint. The author noted that the police subsequently discovered suspicious documents in his possession and that he is now suspected to belong to an extremist group.¹⁹
- ✦ An article in *Divaina* stated that Dr. Mohamed Fareed had resigned from his position as Director of the Kurunegala Teaching Hospital following protests from parties including Buddhist priests and ‘affected Sinhalese women’ among others. The article noted that the protests were sparked by the transfer of the previous Dr. Sarath Weerabandara, the person who allegedly ‘brought to light’ allegations of infertility pills dispensed to Sinhalese women of the area by former Director Dr. Shafi Shihabdeen.
- ✦ An article in *Dinamina* featured a statement from former MP Daya Gamage alleging that the UNP had lost Buddhist votes due to its affiliation with members of the SLMC. Gamage added that the SLMC’s claim that it built the party to ensure Muslim rights fuels racism and religiosity.
- ✦ An article in *Divaina* featured a statement from former Chief Minister of the Northern Province C. V. Wigneswaran wherein he reportedly stated that the *Mahavamsa* is a work of fiction.
- ✦ An article in *Lankadeepa* featured a statement from former MP Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thero that the people had lost faith in the Opposition because they showed no objection to Islamic extremism. The Thero also accused various party leaders of shielding and promoting Wahabism and Islamic extremism, alleging that Sri Lanka was their ‘hunting grounds’ in Asia.
- ✦ An article in *Divaina* noted the arrest of a Muslim man posing as a doctor with fake credentials and running an abortion clinic in the Monaragala District for Sinhalese women.
- ✦ Articles in *Divaina* described the arrest of 3 ‘moulavis’ from Negombo who had ‘allegedly’ been collecting donations for Islamic schools from Muslim businessmen in a ‘suspicious manner’. One article described the suspects as collecting funds for a ‘Muslim extremist organisation’.²⁰

¹⁸ *Divaina*, June 02, p.12.

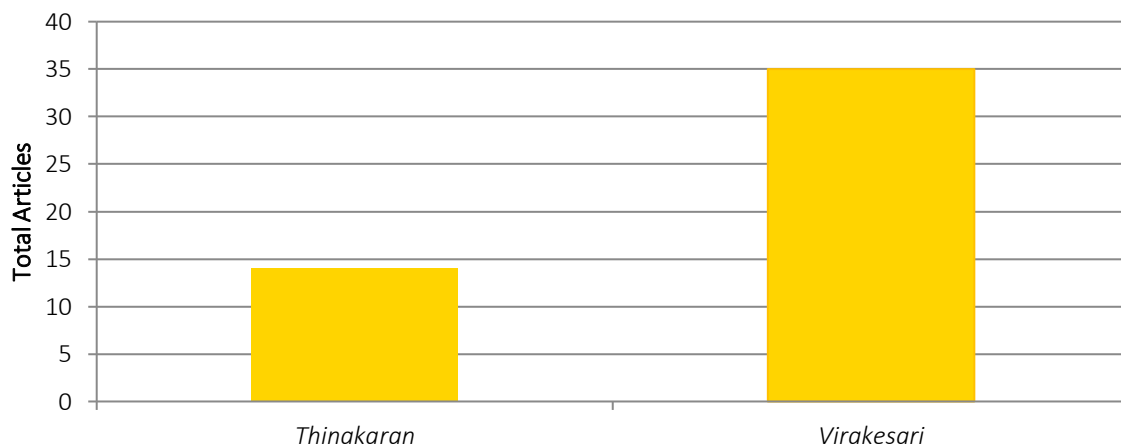
¹⁹ *Lankadeepa*, June 26, p.10.

²⁰ *Divaina*, June 19, p.3; *Divaina*, June 20, p.3.

Coverage in Tamil newspapers

| Tamil Newspapers | No. Articles | Reportage | | |
|-------------------|--------------|------------|-----------|----------|
| | | Supporting | Neutral | Opposing |
| <i>Thinakaran</i> | 14 | 2 | 12 | 0 |
| <i>Virakesari</i> | 35 | 0 | 28 | 7 |
| Uthayan | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 49 | 2 | 40 | 7 |

Tamil Newspapers



The Tamil press featured 49 articles that had a bearing on religious freedom. Two articles supported religious freedom, 40 were neutral, and seven articles opposed religious freedom.

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

- ✦ An article published in *Thinakaran* described how the All Ceylon Jamiyathul Ulama (ACJU) had distributed supplies during the COVID-19 curfew to various institutions across Colombo, including those affiliated with other religions such as temples, kovils and churches.²¹

²¹ *Thinakaran*, June 11, p.10.

- ✦ An article published in *Thinakaran* described how a Buddhist monk had appealed to President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to allow Hindu devotees to engage in the Kataragama pilgrimage.²²

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

- ✦ An editorial in *Virakesari* titled 'Is Buddhist patriotic thought reinforced?' carried criticisms of the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on Archaeological Heritage Management in the Eastern Province by Tamil politicians and organisations. The editorial claimed the PTF aimed to change the 'ethnic ratio in the East' and 'demolish and remove the archaeological remains of the Tamil community'. The author also noted that the task force was established following 'a discussion with Buddhist monks' and that Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa stated that the task force was established in 'gratitude for the sacrifices of Buddhist monks in the East'.²³
- ✦ A feature article in *Virakesari* titled 'Fundamentalism becomes a threat' stated that Sri Lanka is on track to a fundamentalism, which does not accept other philosophies and policies. The author added that President Gotabaya Rajapaksa supports 'Sinhala Buddhist patriotism' in gratitude for making him president and noted that he only appointed Sinhala-Buddhists to the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on Archaeological Heritage Management in the Eastern Province.²⁴
- ✦ A feature article in *Virakesari* titled 'Attempt to make the East a Buddhist Rasathani' (i.e. kingdom) noted that the establishment of the PTF on Archaeological Heritage Management in the Eastern Province has made the Tamil-speaking community panic. The author surfaces questions on whether the PTF was introduced to establish a Sinhala-Buddhist 'kingdom' in the region.²⁵
- ✦ An article in *Virakesari* noted that the 500-year old Kallatimalai Neeli Amman Kovil has been demolished and a Buddhist temple constructed in its place. The article added that security personnel protected the new temple, and that a 'racist monk' had been appointed to it.²⁶
- ✦ An interview with Tamil People's Alliance (TPA) Jaffna District Candidate M.K. Shivajilingam in *Virakesari* included a quote from Shivajilingam that the PTF for Archaeological Heritage Management in the Eastern Province will create a similar situation to that faced by the people of Palestine. He added that Sinhalese and Tamils

²² *Thinakaran*, June 16, p.03.

²³ *Virakesari*, June 03, p.04.

²⁴ *Virakesari*, June 06, p.9.

²⁵ *Virakesari*, June 06, p.11.

²⁶ *Virakesari*, June 10, p.11.

are subject to different laws, and that—since independence—Sinhala-Buddhist governments have been working to establish Buddhist majoritarian rule by spreading Buddhism across the country—especially in the East.²⁷

- ✦ A feature article in *Virakesari* stated that ‘hardline Buddhists’ had urged the president to bring the North under his surveillance. The author specifically noted that Ven. Ellawala Medhananda Thero, a member of the PTF for Archaeological Heritage Management in the Eastern Province, stated that he would urge the president to empower the PTF to monitor archaeological sites in the North. The author further noted that Hindu kovils in the East have not been developed due to being associated with the Anuradhapura era.²⁸
- ✦ An article in *Virakesari* noted that there was no Tamil or Muslim representation on the PTF for Archeological Heritage Management in the East—only Sinhala-Buddhists and members of the military. The author noted that the Tamil people viewed the PTF as a continuation of ‘ethnic cleansing’.²⁹

²⁷ *Virakesari*, June 18, p.4.

²⁸ *Virakesari*, June 20, p.11.

²⁹ *Virakesari*, June 28, p.3.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

The 140 articles monitored during the month of June 2020 can be categorised under four overarching themes pertaining to religious freedom. These themes are *physical violence towards people and/or property; court cases, laws and regulations pertaining to religious freedom; religious inequality and discrimination;* and *other related reporting*.

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

Two events/issues were selected for the month of June. These two issues/events were as follows: (1) The appointment of the Presidential Task Force for Archeological Heritage Management in the East; and (2) Harin Fernando’s statements criticising Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith.

The first issue falls under the theme *religious inequality and discrimination*, and the second is classified as *other related reporting*.

| Overarching theme | Events/ Issues |
|---|--|
| Religious inequality and discrimination | The appointment of the Presidential Task Force for Archeological Heritage Management in the East |
| Other related reporting | Harin Fernando’s statements criticising Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith |

Religious inequality and discrimination

This theme relates to any form of discrimination on religious grounds.

On 02 June 2020—following a statement made in May—President Gotabaya Rajapaksa issued a gazette notification establishing the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on Archaeological Heritage Management in the Eastern Province.³⁰ Coverage relating to the PTF dominated the Tamil press in June. By contrast, the Sinhala press carried no substantial coverage on the PTF. This is a reversal of the trend in Sinhala and Tamil press reportage relating to Muhudu Maha Viharaya—the context in which the PTF was first proposed.³¹ This disparity underscores a critical divergence in how the Sinhala and Tamil press perceive the PTF. To the Sinhala press the task force is simply **a solution to a problem**, whereas to the Tamil press the task force **constitutes the problem**.

The Tamil press response to the appointment of the PTF was overwhelmingly negative. Voices featured in the press underscored the ‘panic’ the task force had created among ethno-religious minorities in the East as well as the ensuing ‘wave of opposition’.³² Within this, the predominant criticism that surfaced was the lack of representation for Tamils and Muslims in the PTF.³³ As per the last national census on population and housing conducted in 2012, the demographic breakdown of the Eastern Province was as follows: 37% Muslim, 34.7% Hindu and 23% Buddhist.³⁴ Meanwhile, the Tamil press report that all members appointed to the PTF are Sinhala-Buddhist.³⁵ In this context, Tamil press commentary appeared to interpret the absence of minority voices as signaling a lack of investment in minority interests. Consequently, the PTF was portrayed as established specifically to cater to the interests of Sinhala-Buddhists.³⁶

This framing taps into an **emerging narrative around Sinhala-Buddhist majoritarianism and institutional decay** in Sri Lanka. Neil DeVotta described ‘institutional decay’ as setting in when ‘the state’s rulemaking, applying, adjudicating and enforcing institutions shower preferential treatment on a particular group while disregarding the legitimate grievances of other groups’.³⁷

³⁰ NewsFirst, *Presidential Task Force headed by Secretary of Defence appointed to manage archaeological sites*, (2020) at <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2020/06/03/presidential-task-force-headed-by-sec-defence-appointed-to-manage-archaeological-sites/> [Last accessed on 27 July 2020].

³¹ Verité Research, *Understanding Press Coverage on Religious Freedom* (May 2020) at <http://www.minormatters.org/en/media-pdfs> [Last accessed on 27 July 2020].

³² *Virakesari*, June 03, p.4; *Virakesari*, June 06, p.11; *Virakesari*, June 08, p.15; *Virakesari*, June 19, p.4.

³³ *Virakesari*, June 08, p.11; *Virakesari*, June 11, p.02; *Virakesari*, June 08, p.15; *Virakesari*, June 10, p.1; *Virakesari*, June 16, p.12; *Virakesari*, June 19, p.4; ; *Virakesari*, June 28, p.3.

³⁴ *Census of Population and Housing; Sri Lanka 2012*, at <http://www.statistics.gov.lk/PopHouSat/CPH2011/Pages/Activities/Reports/SriLanka.pdf> [Last accessed on 27 July 2020].

³⁵ *Virakesari*, June 06, p.9; *Virakesari*, June 28, p.3.

³⁶ *Virakesari*, June 03, p.4; *Virakesari*, June 06, p.9; *Virakesari*, June 06, p.11; *Virakesari*, June 09, p.16; *Virakesari*, June 18, p.1; *Virakesari*, June 18, p.4.

³⁷ DeVotta, Neil, *From ethnic outbidding to ethnic conflict: The institutional bases for Sri Lanka’s separatist war. Nations and Nationalism*, (2005) at 146 [Last accessed on 27 July 2020].

Scholars such as Gehan Gunatilleke have argued that such institutional decay has been incentivised in the Sri Lankan context by the galvanisation of Sinhala-Buddhist identity.³⁸ This is precisely the position taken by voices in the Tamil press which perceive the PTF—an institution affiliated with the state—as a tool to spread Sinhala-Buddhist influence across the Eastern province to the detriment of other ethno-religious communities.³⁹ For instance, several voices featured in the press advanced the belief that the task force was intended to ‘grab’ lands belonging to minority communities.⁴⁰ Building on this strand of commentary, some argued that Sinhalese would subsequently be allowed to settle on those lands.⁴¹ Contestations from voices aligned with the state - that claim that the PTF would protect the archeological heritage of all communities in the region - gained little traction.⁴² Negative perceptions of the PTF have likely been intensified due to its mandate pertaining to archeology. In the past, the Tamil press have framed the Department of Archeology as a victim of institutional decay, describing it as ‘an arm of the government that promotes Sinhala majoritarian dominance in the North and East’.⁴³ As such, state involvement in matters related to archeology has consistently been viewed with a measure of distrust.⁴⁴

Tamil press coverage also projected two possible consequences of the land grabs the PTF is expected to enable: first, a **destruction of the culture and heritage of minorities living in the East**, and second, a **change to the demographics in the East**. Both concerns can be better understood in the context of entrenched insecurities within Tamil-speaking communities in the North and East of Sri Lanka.

Concerns over destruction of the culture and heritage of minorities living in the East can be understood in relation to historical concerns held by the Tamil community with regard to land and collective rights.⁴⁵ Post-war triumphalist rhetoric contributed to a strengthening of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism and the associated ‘host-guest’ mindset entrenched in the Sri Lankan psyche.⁴⁶ Within the host-guest mindset, the rights of minorities—the ‘guests’—are

³⁸ Gunatilleke, Gehan. *The Chronic and the Entrenched: Ethno-Religious Violence in Sri Lanka* (International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Equitas, International Centre for Human Rights Education, 2018) at 62. Accessible at <http://ices.lk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/The-Chronic-and-the-Entrenched-Mr.Gihan-Book-FINAL-WEB-PDF.pdf>. [Last accessed on 27 July 2020].

³⁹ *Virakesari*, June 03, p.4; *Virakesari*, June 06, p.9; *Virakesari*, June 06, p.11; *Virakesari*, June 09, p.16; *Virakesari*, June 18, p.1; *Virakesari*, June 18, p.4.

⁴⁰ *Virakesari*, June 08, p.15; *Virakesari*, June 09, p.16; *Virakesari*, June 19, p.4.

⁴¹ *Virakesari*, June 18, p.1.

⁴² *Virakesari*, June 21, p.1; *Virakesari*, June 17, p.1.

⁴³ Verité Research, *Understanding Press Coverage on Religious Freedom* (July 2019) at <http://www.minormatters.org/en/media-pdfs> [Last accessed on 27 July 2020].

⁴⁴ Verité Research, *Understanding Press Coverage on Religious Freedom* (Dec 2018); Verité Research, *Understanding Press Coverage on Religious Freedom* (January 2019); Verité Research, *Understanding Press Coverage on Religious Freedom* (July 2019) at <http://www.minormatters.org/en/media-pdfs> [Last accessed on 27 July 2020].

⁴⁵ Monograph by the Social Architects, *Salt on old wounds: The systematic Sinhalization of Sri Lanka's North, East and Hill Country* (2012). https://www.scribd.com/fullscreen/86205026-Salt-on-Old-Wounds-by-TSA-The-Systematic-Sinhalization-of-Sri-Lanka-s-North-East-and-Hill-Country?access_key=key-3szuxcd2ta360nmtijl [Last accessed on 27 July 2020].

⁴⁶ Verite Research, *Sri Lanka Strategic Assessment*, (Asia Foundation, 2016) at 15 accessible at <https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Sri-Lanka-strategic-assessment.pdf> [Last accessed on 27 July 2020].

determined based on the benevolence of the ‘host’—Sinhala-Buddhists—as opposed to a rights-based framework.⁴⁷ Such a dynamic disadvantages claims that run counter to the narratives set forth by the ‘host’ community. For instance, Member of the PTF Ven. Ellawala Medhananda Thero stated in an interview that there is ‘no place’ for Tamils to declare the East was their ‘native homeland’ in the country.⁴⁸ This runs counter to the Tamil-nationalist narrative regarding a ‘traditional homeland’ in the North and East of the country.⁴⁹ Importantly, such contentions underly the two communities’ respective claims to contested religious sites in the North and East.⁵⁰ To date, the Tamil press continue to chronicle instances of Hindu kovils being demolished and replaced with Buddhist temples.⁵¹ The apprehension that the PTF—which ostensibly has the authority to weigh-in on such contestations—elicits within sections of the Tamil press, regarding the preservation of Tamil heritage, therefore, can be understood against this backdrop.

Concerns were also raised regarding the PTF paving the way for a **change in the ‘ethnic ratio’ in the East**. This concern can be understood in relation to how Muslim and Tamil communities in the region view their relationship with the state. Specifically, such communities have expressed the perception that “if the ethnic balance does not lie in their favour... their access to the state... will be minimal.”⁵² This perception extends beyond political power to also encompass access to economic opportunities and resources—such as loans—that are administered by the state.⁵³ This belief stems from a perception that state institutions cannot be relied on to impartially deliver the needs of the people (i.e. that institutional decay has set in).⁵⁴ Specifically, the pervasiveness of political patronage structures within domestic politics, has created the impression that those persons and communities with access to politicians benefit at the expense of other.⁵⁵ Within this framework, a demographic shift that increases the Buddhist presence—necessarily reducing the relative presence of other communities—would adversely affects Tamil-speaking communities’ ability to access vital state resources.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Virakesari*, June 28, p.16.

⁴⁹ Verite Research, *Sri Lanka Strategic Assessment*, (Asia Foundation, 2016) at 15 accessible at <https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Sri-Lanka-strategic-assessment.pdf> [Last accessed on 27 July 2020].

⁵⁰ Verité Research, *Understanding Press Coverage on Religious Freedom* (July 2019); Verité Research, *Understanding Press Coverage on Religious Freedom* (September 2019) at <http://www.minormatters.org/en/media-pdfs> [Last accessed on 27 July 2020].

⁵¹ *Virakesari*, June 10, p.11.

⁵² Verite Research, *Sri Lanka Strategic Assessment*, (Asia Foundation, 2016) at 25 accessible at <https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Sri-Lanka-strategic-assessment.pdf>. [Last accessed on 27 July 2020].

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

Other related reporting

This theme accounts for all reportage in relation to religious freedom that cannot be brought under any of the other themes.

On 21 June 2020, member of the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) Harin Fernando criticised Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith by saying his political involvement cost Leader of the SJB Sajith Premadasa the ‘Catholic vote’ at the 2019 Presidential Election.⁵⁶ Coverage of Fernando’s statement and the strong backlash towards it featured heavily in the Sinhala press in the month of June. Notably, the Tamil press did not offer significant coverage of the issue.

The Sinhala press response to Fernando’s statement gives insight into shifting ethno-religious dynamics in the country. Overall, voices featured in the press were critical of Fernando. Such criticisms typically centred around discussions of: (1) the **substance of Fernando’s claims**, and (2) the **subject of Fernando’s claims**.

The substance of Fernando’s claims

Fernando accused the Cardinal of leveraging the circumstances of the Easter Sunday attacks to contribute to the defeat of Sajith Premadasa at the presidential election. Voices featured in the mainstream press dismissed the claim as ‘baseless’ and called for remedial action.⁵⁷ Mangala Samaraweera—who has himself come under fire for criticising the Buddhist clergy—and sections of the alternative press alone suggested that Fernando’s statements were accurate.⁵⁸ However, this view remained marginal. Notably, the language used to describe Fernando’s statement—‘disgusting, ‘derogatory’, ‘defamatory’—indicated that commentators viewed the allegations levelled against the Cardinal to be serious.⁵⁹ On the one hand, this view might be understood as responding to the suggestion that the Easter Sunday attacks had been leveraged for political gain. Several voices implied that accusing the Cardinal of leveraging the attacks was especially egregious given his contributions to minimising violence in the aftermath of the attacks.⁶⁰ Beyond this, many voices also highlighted Fernando’s claim that the cardinal “played politics”.⁶¹ The archdiocese’s response to Fernando for instance, specifically rejected this aspect of Fernando’s claim.⁶²

⁵⁶ *Economy Next*, *Harin says remarks on Cardinal taken out of context, issues clarification on Easter attacks* (2020), at <https://economynext.com/harin-says-remarks-on-cardinal-taken-out-of-context-issues-clarification-on-easter-attacks-71359/> [Last accessed on 27 July 2020].

⁵⁷ *Lankadeepa*, June 23, p.1; *Divaina*, June 23, p.1; *Dinamina*, June 23, p.2.

⁵⁸ *Dinamina*, June 25, p.1; *Divaina*, June 25, p.1; *Anidda*, June 28, p.1.

⁵⁹ *Lankadeepa*, June 23, p.1; *Divaina*, June 23, p.1; *Dinamina*, June 24, p.7; *Divaina*, June 25, p.10; *Divaina*, June 25, p.11.

⁶⁰ *Dinamina*, June 24, p.17; *Divaina*, June 24, p.3; *Divaina*, June 24, p.8; *Divaina*, June 25, p.1.

⁶¹ *Divaina*, June 25, p.10; *Divaina*, June 24, p.3; *Divaina*, June 23, p.1; *Lankadeepa*, June 23, p.1.

⁶² *Divaina*, June 25, p.10.

The subject of Fernando's claims

Many press voices criticised Fernando for criticising a religious leader.⁶³ This backlash mirrored criticisms directed at fellow SJB member Mangala Samaraweera when he criticised the Maha Sangha. In the case of Samaraweera, the hostile response to his comments can also be understood in relation to the entrenchment of Buddhist monastic exceptionalism within the Sri Lankan psyche.⁶⁴ As DeVotta and Stone explain, the Buddhist clergy in Sri Lanka 'command enormous respect' by virtue of being viewed as representing '*Buddha* and *Dhamma* (doctrine)'.⁶⁵ Consequently, Buddhist monks are afforded significant impunity for their actions.⁶⁶ Understanding why the Cardinal—the religious leader of a minority community that has itself been targeted in the Sinhala press—was afforded such a spirited defense is more complicated. A potential answer lies in a belief held by certain Sinhala-nationalists that Sinhalese Catholics and Sinhala-Buddhists are aligned in terms of the broader political interests of the Sinhala community.⁶⁷ This aligns with the framing of the Cardinal as an individual who is 'honored not only by Catholics but also the Sinhala Buddhist community'.⁶⁸ Consequently, the Cardinal is generally perceived to be an ally of Sinhala nationalism within the Sinhala press.⁶⁹ Thus, criticisms of the Cardinal are treated as 'attacks' on Sinhala nationalism and are responded to in-line with this belief.

⁶³ *Divaina*, June 24, p.8; *Lankadeepa*, June 26, p.2; *Lankadeepa*, June 24, p.5.

⁶⁴ Gunatilleke, Gehan, *The Chronic and the Entrenched: Ethno-Religious Violence in Sri Lanka* (International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Equitas, International Centre for Human Rights Education, 2018) at 77 Accessible at <http://ices.lk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/The-Chronic-and-the-Entrenched-Mr.Gihan-Book-FINAL-WEB-PDF.pdf>. [Last accessed on 27 July 2020].

⁶⁵ DeVotta, Neil & Stone, Jason. *Jathika Heia Urumaya and Ethno-Religious Politics in Sri Lanka* (Pacific Affairs 2008) [Last accessed on 27 July 2020].

⁶⁶ Gunatilleke, Gehan, *The Chronic and the Entrenched: Ethno-Religious Violence in Sri Lanka* (International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Equitas, International Centre for Human Rights Education, 2018) at 77 Accessible at <http://ices.lk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/The-Chronic-and-the-Entrenched-Mr.Gihan-Book-FINAL-WEB-PDF.pdf>. [Last accessed on 27 July 2020].

⁶⁷ 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.10, #26.

⁶⁸ *Dinamina*, June 24, p.7; *Lankadeepa*, June 23, p.1; *Divaina*, June 25, p.10; *Divaina*, June 25, p.11.

⁶⁹ 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. 09, #16.

CONCLUSION

This report was based on media reportage featured during the month of June 2020 on issues related to religious freedom. The reportage was carried in newspapers in the two national languages—Sinhala and Tamil. The analysis in this report took into account 140 articles dealing with religious freedom under five overarching themes. The events/issues that were qualitatively analysed in this report related to two of these five themes, i.e., court cases, laws and regulations pertaining to religious freedom, and religious inequality and discrimination. The articles selected for analysis were chosen on the basis that they featured new events/issues, which gained traction in the Tamil and/or Sinhala press. These articles were analysed by taking into consideration the sentiment expressed towards religious freedom. The sentiment was identified through the content, perspectives, and tone of reporting in these respective articles. A qualitative analysis of the reported content led to two key findings:

(1) The negative response towards the Presidential Task Force for Archeological Heritage Management in the East from the Tamil press drew on entrenched insecurities regarding the relationship between the state and Tamil-speaking people. The press viewed the absence of minority representation on the task force as an indicator that the PTF, too, was affected by institutional decay. Consequently, voices in the press surfaced concerns regarding the PTF in terms of: (1) a destruction of minority heritage, and (2) a shift in the ethnic balance that reduces non-Buddhists' access to the state.

(2) The Sinhala press response to former MP Harin Fernando's criticism of Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith were overwhelmingly negative. Criticisms of Fernando's statements tended to focus on the **substance** of his claims and/or the **subject** of his claims. Criticism of the substance of Fernando's claims pushed back against his claims that the Cardinal engaged in active politics and that the Cardinal evoked the circumstances of the Easter Sunday attacks for this purpose. Criticisms that focused on the subject of Fernando's claim indicated strong support for the Cardinal. This support can be explained in the context of the view that the Cardinal is an ally of Sinhala nationalism and is afforded defense in-line with this view.

RELATED REPORTING

Ven. Hegoda Sri Indasara Thero, dedicated to historical Buddhist revival in Digamadulla (Ven. Gampaha Narada Thero) This venerated Buddhist priest born in the South was instrumental in the great Buddhist revival in the West of our island, seven decades ago. In a 30 year war against terror, when innocent villagers of Aranthalawa were senselessly murdered, Ven. Hegoda Sri Indasara Thero went to the village and in a moving speech said fearlessly that Prabakaran and his inhuman band of terrorists must be destroyed. On 2 Jun 1987 in retaliation, the Thero along with 31 other innocent student priests were brutally massacred.⁷⁰

33 years since the Bhikku massacre that shocked the world (Wasantha Chandapala) 33 years after the brutal Aranthalawa slaughter of innocents, the writer goes into great detail of the mentality of the young student Bhikkus as they excitedly mounted the bus that was to lead them to death. Senselessly hacked and beaten to death by Tamil separatists in the jungles of Aranthalawa, the Ven. Hegoda Sri Indasara Thero, leader and teacher of this group of young novice monks was felled first, soon after the driver of the bus was gunned down. The sole survivor of this tragedy is wheelchair-bound to this day.⁷¹

Ven. Uvatenne Sumana Thero sentenced to life imprisonment (A J A Abeynayake) Colombo High Court Judge, sentenced the Chief incumbent of Sri Bodhirajaramaya, Maligawatte, to life imprisonment. The Thero was found guilty of possessing two T56 weapons and 210 rounds of live ammunition which were found when STF and CID had raided the temple a few days before the 2010 presidential election. Four persons including another monk and three Tamils at the temple during the raid were charged as well but later acquitted.⁷²

Savage Tigers who turned saffron robes crimson with blood (Ven. Budugala Jinawansa Thero) The advent of LTTE terror was in the 70s, when they set fire to a CTB bus in Jaffna and later assassinated one of their own Tamil leaders, Duraiappa - Mayor of Jaffna. These inhuman terrorists infiltrated and ruined every form of civilian life in our land. It is now 33 years since the Aranthalawa Buddhist monk massacre, where mostly young monks were inhumanly chopped up with machetes and beaten to death. This is the most despicable and heinous crime against innocent clergy, like killing voiceless animals. They killed many other innocent Buddhist pilgrims in Anuradhapura, Kandy and several other places. Now we see Muslims propagating their brand of terror in our island too. 11 years after defeating the despised LTTE, no other nation can match what our forces did, nor is there any other way to combat terror in the rest of the Western world.⁷³

Ven. Uvatenne Sumana Thero incarcerated for life (Manopriya Gunasekera) Highcourt Judge ordered Ven. Uvatenne Sumana Thero to a life sentence for possession of a T56 weapon, 50 hand grenades and 210 rounds of live ammunition in the temple precincts prior to the 2010 Presidential election. Another priest and 3 Tamil youths also arrested in this connection were acquitted of all charges and released.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ *Lankadeepa*, June 1, p. 14.

⁷¹ *Lankadeepa*, June 1, p. 14.

⁷² *Divaina*, June 2, 1.

⁷³ *Divaina*, June 2, p. 12.

⁷⁴ *Lankadeepa*, June 2, p. 6.

Adherent in custody over Temple Novice murder (Augustine Fernando) A devotee of the Madampe Galmuruwa Temple was detained by Chilaw police early morning on 30 May 2020 on suspicion, for the murder of a young Buddhist monk on 12 May 2020. A bloodied pole, believed to be the murder weapon was found in his custody. The novice monk had sustained at least two fractured ribs and had been beaten to death within the temple premises.⁷⁵

Mourning the Aranthalawa Bhikku massacre... (Wasantha Chandapala) 2 June 2020 saw 33 years after the heinous Aranthalawa Buddhist monk massacre. A respectful memorial was held under COVID-19 guidelines, close to the Ven. Indasara Thero monument in Aranthalawa, immortalising the 30 monks who lost their lives. The President announced that he would instate a Presidential Task Force to protect and nurture Buddhist heritage in the West of SL, to honour these monks who gave their lives for Buddhism. In the last moment before he was felled by a terrorist's sword, Ven Hegoda Indasara had pleaded with his executioner to take his life, but spare the young novices, yet they slaughtered all but one who managed to escape but is disabled for life. Even after such a despicable act, the State refused to protect Buddhism and its places of worship.⁷⁶

An act to preserve Buddhism (Wijayadasa Rajapakse) A nation is only as strong as its leadership and their attempts to protect and preserve its people. A democracy survives only as long as its leaders acknowledge the law as applicable to all alike. A religious order survives only as long as its adherents respect its basic principles. Faith and rules are two different topics but must both be obeyed in order to preserve Buddha Shasana. Now, more than ever before we see the need for rules and regulations of Buddhist philosophy to be strongly imposed on the clergy so that they set a good example, protect and preserve Theravada Buddhism in our nation.⁷⁷

Alms-giving in memory of all Buddhist monks slaughtered by the LTTE at Aranthalawa (Wasantha Chandrapala, Sandaru Bandara & Kumara C Liyanaarachchi) 2 June 2020 was the 33rd death anniversary of the brutal massacre of more than 30 Buddhist monks at Aranthalawa. A memorial alms-giving was held in accordance with COVID-19 regulations near the Ven. Hegoda Indasara Thero monument. The solemn event was attended by several government and army officials.⁷⁸

Muslims are fearful because of the Easter attacks - Rauf Hakeem Leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress and United National Front candidate for Kandy District, Rauf Hakeem stated that Muslims live in constant fear owing to unfair accusations being leveled at them following the Easter attacks that took place last year. He further mentioned that the Muslim community in no way condoned the barbaric act by extremist suicide bombers and that Muslim clergy had even refused to give their remains any form of burial. He mentioned that the current state of fear and uncertainty faced by Muslims was unfair, yet no one dared to voice out their opinion fearing the consequences. He further revealed that Muslim politicians faced much opposition

⁷⁵ *Lankadeepa*, June 2, p. 19.

⁷⁶ *Lankadeepa*, June 3, p. 13.

⁷⁷ *Lankadeepa*, June 3, p. 4.

⁷⁸ *Lankadeepa*, June 3, p. 12.

and threats and three of them had been forced to resign following unjust accusations of them being involved in the Easter attacks.⁷⁹

41 allegations against Shafi Shihabdeen (By R. M. W. Bandara) Accusations against Dr Shafi Shihabdeen alleging that he had caused barrenness among Sinhala women of the area were presented in a 41 plaint before the Kurunegala Magistrate on 25 June 2020. The accusations were many and varied, gathered from doctors, nurses and midwives who accused the gynaecologist of unethical practices which included using single layer sutures for Sinhalese Caesarean patients and double layers for Muslims, vigorously wiping the inner womb wall with gauze post-surgery for Sinhala patients and performing Muslim blessings for babies born to Muslim mothers.⁸⁰

Elect proper parliamentarians who understand people's struggles and empathise, this time - Dhanawardena Guruge (By Nishantha Amarasinghe and Susil Jayakody) Biyagama chief UNP organiser Dhanawardena Guruge said in a mass rally at Negombo that although most parliamentarians seek votes in the guise of promising solutions to alleviate poverty, they forget all this when gaining power. He stated furthermore that he did not enter politics to gain wealth but used his own private funds to meet the needs of those in need. He strongly criticised United People's Freedom Alliance candidate Harin Fernando's accusation of the Archbishop Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith, stating that he must immediately seek forgiveness from the Archbishop and the Catholic community. Even though Sajith Premadasa had apologised on behalf of the party, he mentioned that the people had a right to know what action the party planned to take in relation to Harin Fernando.⁸¹

Sweep out those who do nothing for country-nation-religion - Ven. Secretary of the Asgiri Chapter (By J. A. L. Jayasinghe) Deputy Secretary of the Asgiriya Chapter, Ven. Narampanawe Ananda Thero stated that the nation and voters must sweep away worthless politicians who had no regard for the country, nation or religion and eject them out of the political arena. He mentioned that politicians who had no respect for anyone were on the rise and that the people had a responsibility to decide for themselves who should come into power and to select only those who showed respect to religious leaders who are committed to the greater good of the nation as well as members of the armed forces and to do away with those who denigrate them.⁸²

If Harin wants Catholic votes, show stance on Islamic extremism and the MCC - Former MP Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thero (By Vinitha M. Gamage) Former parliamentarian Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thero stated at a media briefing on 23 June 2020 that the people had lost faith in the Opposition because they showed no objection to Islamic extremism. He also mentioned that

⁷⁹ *Dinamina*, June 26, p. 6.

⁸⁰ *Divaina*, June 26, 1.

⁸¹ *Divaina*, June 26, p. 11.

⁸² *Lankadeepa*, June 26, p. 1.

they should state their stance on the MCC Agreement, as the nation had a right to know. He decried the deliberate insult of the Cardinal, being a respected religious leader, and also accused various party leaders of shielding and promoting Wahabism and Islamic extremism, alleging that Sri Lanka had proven to be their hunting grounds in the Asian region.⁸³

Extremist sect member who ignored Police orders apprehended (By Bimal Shyaman Jayasinghe) A 34 year old resident of Matale, Mohamed Bassir Mohamed Rishan was apprehended and arrested after he failed to stop when ordered to halt at a checkpoint. Traffic police gave chase and placed him under arrest at Dehiwela and seized the vehicle he was travelling in. The suspect was allegedly unemployed but had relocated to Mount Lavinia five months ago at a relatively high rent. Eight pen-drives, ten CDs, two computers, three mobile phones, four hard drives containing phone data, eight bank passbooks under various names, 20 utility bills under various ownership were found in the vehicle and 2 grams of cannabis was also discovered on his person. It is believed that he is an organiser or member of a religious extremist group.⁸⁴

Gnanasara Thero revokes writ petition (By Thilini de Silva and Ranjan Katugampola) Ven. Galagoda Atthe Gnanasara Thero revoked a writ petition filed at the Supreme Court pleading to invalidate and overrule the decision of the presiding officer Kurunegala District to reject nomination papers by 'Ape Jana Bala Pakshaya' under the Thero's leadership. The case was revoked on 25 June 2020.⁸⁵

Fake doctor arrested at abortion clinic (By Dilip N. Jayasekera) A Muslim man posing as a doctor with fake credentials and running an abortion clinic in the Monaragala District for Sinhalese women was arrested on 24 June 2020 along with 19 western drugs in his custody.⁸⁶

Wattala Mabola Municipal Council condemns Harin's remarks about Archbishop (By Wattala Sarath Chinthaka) The Wattala Mabola Municipal Council condemned United People's Freedom Alliance candidate Harin Fernando's remarks regarding the Archbishop Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith, stating that he must immediately seek forgiveness from the Archbishop and the Catholic community⁸⁷

Harin is right! (By Lasantha Ruhunage) There has been a huge media outrage following former MP Harin Fernando's implication that Archbishop Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith engaged in dirty politics after the Easter attacks. Although all religious leaders and most politicians publicly berated Fernando for his statement, he refused to apologise, and former MP Mangala Samaraweera agreed that he should not. The writer states that Fernando was right, but that

⁸³ *Lankadeepa*, June 26, p. 2.

⁸⁴ *Lankadeepa*, June 26, p. 10.

⁸⁵ *Lankadeepa*, June 26, p. 16.

⁸⁶ *Divaina*, June 27, p. 6.

⁸⁷ *Lankadeepa*, June 27, p. 13.

the politics began way back, on his appointment as Archbishop. He then stated that no one who followed Buddhist precepts would be allowed in the Church, but has proven to be a pawn of the Rajapakse regime, to the point of shamelessly blessing these anti-Muslim, so-called Buddhist politicians.⁸⁸

Are quarantine regulations aimed at discriminating against minorities? (By Rekha Nilukshi Herath) Recently devotees were prevented by the security forces from worshipping at the Amman Kovil in Nainathivu in the Jaffna District. On the surface this was done in accordance with the restrictions imposed to curb the coronavirus pandemic. Though the objective was good, the way it was done and the way devotees were treated was not. It seems that quarantine regulations are being used to target and discriminate against minorities. This is more prevalent in the North than in the South.⁸⁹

What the Catholic church and Harin's party say about his remarks regarding the Archbishop (By Priyantha Kodippili) United People's Freedom Alliance candidate Harin Fernando's recently stated that the Archbishop Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith was responsible for the UNP presidential candidate's defeat at the last election. The Catholic church and members of his party, including SJB leader Sajith Premadasa condemned his remarks and apologised to the Archbishop.⁹⁰

We will reduce prices of essential items as soon as we come into power - Lakshman Kiriella (By Prasanna Sanjeeva Tennekone) Former UNP MP Kandy District and leader of the house of Parliament, Lakshman Kiriella stated in a press interview on 27 June 2020 that the cost of essential items will be reduced no sooner they come back into power. He agreed that owing to Mangala Samaraweera's comments, the party lost the Buddhist vote during the Presidential election and similarly were likely to lose the Catholic voter base owing to Harin Fernando's statements.⁹¹

We are not 'Buddhists' for namesake (By Dayawansha Abeykoon) Ever since ancient times our tiny island has held a special place owing to the preservation and propagation of Buddhist culture and tradition, which we are still famous for. However, there are also undesirable elements that have crept in, spewing hatred and violence, and seeking revenge. This is owing to their own foolishness and pride and does not reflect true Buddhism.⁹²

I will not say anything further about the Cardinal, but neither will I change my stance - Harin Fernando (By Norman Palihawadana) In a discussion with The Island newspaper, former MP Harin Fernando reiterated that he stood by what he originally said, although he would not voice any further opinions about the Cardinal, and blamed the media for dragging such matters on.

⁸⁸ *Anidda*, June 28, p. 1.

⁸⁹ *Anidda*, June 28, p. 4.

⁹⁰ *Lankadeepa*, June 28, p. 18.

⁹¹ *Lankadeepa*, June 28, p. 30.

⁹² *Lankadeepa Thaksalawa*, June 28, p. 7.

His accusation was that Sajith Premadasa lost the Catholic vote owing to certain statements made by Archbishop Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith.⁹³

Harin meets and pays obeisance to the Archbishop Former Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa, accompanied by former Minister Harin Fernando, met Colombo Archbishop Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith on 27 June 2020. Fernando came under criticism last week as he questioned the conduct of the Colombo Archbishop in the run up to the last Presidential election.⁹⁴

Lawyer Ali Sabry demands 150 Mn as compensation from Medille Thero (Thilini de Silva and Ranjan Katugampola) President's Advisor and SLPP National List contender, Mr. Ali Sabry has demanded Rs. 150 million in a defamation claim against Ven. Panyaloka Medille Thero for ruining his political career by propagating false and malicious content on social media and via press/media briefings. The petitioner has appealed to the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka stating that the respondent had used derogatory terms against him including allegations of associating with terrorists and extremists.⁹⁵

(Karunaratne Gamage) An alms-giving was held at Kaduruwela Jayanthi Temple honouring the Maha Sangha of 249 temples in the Polonnaruwa District, marking Poson Poya day on 5 June 2020. This great endeavor was undertaken jointly by the Police, Muslim mosques and Volunteer Organisations Conference of the District. The Maha Sangha expressed their gratitude to the donors who were Muslim and the volunteers for their selfless act of such a vast undertaking not only to Buddhist clergy, but to the people of the District including medical and nursing personnel who had previously been given dry rations and special donations to the COVID-19 quarantine centre in Welikanda. Chief Incumbent of the Jayanthi Temple, Ven. Kaduruwela Dhammapala Thero observed that this was a great service and example of peaceful coexistence instead of harping on religious and racial divides in our nation.⁹⁶

In the dense jungle ... Aranthalawa Bhikku massacre 33 years ago - Part 2 (Saman Dissanayake) A survivor of the heinous massacre, currently Chief Incumbent of the Ampara Udayapura Peace Temple, Ven. Hanguranketha Punyasara Thero detailed his trauma about how he is now maimed and disabled for life. He will never forget how the terrorists boarded that fatal bus and chopped up bodies of the mostly young novice Bhikkus with swords and machetes, then riddled the bus with bullets. He was one of the first to fall and several of the dead fell atop him. His left leg took 3 bullets and shrapnel lodged in his spine. For approximately 25 years after the incident, he still had trouble sleeping, suffers from PTSD and refuses to have his picture taken. Although there was allegedly another young novice monk who survived the incident, the

⁹³ *Divaina*, June 29, p. 1.

⁹⁴ *Divaina*, June 29, p. 1.

⁹⁵ *Lankadeepa*, June 6, p. 10.

⁹⁶ *Divaina*, June 6, p. 15.

writer's attempts at connecting with him were unsuccessful. The Thero expressed his gratitude to the President and nation for standing by him all these years through the horror he endured.⁹⁷

Religious Festivals that were curbed due to pandemics in the past (Dhanesh Visumperuma) - COVID-19 has had a global impact on every aspect of life, including halting all religious observances and pilgrimages in our nation. The last two months of the annual pilgrimage season to Adam's Peak was severely affected and Buddhist devotees have been compelled to observe Poya and other significant days secluded in their homes. Christians were unable to celebrate Good Friday and Easter in April and Muslims were unable to celebrate Ramazan in their usual style in May. These were owing to Government restrictions in an effort to curb the coronavirus outbreak. Such restrictions were imposed at several points in Sri Lanka's history, particularly under British rule from 1914-1920. Outbreaks of cholera, rat fever, smallpox, the plague and influenza were handled by restricting movement and public or social gatherings. Many religious festivals were banned at these times, to prevent the spread of then incurable diseases islandwide, when mortality rates were high.⁹⁸

Ven. Sumana Thero sentenced to life imprisonment for concealing weapons (Nishani Herath Banneheka) Ven. Uwatenne Sumana Thero of Sri Bodhirajarama Temple, Maligawatte, was convicted of illegal possession of weapons and incarcerated for life last week. The conviction was in connection with the concealment of two T-56 rifles, 50 hand grenades and 210 live rounds of ammunition in the Temple premises during the 2010 Presidential Election. Another priest at the temple along with 3 Tamil youths were similarly accused but released in 2018, absolved of all charges. Residents of the area and devotees of the Temple expressed their sorrow and disbelief at the sentence, stating that he was a good priest who helped everyone he could, irrespective of caste or creed, and that he was always kind and courteous.⁹⁹

Historical Devanagala sacred grounds, now under attack by extremists (Rukshila Wettimuny) The writer alleges that the 72 acres belonging to the Devanagala Rajamaha Temple, of great archaeological, historical, and religious significance, has been subject to attack and vandalism by outsiders for quite some time. As much as the media have sought to highlight this case, the writer feels that the government should enforce strict measures to contain the damage caused and expresses how disastrous it is that a site of such great significance, reaching far back into the Anuradhapura Era of Sri Lankan history, should today fall prey to religious extremists.¹⁰⁰

Laws should operate for swords and kris knives as much as for guns - Ven. Omalpe Sobitha Thero (Chatura Pamunuwa) Subsequent to Ven. Uwatenne Sumana Thero's conviction and incarceration for possession of T-56 weapons and ammunition, Ven. Dr. Omalpe Sobitha Thero, Chief Sangha Nayaka of the Southern Province stated that the nation was eager to see the fate

⁹⁷ *Lankadeepa Rasavitha*, June 7, p. 3.

⁹⁸ *Lankadeepa Thaksalawa*, June 7, p. 7.

⁹⁹ *Silumina*, June 7, p. 15.

¹⁰⁰ *Silumina*, June 7, p. 19.

of those mosques where swords, kris knives, axes and machetes were found. The issue was whether these swords were to cut grass, as originally stated.¹⁰¹

Pointing to Jaffna library and insulting the Sinhala people (Chatura Pamunuwa) It has been 39 years since the Jaffna library was burned down. More than 97,000 books and manuscripts were destroyed in the fire. Former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe said that this act took place when the UNP was in power and took responsibility for it. But 39 years after the fact, the entire responsibility for the burning of the library is being laden on the Sinhalese people. The peaceful Sinhala people never approved of this act. Can the act of a few thugs be blamed on the entire Sinhala people? When Prabakaran attacked the Dalada Maligawa, did the Sinhala Buddhist people blame the entire Tamil people? Further blaming and insulting the entire Sinhala community for the burning of the Jaffna library must cease.¹⁰²

The LTTE's heinous attack against Buddhist legacy (Susantha Amarabandu) The Chief Incumbent of the Ampara Udayapura Peace Temple, Ven. Hanguranketha Punyasara Thero is the only survivor of the heinous massacre of Buddhist monks by the LTTE. He will never forget how the terrorists boarded that fatal bus and chopped up bodies of the mostly young novice Bhikkus with swords and machetes, then riddled the bus with bullets. He was one of the first to fall and several of the dead fell atop him. His left leg took 3 bullets and shrapnel lodged in his spine. For 25 years after the incident, he still has trouble sleeping and suffers from PTSD and refuses to have his picture taken. Although there was allegedly another young novice monk who survived the incident, the writer's attempts at connecting with him were unsuccessful. The Thero expressed his gratitude to the President and nation for standing by him all these years through the horror he endured.¹⁰³

Archbishop Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith asks President for permission to conduct mass while observing health regulations (Sujith Hewajulige et al) - The Archbishop has requested that the President permit Catholic Mass to be held in accordance with COVID-19 health regulations for a restricted congregation. The Cardinal made the request taking into consideration the fact that the country is slowly returning to normal and that Catholic churches shutdown immediately, in keeping with the government ruling at the outset of the pandemic.¹⁰⁴

DIG Muditha made an incorrect statement: he never spoke about providing security for the Church (Nimanthi Ranasinghe) The Priest of St. Mary's Church Dehiwela, giving evidence before the Presidential Commission into the 2019 Easter attacks stated that DIG of Police - Muditha Pussella never had a conversation with him about providing security for the Church, and that his statement was an outright lie. The Priest further stated that had they been given any intimation of the planned suicide attacks by religious extremists, the services would have been

¹⁰¹ *Divaina*, June 7, p. 1.

¹⁰² *Divaina*, June 7, p. 18.

¹⁰³ *Divaina*, June 7, p. 18.

¹⁰⁴ *Lankadeepa*, June 8, p. 1.

canceled islandwide. The only reason he had requested police protection during special services at the premises was owing to a series of robberies that had taken place.¹⁰⁵

Kurunegala Maha Sangha and mothers up in arms against Base Hospital Director (Hemantha Randunu) Kurunegala Buddhist clergy, mothers, hospital staff and the general population have raised a public outcry against the new appointee Dr. Mohamed Fareed as Director, Kurunegala (Teaching) Hospital in the wake of the allegations of infertility pills dispensed to Sinhala mothers of the area by former Director Dr. Shafi Shihabdeen. The Director who publicised the issue, Dr. Sarath Weerabandara has been transferred. Lawyers on the case oppose the new appointment saying that although they are not racist, there is a conflict of interest in furthering investigations as Dr. Fareed is a close ally of former MP Rishad Bathiudeen and that evidence regarding the case could be covered up.¹⁰⁶

New Director of Kurunegala Base Hospital resigns owing to protests (Hemantha Randunu) In the face of full-scale protests by Buddhist Priests, affected Sinhala women, lawyers, hospital staff and the general public of Kurunegala, opposing his appointment as Director, Kurunegala (Teaching) Hospital, Dr. Mohamed Fareed resigned from his post on 7 June 2020. The transfer of Director Dr. Sarath Weerabandara, who brought to light allegations of infertility pills dispensed to Sinhala women of the area by former Director Dr. Shafi Shihabdeen, from the hospital, sparked the outcry and protests.¹⁰⁷

Attack on St Anthony's Church, Jaffna (Rasula Dilhara Gamage) - A group of approximately five individuals had entered the St. Anthony's Church premises in Jaffna and vandalised buildings and statues and stolen several items. Jaffna Police are conducting further investigations and have sealed off the premises until they are concluded.¹⁰⁸

Appointed to oversee Kurunegala Hospital, Dr. Fareed resigns in two days (Pushpakumara Jayaratne) - Appointed as Interim Director of Kurunegala (Teaching) Hospital, Dr. N. Fareed, Director Health Services, North-Western Province, tendered his resignation on 8 June 2020. He was appointed as Interim Director owing to allegations leveled against the former Director, Dr. Sarath Weerabandara who is currently under investigation. Even though he was only appointed for a one-month period, certain factions tried to connect him with former accused Physician Dr. Shafi Shiyabdeen, attempting create racism and religious strife. Under such conditions, Dr. Fareed stated it was impossible and unfair to expect him to oversee the Hospital.¹⁰⁹

We were briefed the day before Easter of possible attacks by Thawheed Jama'ath against Catholic Churches - Intelligence Chief, Fort Police (Nimanthi Ranasinghe) - R. W. Thilakarathne,

¹⁰⁵ *Lankadeepa*, June 8, p. 15.

¹⁰⁶ *Divaina*, June 8, p. 2.

¹⁰⁷ *Divaina*, June 9, p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ *Dinamina*, June 9, p. 10.

¹⁰⁹ *Lankadeepa*, June 9, p. 7.

Chief Inspector of the Fort Police Intelligence Unit, in his evidenciary hearing before the Presidential Commission into the Easter bombings, stated that they were read information of possible attacks on churches and the Indian High Commission in a debriefing session on 20 April 2019. The only instructions he had personally received were 'look into the matter.' No names of suspects or their plans were communicated, even though all these details were mentioned in the anonymous documentation they had received.¹¹⁰

Mangala quits parliamentary politics - Former minister and long-time parliamentary member Mangala Samaraweera has decided to step down from parliamentary politics and not to contest the upcoming 2020 general election. He requested the people of Matara to refrain from casting their preferential votes for him at the upcoming 2020 parliamentary election although his name appears in the electoral list as a candidate from the Samagi Jana Balawegaya. Minister Samaraweera has held a number of important ministerial portfolios, rendering invaluable service to the nation for over 30 years. Samaraweera also held a meeting at his residence with local government representatives from Matara and briefed them regarding his decision. Expressing his views, Samaraweera observed that President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's leadership has been inefficient and short-sighted, and that this has been proven within a brief span of six months. He further observed that under President Rajapaksa, ethnic, racial and religious divides among the people of the land are being widened while the state is being militarised, and that the opposition does not seem to have a clear understanding of what its role and duty should be at a time when the nation is faced with such grave challenges.¹¹¹

Wattapelai Temple annual festival begins with Air Force salute (Dinasena Rathugamage) - The annual festival at the Wattapelai Temple in Mullaithivu began with a salute by the Air Force. Air Force helicopters conducted a flyby and dropped flowers on the Hindu temple to inaugurate the festival. A large number of devotees, along with health authorities to enforce pandemic distancing regulations, participated in the festival.¹¹²

Stone throwing attack on Buddhist statue in front of Jaffna Naga Viharaya pandol (Dinasena Rathugamage) - An attack by unidentified perpetrators, throwing stones, smashed glass and caused severe damage to the Buddhist statue in front of the Jaffna Naga Viharaya pandol, on the night of June 9. The attack took place despite security provided by the police and armed forces. Though the glass case was shattered, the Buddhist statue itself was unharmed.¹¹³

Stone throwing attack on Buddhist statue at Ariyakulam Naga Viharaya (Wanni Romesh Madushankar) - Jaffna Police said that an attack by unidentified perpetrators, throwing stones, smashed glass and caused severe damage to the Buddhist statue in front of the Jaffna Naga Viharaya pandol, at the Ariyakulam junction, on the night of June 9. The attack took place

¹¹⁰ *Lankadeepa*, June 10, p. 11.

¹¹¹ *Lankadeepa*, June 10, p. 6.

¹¹² *Divaina*, June 10, p. 11.

¹¹³ *Divaina*, June 11, p. 13.

despite security provided by the police and armed forces. Though the glass case was shattered, the Buddhist statue itself was unharmed. The police say that the attack was conducted by some extremist group and are examining CCTV footage and carrying on further investigations.¹¹⁴

Acts by the Muslim Congress will affect the UNP Buddhist voter base - Former MP Daya Gamage

(By Nuwan Kodikara) - Former MP Daya Gamage stated that the reason for the UNP to lose so many Buddhist votes is because members of the Muslim Congress come under the UNP at every election for votes, but constantly reiterate that they have built the party to ensure Muslim rights, thus fueling racism and religiosity. It has reached a point where Buddhist voters doubt the UNP has their best interests at heart and has resulted in a downward slump, where votes are concerned.¹¹⁵

The Muslim Congress damaged the UNP Buddhist voter base - Former MP Daya Gamage

(By Chatura Pamunuwa) - In a televised interview, Former MP Daya Gamage stated that the reason for the UNP to lose so many Buddhist votes is because various acts by members of the Muslim Congress have damaged the Buddhist voter base.¹¹⁶

The Government will obtain power of five out of six preferential votes - MP S. M. Chandrasena

(By Ratna B. Ekanayake) - In a discussion held among provincial leaders of the Anuradhapura District at his office on 10 June 2020, MP S. M. Chandrasena stated that the government would gain five out of six votes given the fact that the President loves the nation and people alike, and is dedicated to just and integral rule. The Minister further opined that the President would never betray the nation, unlike past leaders who ruined even education in this Sinhala Buddhist nation by forcing everyone to learn English and behave like white-skinned foreigners, instead of remaining with Sinhala Buddhist culture and language.¹¹⁷

30 years since the massacre of 600 Police Officers in the deep jungles of Rupaskulam

(By Susantha Amarabandu) - Even though we celebrate the end of a 30 year war, there are disturbing memories etched in our minds that we still need to remember. 11th June 1990 was a day of mourning for the entire nation, because of irresponsible, arrogant decisions of then leaders, which resulted in sacrificing over 600 Police Officers across the Eastern coast who were inhumanly slaughtered by the LTTE. Ven Kirindiwela Somaratana Thero requested that the government erect a monument to immortalise our brave Policemen who sacrificed their lives that day and that a Police Training College or Officers' Quarters be built in the area, to guard the site. Temple precincts are where the world receives peaceful, sacred instruction; where all should find peace irrespective of race or religion. An alms-giving was held sponsored by the Samadhi Buddhist Meditation Centre, Sweden and its Chief Incumbent, Most Ven. Udagama

¹¹⁴ *Lankadeepa*, June 11, p. 7.

¹¹⁵ *Dinamina*, June 12, p. 1.

¹¹⁶ *Divaina*, June 12, p. 1.

¹¹⁷ *Divaina*, June 12, p. 10.

Narada Thero to distribute dry rations to Tamil villagers of Pussellawa and Manikkamaduwa, Ampara. Ven Somaratana Thero praised this meaningful act.¹¹⁸

The Government must take immediate measures to rescue the sacred Devanagala precincts from Muslim extremists (By Sujeeva Thattsara) - Protect Sri Lanka' President, Ven. Pahiyangala Ananda Sagara Thero stated that the government must take immediate steps to protect the historically rich, Devanagala-Mawanella archaeological site from marauding Muslim extremists. He mentioned that the historical rock inscriptions had been destroyed by acid; numerous artifacts, statues and valuable buildings had been vandalised. He added that any religion, nation or people had the right to defend their historical or archaeological sites from saboteurs and requested that the offenders be brought to justice without delay.¹¹⁹

Sri Lankan Bhikkus accused in American report (By Keerthi Warnakulasuriya) - An American report has chosen to vilify several Sri Lankan Buddhist clergy, accusing them of religious extremism, while completely ignoring Muslim extremists and their Easter bombings. The same report condemns the act of banning the burka for Sri Lankan Muslim women, after the bombings. The 14 report alleges that Sri Lanka has not given any other religion other than Buddhism, fair treatment.¹²⁰

Security Heads who ignored prior warnings of attacks (By Nimanthi Ranasinghe) - R. W. Thilakaratne, Chief Inspector of the Fort Police Intelligence Unit stated that they were read information of possible attacks on Churches and the Indian High Commission in a debriefing session on 20 April 2019, in his evidenciary hearing before the Presidential Commission into the Easter bombings. The only instructions he had personally received were 'look into the matter.' No names of suspects or their plans were communicated, even though all these details were mentioned in the documentation they had received.¹²¹

Then, lets appoint a Tamil Director to the Kurunegala National Hospital (By Hansi Manawadu) - It has been a year since an incriminating press article by Hemantha Randunu, claiming that 4000 women had been intentionally made barren by a Muslim Doctor at the Kurunegala Base Hospital allegedly linked to Thawheed Jama'ath, was published. The MO was later identified as Dr. Mohamed Safi, and these unscrupulous individuals even took the case to High Courts, even though to date there has not been a single woman identified as barren, of these 4000 alleged victims. Several of the Sinhalese mothers who were Dr. Safi's patients for delivery of their first child happen to be pregnant yet again, yet the demon of racism has no brain. Countless press articles pointing at Dr Safi's successor, Dr. Mohamed Fareed's resignation from the post of Director owing to extreme unrest and opposition his appointment caused, accused him of guilt and other political associations. Chairman of the Mothers' Union (who oddly happens to be a

¹¹⁸ *Divaina*, June 12, p. 11.

¹¹⁹ *Divaina*, June 13, p. 7.

¹²⁰ *Divaina*, June 13, p. 9.

¹²¹ *Lankadeepa*, June 14, p. 18.

man), Lawyer Indrasiri Senaratne has indicated that asking Dr. Fareed to present his medical findings of the alleged case will not be successful as he is a Muslim. This is an outrageously racist comment and if he is to request the appointment of an unbiased MO as Director, he should request a Tamil Doctor to head the Hospital as both Sinhala and Muslim personnel have been ruled out.¹²²

Private Catholic Schools, Christ, and the Cardinal (By Neil Christopher) - Zahran's crime was killing hundreds of Christians with bombs. The Catholic church commits the crime of standing by while snatching away the right to education of children whose parents are unable to produce lakhs of rupees. Christ condemned those who tried to make God's house a den of thieves, but this seems to be what is happening now with the hoarding of wealth and craving for power. The Bible also clearly records judgement on some early Christians who lied, deceived and misused public funds. True shepherds must know their doctrine and give proper instruction to their flock. The writer questions how the Cardinal does not know these things and why he is insistent on projecting a feudal aura, siding with a racist government, when he should be focusing on spiritual things of eternal value.¹²³

Sri Lanka has 43 Muslim Extremist cults; four of them operate as mainline political parties (By Nimanthi Ranasinghe) - General Secretary of the Bodu Bala Sena Ven. Galagodaththe Gnanasara Thero giving evidence before the Presidential Commission into the Easter Attacks stated on 13 June 20, that Sri Lanka has 43 known Muslim Extremist cults operational in Sri Lanka, and that four of them are under the guise of mainstream political parties.¹²⁴

I informed the former President and former IGP about Muslim extremism on several occasions (By Gayan Kumara Weerasinghe) - General Secretary of the Bodu Bala Sena Ven. Galagodaththe Gnanasara Thero giving evidence before the Presidential Commission into the Easter Sunday Attacks alleged that he had informed the former President, Maithripala Sirisena and former Inspector General of Police, Pujitha Jayasundera on several occasions regarding Muslim extremism in the country. He went on to state that despite his repeated warnings the relevant authorities did not take any action regarding the information he provided. He alleged that if sufficient attention had been paid to his warnings, the tragic events of Easter Sunday could have been avoided.¹²⁵

'Youtube' monks who corrupt Sri Lankan Buddhism (By Shri Buddharakshitha Devananda Nahimi) - The author alleges that there are certain Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka, whom he refers to as 'Youtube' monks, who bring Sri Lankan Buddhism into disrepute. He says that Sri Lanka has a long history of honouring and preserving the teachings of the Lord Buddha, but that the actions of a handful of monks threaten to corrupt his teachings and Buddhist philosophy in the

¹²² *Anidda*, June 14, p. 4.

¹²³ *Anidda*, June 14, p. 6.

¹²⁴ *Lankadeepa*, June 15, p. 14.

¹²⁵ *Dinamina*, June 15, p. 12.

nation. He urges the relevant authorities to take stern action against Buddhist monks who do not obey the disciplinary regulations of their orders and cause Buddhism to be brought into disrepute.¹²⁶

Wigneswaran calls for everyone's support (By Dinasena Rathugamage) - Former Chief Minister of the Northern Province, C.V. Wigneswaran says that the entire Tamil community must join and cooperate as there are a great many people who support the establishment of Sinhala Buddhist hegemony in the country. He says that his new party endeavours to forge a new political era for the Tamil community in Sri Lanka and that all Tamils must join and cooperate in this endeavour.¹²⁷

How was a person injured in a bomb explosion admitted to hospital? - Evidence given before the Presidential Commission investigating the Easter Sunday terrorist attacks, indicates that one of the plotters, Rilwan Hashim, was admitted to the National Hospital with injuries sustained while testing an explosive device. The question arises as to how this person was admitted to hospital with bomb injuries, without any questions being asked or any investigation conducted into the circumstances.¹²⁸

Sri Lankan youth join the IS organisation and form several training camps in the country (By Nimanthi Ranasinghe) - General Secretary of the Bodu Bala Sena Ven. Galagodaththe Gnanasara Thero giving evidence before the Presidential Commission into the Easter Sunday Attacks stated that many youth from the Muslim community have joined the Islamic State terrorist organisation. He went on to allege that these youth have formed training camps within the country and aim to spread their brand of religious extremism among the youth of the country.¹²⁹

15 suspects in Mawanella Buddhist statue defacement case further remanded (By Subashini Senanayake) - The Mawanella Magistrate's Court further remanded the 15 suspects imprisoned in connection with defacing Buddhist statues in Mawanella. The suspects were taken into custody in a joint operation by the Criminal Investigation Department, government intelligence services and the Mawanella Police.¹³⁰

Father Ernest Poruthota - symbol of Sri Lankan Christianity - The funeral of Father Ernest Poruthota was conducted on June 18. He was a religious leader who epitomised the principles and tenets of Christianity. He worked towards furthering the understanding and tolerance between the races and religions of Sri Lanka.¹³¹

¹²⁶ *Divaina*, June 15, p. 8.

¹²⁷ *Divaina*, June 15, p. 11.

¹²⁸ *Lankadeepa*, June 16, p. 4.

¹²⁹ *Lankadeepa*, June 16, p. 12.

¹³⁰ *Dinamina*, June 16, p. 5.

¹³¹ *Lankadeepa*, June 18, p. 12.

Government grants will be extended to Temples and Dhamma Schools (by Nuwan Kodikara) - President Gotabaya Rajapakse promised the State would grant aid to Temples and Dhamma schools, in his address to the Buddhist Advisory Council on 18 June 2020. He further observed that the subjects of English Language and Information Technology should be given as much importance as the other subjects in the curriculum. The Chief Prelate of Malwatte Chapter Ven. Thibbotuwawe Sri Sumangala Thero mentioned he was glad their advice was being followed and that the President had initiated special task forces to ensure that the country was protected, observed laws and preserved ancient archaeological sites of religious and cultural significance.¹³²

Father Porutota who even encouraged young Muslims to be part of the Youth group (by Sumedha Navaratne) - The funeral of Most Reverend Father Ernest Porutota (88) was held on 19 June 2020. He had been receiving treatment in a private hospital at the time of his demise. Born in 1931, Porutotage Raymond Ernest Alexander Fernando – Ernest Porutota – was ordained in February 1957 at the St. Lucia’s Cathedral in Kotahena. He had a great rapport with those of other faiths, and encouraged all youngsters to use the church premises to excel in sports especially during the war. While being an integral part of the Young Christian Workers Movement, Father Porutota was also the founding Director of OCIC, the Sri Lankan chapter of the international film award SIGNIS Awards. Reverend Father Porutota authored several books such as ‘Kithunu Peraliya’ and ‘Gihya’ as well.¹³³

Three Moulavis supposedly collecting aid for Islamic schools under suspicion (by Wimal Keerthi) - Three Moulavis allegedly collecting aid for Islamic schools from Muslim businessmen in the Negombo area were taken into custody pending investigation.¹³⁴

Wigi issues new certificate to Sri Lankan Indigenous Veddas (by Keerthi Warnakulasuriya) - Former Chief Minister of the Northern Province, C. V. Wigneswaran has stated that the ancient indigenous vedda community have Tamil Hindu roots. He has further stated that the Western, North-Western and Eastern coasts were inhabited by Tamil Hindu tribes and that the Mahavamsa is a work of fiction, not fact.¹³⁵

State-issued books of learning portray Abdul Wahab, the founder of Wahabism as a good leader - Presidential Commission on Easter attacks (by Eric Gamini Jinapriya) - Founder of Wahabism and by default, extremist cults propagating suicide bombers, Abdul Wahab is portrayed as a good leader by government-issued text books, according to leader of the sect,

¹³² *Dinamina*, June 19, p. 8.

¹³³ *Dinamina*, June 19, p. 12.

¹³⁴ *Divaina*, June 19, p. 3.

¹³⁵ *Divaina*, June 19, p. 2.

Al Abdul Javan Aleem Walihulla - as stated in his evidenciary hearing before the Presidential Commission into Easter attacks.¹³⁶

I informed Gotabaya in 2013 that Muslim extremists were active in the country (by Dasun Rajapaksa) - General Secretary of the Bodu Bala Sena Ven. Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara Thero, giving evidence before the Presidential Commission investigating the Easter Sunday bombings said that he informed then Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa that Muslim extremists were active in the country as early as 2013. He went on to say that he requested the Defence Secretary to use the intelligence services of the government to study and learn more about the Muslim extremists as they operated in a totally different manner to the LTTE terrorists. He said that he tried to educate the public about the dangers posed by Muslim extremism. He went on to say that if his warnings had been given credence and the government taken necessary action, the tragedy of the Easter Sunday suicide bomb attacks by these Muslim extremists could have been prevented.¹³⁷

Give the information about the Rs. 4 billion received by the Batticaloa Campus Fund to the police - The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) informed the Colombo Chief Magistrate that an account maintained as the Batticaloa Campus Fund received deposits amounting to over Rs. 4 billion from abroad, during the period 14 January 2016 to 31 May 2019. At present there is Rs. 36,298.47 remaining in the account. The CID reported that the majority of the money had been received from a depositor in Saudi Arabia and that further investigations were being conducted as to how these funds had been spent.¹³⁸

Don't do that which denigrates the priesthood - The Mahasangha of all three main Chapters of Buddhism in a joint statement requested that Buddhist monks should not engage in activities that oppose or denigrate their faith and precepts and should uphold the high values of Buddhist teachings and the ways of peace and serenity.¹³⁹

Three Moulavis supposedly collecting aid for Islamic schools under suspicion (by Wimal Keerthi) - Three Moulavis allegedly collecting aid for Islamic schools from Muslim businessmen in the Negombo area were taken into custody pending investigation.¹⁴⁰

A false petition sent to the UN regarding Easter attacks (by Keerthi Warnakulasuriya) - A false report stating that 1800 Muslims have been arrested in connection with the Easter attacks has been submitted to the UN's Amnesty International. Whereas it only 200 Muslims linked to Thowheed Jamath were arrested pending further investigations.¹⁴¹

¹³⁶ *Divaina*, June 19, p. 11.

¹³⁷ *Lankadeepa*, June 19, p. 2.

¹³⁸ *Lankadeepa*, June 19, p. 6.

¹³⁹ *Dinamina*, June 20, p. 1.

¹⁴⁰ *Divaina*, June 20, p. 3.

¹⁴¹ *Divaina*, June 20, p. 4.

Government grants will be extended to Temples and Dhamma Schools (by Lasitha Duminda) - President Gotabaya Rajapakse promised the State would grant aid to Temples and Dhamma schools, in his address to the Buddhist Advisory Council on 18 June 2020. He further observed that the subjects of English Language and Information Technology should be given as much importance as the other subjects on the curriculum. The Chief Prelate of the Malwatte Chapter, Ven. Thibbotuwawe Sri Sumangala Thero mentioned he was glad their advice was being followed and that the President had initiated special task forces to ensure that the country was protected, observed laws and preserved ancient archaeological sites of religious and cultural significance.¹⁴²

State sponsorship of piriven daham pasal education (by Nalaka Sanjeeva Dahanayake) - President Gotabaya Rajapaksa said that the state would sponsor and support piriven daham pasal Buddhist religious education. The President met with the Presidential Advisory Committee for Buddhist Religious Affairs on June 18 and made this decision on the advice of the Committee. The Advisory Committee also requested the President to prohibit tuition classes on Poya days and Sundays to ensure that students were able to attend Daham Pasal in order to gain religious education.¹⁴³

Refrain from dishonourable actions and preserve the honour of the Bhikku order - The Chief Prelates of the various Chapters released a directive to all Buddhist monks to refrain from dishonourable actions and preserve the honour and respect of the Bhikku orders and chapters. Sri Lanka is a nation which preserves the pure Theravada teachings of the Lord Buddha. The Sangha has been the repository and protector of the Lord Buddha's teachings for thousands of years. However, we have learned via the media recently, that there are certain Buddhist monks who indulge in dishonourable and indisciplined behaviour, bringing shame and dishonour upon their various orders and chapters and the Sangha as a whole. Buddhist monks have a duty and responsibility to society and the country to act in an honourable and disciplined manner. We urge all Buddhist monks to abide by the rules and discipline of the Sangha.¹⁴⁴

Gnanasara Thero's revelations about Muslim extremism - General Secretary of the Bodu Bala Sena Ven. Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara Thero, giving evidence before the Presidential Commission investigating the Easter Sunday bombings said that he informed then Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa that Muslim extremists were active in the country as early as 2013. He went on to say that he requested the Defence Secretary to use the intelligence services of the government to study and learn more about the Muslim extremists as they operated in a totally different manner to the LTTE terrorists. He said that he tried to educate the public about the dangers posed by Muslim extremism. He went on to say that if his

¹⁴² *Divaina*, June 20, p. 9.

¹⁴³ *Lankadeepa*, June 20, p. 5.

¹⁴⁴ *Lankadeepa*, June 20, p. 6.

warnings had been given credence and the government taken necessary action, the tragedy of the Easter Sunday suicide bomb attacks by these Muslim extremists could have been prevented. He alleged that there were 43 Muslim extremist organisations operating in the country and four major Islamic factions operate openly here.¹⁴⁵

Just because Gnanasara Thero brandishes a list of Muslim organisation names, do they become terrorist organisations? (by Tharindu Uduwaragedera) - General Secretary of the Bodu Bala Sena, Ven. Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara Thero, giving evidence before the Presidential Commission investigating the Easter Sunday bombings alleged that he informed then Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa that Muslim extremists were active in the country as early as 2013. He says that he has tried to educate the public about the dangers posed by Muslim extremism and that if his warnings had been given credence and the government taken necessary action, the tragedy of the Easter Sunday suicide bomb attacks by these Muslim extremists could have been prevented. He alleged that there were 43 Muslim extremist organisations operating in the country and four major Islamic factions operate openly here. He has a list of names of Muslim organisations. What proof does he have that these are anything other than civil organisations? What proof does he have that these are Islamic extremist terrorist organisations?¹⁴⁶

Sinhalese becoming Buddhists and monks becoming non-Buddhists (by Wasantha Navaratne) - There are some (of the likes of Mangala Samaraweera and his gang) who insist that Sri Lanka is not a Buddhist country, but rather a country of Lankans. Their objective is to sow the seeds of dissension and hate among the people of this nation. Sri Lanka was blessed by receiving the pure teachings of the Lord Buddha. The Sangha has protected and preserved these priceless teachings for thousands of years. The Sinhala people have the singular honour of receiving the Dhamma and becoming Sinhala Buddhists. This identity has been preserved for millennia. Unfortunately, there are some Buddhist monks who have dishonoured this priceless gift. Their indisciplined and dishonourable actions mark them as non-Buddhists. It is the duty and responsibility of the people of Sri Lanka, guided by the Maha Sangha, to preserve and protect the priceless gift of the Lord Buddha's teachings for posterity.¹⁴⁷

The Archbishop of Colombo cost Sajith the Catholic voter base - Harin Fernando - At a political rally on 21 June 2020 in Medirigiriya, Polonnaruwa, former MP Harin Fernando alleged that UNP candidate Sajith Premadasa had lost the Catholic vote because of His Eminence, Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith and his involvement in politics, which the former MP found repelling, being from a Catholic background himself.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ *Lankadeepa*, June 21, p. 6.

¹⁴⁶ *Anidda*, June 21, p. 4.

¹⁴⁷ *Anidda*, June 21, p. 6.

¹⁴⁸ *Dinamina*, June 22, p. 2.

A Mahaweli project for the Tamil people (by Tissa Gunatilake and Prasanna Silva) - The Mahaweli Authority has initiated a pioneering venture to serve predominantly Tamil-speaking people on the Southern bank of the Mahaweli 'B' Zone, for which survey plans are currently underway.¹⁴⁹

Faction opposes land survey at Muhudu Maha Viharaya (by Vasantha Chandrapala, et al) - A group of people occupying land belonging to the Muhudu Maha Viharaya in Pottuvil, objected to the historic site being surveyed and measured and prevented the work from continuing. These individuals prevented officials attempting to survey the temple premises from carrying out their duties. The Ampara Police were called to control the situation and mediate with the protesters.¹⁵⁰

Harin's statement condemned by the Catholic Archdiocese of Colombo (by Diana Udayanganee) - The Auxiliary Bishops of Colombo, together with the Catholic Clergy of the Archdiocese of Colombo have jointly condemned the recent statement made by former MP Harin Fernando that the Archbishop of Colombo Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith had played politics during the Presidential election as derogatory and totally baseless. The Archdiocese of Colombo state that the former MP had treated His Eminence with derision when he stated at a political rally on 21 June 2020 that UNP candidate Sajith Premadasa had lost the Catholic vote because of His Eminence, and demand that remedial action be taken immediately to restore the image of this esteemed high office in Catholic hierarchy.¹⁵¹

Pottuvil Magistrate orders that all development work on the Maha Muhudu Viharaya cease immediately (by Wasantha Chandrapala) - The Pottuvil Magistrate on 22 June 2020 ordered that the surveying of lands belonging to the Muhudu Maha Viharaya in Pottuvil be suspended until the report relating to a case filed by the Department of Archaeology against 13 persons living sans authorisation at the Temple premises, is received. Owing to a dispute which broke out when surveying the lands of the temple, the Department filed a plaint in the Pottuvil Magistrate's Court in November 2019 and when the case was taken up for hearing, Pottuvil Magistrate issued this order.¹⁵²

It is uncouth for Archbishops to be in politics: the reason Sajith did not get Catholic votes was an Easter deal - Harin Fernando (by K.G. Karunaratne) - At a political rally on 21 June 2020 in Medirigiriya, Polonnaruwa, former MP Harin Fernando alleged that UNP candidate Sajith Premadasa had lost the Catholic vote because of His Eminence, Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith and his involvement in politics, which the former MP found repelling, being from a Catholic background himself.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ *Divaina*, June 22, p. 6.

¹⁵⁰ *Lankadeepa*, June 22, p. 12.

¹⁵¹ *Lankadeepa*, June 23, p. 1.

¹⁵² *Lankadeepa*, June 23, p. 1.

¹⁵³ *Lankadeepa*, June 23, p. 8.

Take immediate measures to rectify the damage done to His Eminence's image - Harin Fernando should apologise to all (by Asela Liyanage) - The Archdiocese of Colombo stated that the former MP Harin Fernando has treated His Eminence, Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, with derision when he stated at a political rally on 21 June 2020 that UNP candidate Sajith Premadasa had lost the Catholic vote because of His Eminence. The Archdiocese demanded that remedial action be taken immediately to restore the image of this esteemed high office in Catholic hierarchy.¹⁵⁴

Harin's statement condemned by the Catholic Archdiocese of Colombo - The Auxiliary Bishops of Colombo, together with the Catholic Clergy of the Archdiocese of Colombo have jointly condemned the recent statement made by former MP Harin Fernando that the Archbishop of Colombo Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith had played politics during the Presidential election as derogatory and totally baseless. The Archdiocese of Colombo state that the former MP has treated His Eminence with derision when he stated at a political rally on 21 June 2020 that UNP candidate Sajith Premadasa had lost the Catholic vote because of His Eminence and demanded that remedial action be taken immediately to restore the image of this esteemed high office in Catholic hierarchy.¹⁵⁵

Catholic Archdiocese of Colombo condemns Harin's statement (by Diana Udayangani) - Former Minister and Samagi Jana Balavegaya candidate Harin Fernando recently made defamatory allegations regarding Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, that he was responsible for United National Party presidential candidate Sajith Premadasa losing the Catholic vote at the last presidential election. The Catholic Archdiocese of Colombo strongly rejects and condemns Fernando's allegations and states that the Cardinal is a respected leader of the Catholic faith and is honoured not only by Catholics, but by the Sinhala Buddhists of this country.¹⁵⁶

Pottuvil Magistrate orders suspension of Muhudu Maha Viharaya reconstruction work (by Vasantha Chandrapala) - Following a motion filed by individuals who claims ownership of land allegedly belonging to the temple, the Pottuvil Magistrate, Mohammed Rufy, has ordered a temporary halt to reconstruction work at the Muhdu Maha Viharaya. The Magistrate directed that no further reconstruction work be conducted at the temple until the final survey and report is produced to court by the Department of Archaeology. A motion was filed by 13 individuals who claim ownership of land allegedly belonging to the historic site.¹⁵⁷

Easter conspiracy to deprive Sajith of Catholic votes at the Presidential Election (by K.G. Karunaratne) - Former Minister and Samagi Jana Balavegaya candidate Harin Fernando alleged

¹⁵⁴ *Dinamina*, June 23, p. 2.

¹⁵⁵ *Divaina*, June 23, p. 1.

¹⁵⁶ *Lankadeepa*, June 23, p. 1.

¹⁵⁷ *Lankadeepa*, June 23, p. 1.

that Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith used the circumstances of the Easter Sunday suicide attacks on Catholic churches to deprive the United National Party candidate, Sajith Premadasa of the Catholic vote at the last Presidential Election. He said that Premadasa was only able to secure 5% of the Catholic vote and that the Cardinal's statements following the Easter Sunday attacks were responsible for this short-fall in the traditional UNP vote. He went on to say that using the office of the Cardinal to indulge in political partisanship was disgusting and unworthy of a religious leader. Fernando made these statements at a UNP political rally in Polonnaruwa on June 21.¹⁵⁸

It is a sad thing for a politician to insult a Cardinal - Ven. Vendaruwe Upali Thero, Anunayake of the Asgiriya Chapter (by Asela Kuruluwansa) - Ven. Vendaruwe Upali Thero, Anunayake of the Asgiriya Chapter stated that it is a cause for great concern and sadness that a politician should dare insult a clergyman held in great respect, whether he be Buddhist, Catholic, Hindu or Muslim. He went on to condemn the speech given by former MP Harin Fernando at a political rally.¹⁵⁹

I beg forgiveness for saying 'Archbishop' - Harin (by Mahinda Aluthgedara) - Former MP Harin Fernando has asked forgiveness for not using the full and correct form of address to His Eminence the Archbishop of Colombo, Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith. Even though he was mentioned in a derogatory manner, the former MP says that having been brought up with Catholic values, he sees what is wrong and right, and wishes to apologise for the incorrect form of address.¹⁶⁰

This country's election laws are like tying a man's hands together before giving him to eat (by Hirantha Gunatilake) - United National Party (UNP) Organiser for the Biyagama District Prof. Danawardane Guruge said this country's election laws are tantamount to tying a man's hands together before giving him to eat. He went on to say that Samagi Jana Balavegaya candidate Harin Fernando had recently made allegations regarding Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith that were disgusting and defamatory. He said that the Cardinal is a leader of the Catholic faith and is respected not only by Catholics, but by the Sinhala Buddhists of this country and politicians like Fernando are responsible for the destruction of the UNP.¹⁶¹

I totally reject Harin's statement – Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thero (by Amoda Jayamaha) – Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thero said that on behalf of the Samagi Jana Balavegaya Party he totally rejected former Minister Harin Fernando's statement regarding Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith alleging that the Cardinal was politically motivated. Rathana Thero went on to say that he regretted the fact that Fernando had disobeyed the principles of the party by denigrating a

¹⁵⁸ *Lankadeepa*, June 23, p. 8.

¹⁵⁹ *Dinamina*, June 24, p. 1.

¹⁶⁰ *Dinamina*, June 24, p. 2.

¹⁶¹ *Dinamina*, June 24, p. 7.

religious leader in that fashion. He said that the Cardinal was responsible for preventing a bloodbath after the Easter Sunday suicide bomb attacks on Catholic churches and was respected by all Sri Lankans.¹⁶²

Harin's defamation of the Cardinal is a dishonour to all Catholics - Indika Anurudda (by Ananda Nissanka) - Former State Minister and Gampaha District Parliamentary candidate Indika Anurudda said that former Minister Harin Fernando's statement defaming Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith was a dishonour to all Catholics of the country. He said that the Cardinal was responsible for preventing a firestorm from igniting in the country after the Easter Sunday suicide bomb attacks, by calming the angry people reacting to the tragedy. Anurudda said that the Cardinal never involved himself in politics and it was a disgrace to speak to him in the manner that Fernando did.¹⁶³

Political sheep - A political culture of defaming religious leaders has taken hold in the country. This is totally inappropriate in a country like Sri Lanka that places great importance on ethical values and traditions. It could be argued that religious leaders bring this upon themselves when they become involved in politics. However, Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith is a religious leader whose wise words and peace making efforts were instrumental in putting out the flame of potential ethnic and religious strife following the Easter Sunday attacks. Those who hold such narrow minded views should be swept out of politics.¹⁶⁴

Statement regarding Cardinal: though the manner was not appropriate, it was done responsibly - Harin Fernando (by Anjula Mahika Weeraratne) - Former Minister and Samagi Jana Balavegaya candidate Harin Fernando said that though his remarks regarding Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith may have been made in an inappropriate manner, he would take full responsibility for what he said. Fernando alleged that the Cardinal used the circumstances of the Easter Sunday suicide attacks on Catholic churches to deprive the United National Party candidate, Sajith Premadasa of the Catholic vote at the last Presidential Election. Fernando made these statements at a UNP political rally in Polonnaruwa on June 21.¹⁶⁵

Harin's team constantly attacked the nation's culture and religious leaders - Former Minister Wijedasa Rajapaksa - Former Minister Wijedasa Rajapaksa said that Samagi Jana Balavegaya candidate Harin Fernando's political party constantly attacked the cultural traditions and values of the nation and also did not hesitate to defame religious leaders. Rajapaksa was referring to the remarks made by Fernando regarding Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith. Fernando alleged that the Cardinal used the circumstances of the Easter Sunday suicide attacks on Catholic churches to

¹⁶² *Dinamina*, June 24, p. 17.

¹⁶³ *Divaina*, June 24, p. 3.

¹⁶⁴ *Divaina*, June 24, p. 8.

¹⁶⁵ *Lankadeepa*, June 24, p. 1.

deprive the United National Party candidate, Sajith Premadasa of the Catholic vote at the last Presidential Election.¹⁶⁶

Mangala surprised by Harin's courage - Former Minister Mangala Samaraweera said he was surprised by former Minister Harin Fernando's courage in pointing out and challenging the hypocrisy in certain sections of the Catholic church. Samaraweera said in a Tweet that he respected Fernando's statement. However, Samagi Jana Balavegaya leader Sajith Premadasa had rejected Fernando's statement and apologised to the Cardinal.¹⁶⁷

Mangala expresses pleasure at Harin's remarks (by Chathura Pamunuwa) - Former Minister Mangala Samaraweera said he was pleased by former Minister Harin Fernando's remarks regarding Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith. Samaraweera said in a Tweet that he respected Fernando's statement. Fernando alleged at a campaign rally in Polonnaruwa that the Cardinal had aided in defeating United National Party candidate Sajith Premadasa at the last presidential election.¹⁶⁸

Harin must apologise to the Cardinal immediately - Danawardane Guruge (by Nishantha Amarasinghe and Susil Jayakody) - United National Party (UNP) Organiser for the Biyagama District Prof. Danawardane Guruge said that Samagi Jana Balavegaya candidate Harin Fernando should apologise immediately for his recent allegations regarding Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith. He said that the cardinal was responsible for preventing a bloodbath after the Easter Sunday suicide bomb attacks on Catholic churches, by calming the angry people reacting to the tragedy.¹⁶⁹

Only weak individuals defame a religion or the clergy - Founder of the Pelpola Vipassi Foundation and Chief Prelate of the Asian section of the Agnidiga Chapter Ven. Pelpola Vipassi Thero said that only weak individuals defame a religion or clergy in order to further their political goals. The Prelate was addressing the remarks made by former Minister Harin Fernando regarding Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith on a political stage recently. He went on to say that the objective of every religion was to build an ethical and moral society and attacking any religion or the clergy was an attack on the very foundations of society.¹⁷⁰

The Archdiocese nor the Catholic Church engage in active politics - Media Secretary of the Archdiocese of Colombo, Lal Pushpadeva stated that neither the Archdiocese nor the Catholic Church engage in any form of active politics. Former Minister and Samagi Jana Balavegaya candidate Harin Fernando recently made defamatory allegations regarding Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, that he was responsible for United National Party presidential candidate Sajith Premadasa losing the Catholic vote at the last presidential election. The Catholic Archdiocese

¹⁶⁶ *Lankadeepa*, June 24, p. 5.

¹⁶⁷ *Dinamina*, June 25, p. 1.

¹⁶⁸ *Divaina*, June 25, p. 1.

¹⁶⁹ *Divaina*, June 25, p. 1.

¹⁷⁰ *Divaina*, June 25, p. 9.

of Colombo strongly rejects and condemns Fernando's allegations and states that the Cardinal is a respected leader of the Catholic faith and is honoured not only by Catholics, but by the Sinhala Buddhists of this country.¹⁷¹

President performs several acts of merit at Anuradhapura sacred precincts (by Karunaratne Gamage) - President Gotabaya Rajapaksa spent his 71st birthday on June 20, performing several meritorious acts at the Anuradhapura sacred precincts. Following this, the President participated at a Buddha pooja at the Mirisawetiya temple. Former Minister and Samagi Jana Balavegaya candidate Harin Fernando recently made defamatory allegations regarding Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, that he was responsible for United National Party presidential candidate Sajith Premadasa losing the Catholic vote at the last presidential election. The Cardinal is a respected leader of the Catholic faith and is honoured not only by Catholics, but by the Sinhala Buddhists of this country.¹⁷²

Religious services allowed from June 9 (Zams Fahim) The health sector has permitted to observe religious services at places of worship from June 9. Accordingly, Muslims have the opportunity to engage in prayers at mosques.¹⁷³

"PTF fir the east as gratitute for the loss of theros who gave their lives"- PM -- R. Hashan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa said that the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on 'Archaeological Heritage Management in the Eastern Province was established as gratitude for the loss of the theros who had given their lives for safeguarding the rights of the Buddhists in the North and East.¹⁷⁴

"Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic country"- Ganesan -- N. Thanuja Leader of the Tamil Progressive Alliance (TPA) Mano Ganesan said that Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic country where Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and Christians live. He added that while we voice for equality in the USA, we should also think of our country.¹⁷⁵

"Muslim people should cooperate for the merger of North and East"- TNPF Coordinator of the Tamil National People's Front (TNPF) Tharmalingam Suresh said that Muslim scolars and political leaders should at least now realise that the freedom struggle carried out by the Tamil people was correct and extend their support for merger of the North and East. He added that does not happen, not only the existence of the Tamils but the Muslims too be questionable in the east in future. He added that some racist Muslim leaders had supported the government for creating crisis between the Tamils and Muslims in the past. Muslim youths were misled such politicians.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷¹ *Divaina*, June 25, p. 10.

¹⁷² *Divaina*, June 25, p. 11.

¹⁷³ *Thinakaran*, June 02, p. 1.

¹⁷⁴ *Virakesari*, June 02, p. 2.

¹⁷⁵ *Virakesari*, June 03, p. 1.

¹⁷⁶ *Virakesari*, June 02, p. 3.

Is Buddhist patriotic thought reinforced? President Gotabaya Rajapaksa recently established a Presidential Task Force (PTF) on 'Archaeological Heritage Management in the Eastern Province following a discussion with Buddhist monks. A massive opposition wave has emerged against the PTF among the Tamil community. The Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and other Tamil organisations have expressed their displeasure saying that the PTF had been established with the focus of changing the ethnic ratio in the East and to demolish and remove the archaeological remains of the Tamil community. Prime minister Mahinda Rajapaksa recently stated that the PTF had been established as a gratitude for the sacrifices the Buddhist monks had made in the east. He added that the rights of the Buddhists would be resolved by the task force.¹⁷⁷

An individual who damaged a stature of Mary arrested An individual who damaged a stature of Mary arrested in Jaffna was arrested by the Jaffna police. It was reported that the individual is a foreign national.¹⁷⁸

Fundamentalism becomes threat (P.Manikkavasagam) Basically, fundamentalism does not accept other philosophies and policies. It is a very dangerous. It does everything for what it wanted to do. Thus, it seems that Sri Lanka is now on the track of fundamentalism. Gotabaya Rajapaksa became president as the election campaign was successful among the Sinhala Buddhists. Now he supports Sinhala Buddhist patriotism as gratitude for making him president. He established a Presidential Task Force (PTF) on 'Archaeological Heritage Management in the Eastern Province which only includes Sinhala Buddhists.¹⁷⁹

Attempt to make the East as Buddhist Rasathani The establishment of the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on 'Archaeological Heritage Management in the Eastern Province has made the Tamil speaking community panic. There has been an opposing wave from the minority communities. There is a question whether the PTF was established in order to establish a Sinhala Buddhist Rasathani (Kingdom). Intellectuals have raised concern that the PTF in the East might create divisions among the ethnic groups in the region.¹⁸⁰

Cardinal requests government to allow limited crowd for worship (M. Manochithra) Archdiocese of Colombo Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith has requested the government to allow limited crowd of Catholic devotees for worship at churches. The churches have been closed following the COVID-19 outbreak.¹⁸¹

Why there is a Muslim or Tamil in the PTF? (P.K. Balachandran) There is no Tamil or Muslim person in the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on 'Archaeological Heritage Management in the Eastern Province. The population of the Tamil and Muslims is two-third in the region. Secondly, there are Buddhist monks but there is no Hindu or Muslim representation in the task force.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁷ *Virakesari*, June 03, p. 4.

¹⁷⁸ *Thinakaran*, June 04, p. 8

¹⁷⁹ *Virakesari*, June 06, p. 9.

¹⁸⁰ *Virakesari*, June 06, p. 11.

¹⁸¹ *Virakesari*, June 08, p. 2.

¹⁸² *Virakesari*, June 08, p. 11.

11 Sinhalese appointed for PTF on preserving archaeological sites in the eastern Former MP and organiser of Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi (ITAK) in Pattiruppu P. Ariyanenthiran said that the establishment of the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on 'Archaeological Heritage Management in the Eastern Province' had made the entire Tamil people worry as the Tamils have been neglected in the appointment. The minority communities who widely live in the area have been neglected. He added that the Rajapaksa attempt to grab the entire east through the PTF from the minorities.¹⁸³

"Ruling party attempt to proceed with religious politics"- Janakan (N. Thanuja) Managing Director at IDM Nations Campus and Founder of Janakan Foundation Vinayagamorthy Janagan said that the ruling party attempts to proceed their politics through religion based on Sinhala Buddhism. He added that those who are in the illusion of religious views cannot see the good work which had been done by the previous government.¹⁸⁴

PTF is to vacate the existence of the Tamils in the east United National Party (UNP) Colombo district candidate San Kuhavarathan said that the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on 'Archaeological Heritage Management in the Eastern Province' had been established to convert the eastern province under the control of the Sinhala Buddhists through the task force. He added that the process of grabbing the region from the Tamil people had started in 1932.¹⁸⁵

The case on cremation of Janazas postponed (M.A.M. Nilam) The case against cremation of Muslim Janazas who fall for COVID-19 was postponed to June 13 after it had been taken for hearing. The case was filed by former Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) Ali Zahir Maulana against the decision taken by the Ministry of Health to cremate the Muslim Janazas.¹⁸⁶

"No minority representation in the Presidential Task Force escalates doubt"- Amnesty International (N. Thanuja) The Amnesty International said that Sri Lanka appears to have arbitrarily targeted the Muslim community. In a submission made to the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Amnesty International said that the lack of representation of any minority community in the Presidential Task Force for Archaeological Heritage Management in the Eastern Province is extremely problematic given the existence of archaeological sites from different religions and ethnicities.¹⁸⁷

Kallatimalai Neeli Amman Kovil destroyed and a Buddhist temple built Kallatimalai Neeli Amman Kovil which is a 500 old temple in Verugal area has been destroyed and a Buddhist temple has been built. Meanwhile, the area residence said that the Buddhist temple is protected by security personnel and a racist monk has also been appointed for the temple.¹⁸⁸

"Muslims should not consider President Rajapaksa as evil as Janazas were cremated"- Nizam Leader of the all party activists association M.M.M. Nizam said that the Muslim people should

¹⁸³ *Virakesari*, June 08, p. 15.

¹⁸⁴ *Virakesari*, June 09, p. 2.

¹⁸⁵ *Virakesari*, June 09, p. 16.

¹⁸⁶ *Thinakaran*, June 10, p. 8.

¹⁸⁷ *Virakesari*, June 10, p. 1.

¹⁸⁸ *Virakesari*, June 10, p. 11.

not consider President Gotabaya Rajapaksa as an evil as the Muslim janazasa had been cremated during the COVID-19 outbreak.¹⁸⁹

All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama supplies equipments (S.M. Javid) The social service unit of the All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama supplied equipment to use during the COVID-19 pandemic to Buddhist temples, Kovils, churches, mosques, hospitals and police stations in the Central Colombo area. They also supplied 10,000 face masks.¹⁹⁰

Devananda writes to president on why Tamil and Muslim representations are not in the PTF – (R. Hashan) Minister of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Douglas Devananda has written a letter to President Gotabaya Rajapaksa on why there is no representation of the Tamil and Muslim communities in the Presidential Task Force for Archaeological Heritage Management in the Eastern Province.¹⁹¹

All mosques ope from today (Shams Fahim) The Waqf Board announced that all mosques are open for genrl prayers from today onwards after three month locked down. It added that prior approval should be obtained from public health inspectors of the area.¹⁹²

Limited groud for July feast of Madhu Church It was decided to allow a limited crowd for the July feast of Madhu Church. The discussion was headed by District Secretariat C.A. Mohanathas. Bishop of Mannar Emmanuel Fernando was also took part in the discussion.¹⁹³

Places of worship and special classes allowed in Batticaloa Places of worship and special classes are allowed to function in the Batticaloa District from June 12 adhearing the health guidelines. It was decided at a meeting headed by District Secretariat Ms. Kalamathi Pathmarajah.¹⁹⁴

The 2019 Report on International Religious Freedom of the United States said that according to representatives of minority religious communities and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), government officials continued to engage in systematic discrimination against religious minorities. Local government officials and police reportedly responded minimally or not at all to numerous incidents of religiously motivated violence against minorities. Religious minorities reported government officials and police often sided with religious majorities and did not prevent harassmet of religious minorities and their places of worship.¹⁹⁵

The PTF targets the North as well (R. Yasi) Member of the Presidential Task Forces (PTFs), adding that role of the PTF on Archaeological Heritage Management in the Eastern Province Ven. Ellawala Medhananda thero said that they would urge President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to empower the task force to monitor the archaeological sites in the North as well.¹⁹⁶

¹⁸⁹ *Virakesari*, June 10, p. 15.

¹⁹⁰ *Thinakaran*, June 11, p. 10.

¹⁹¹ *Virakesari*, June 11, p. 2.

¹⁹² *Thinakaran*, June 12, p. 1.

¹⁹³ *Thinakaran*, June 12, p. 6.

¹⁹⁴ *Thinakaran*, June 12, p. 10.

¹⁹⁵ *Virakesari*, June 12, p. 2.

¹⁹⁶ *Virakesari*, June 14, p. 1.

Police ban activities of Lord Shiva Kovil at Kanniya Hot Water Well The police have banned religious practices at the Lord Shiva Kovil at Kanniya Hot Water Well in Trincomalee following a complaint lodged by the trustee board of the Lord Ganesa Kovil.¹⁹⁷

This is time for Muslim parties to leave politics (Sahabdeen) The government is attempting to hold the general election at any cost. On the other hand, the opposition parties wanted to postpone the election. Meanwhile, hate speech on minority communities might be the most spoken topics during the election period by Buddhist racist groups. At this moment, the Muslims should be very careful as the politicians attempt to mislead them. The chauvinists will show that they are the saviours for the Muslim community during the election.¹⁹⁸

President requested to control anti-Muslim sentiment (Shams Fahim) A collective of Muslim organisations have requested President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to control the anti-sentiment and statements made by certain groups.¹⁹⁹

Monk requests to allow Hindu devotees to Kataragama pilgrimage Ven. Ampitiye sumanarathana Thero has requested President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to allow the Hindu devotees for Kataragama pilgrimage and make all arrangements for it.²⁰⁰

Stature of Lord Muruga vandalised -- A stature of Lord Muruga was vandalised by an unidentified group in Valapana area.²⁰¹

"Why is there a presidential task force for just one province?" – Teplitz (Robert Antony) Speaking at a roundtable discussion held yesterday (15th) US Ambassador to Sri Lanka and the Maldives Alaina Teplitz stated that the US will support a strong and sustainable economic recovery for Sri Lanka. She added that the US has contributed USD 56 million to aid Sri Lanka's COVID-19 response. Meanwhile, she raised concerns on the recently appointed presidential task forces. In particular, she questioned why there were certain presidential task forces appointed for just one province.²⁰²

"Tamils should be in same line in order to safeguard the existence of the Tamils"- Sumanthiran Leader of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) M.A. Sumanthiran said that the Tamil people should gather and be in the same line in order to safeguard the existence of their existence in the country. He added that the Presidential Task Force on archaeology in the East and military rule is already commenced by the government.²⁰³

Tamils should be included in the PTF Students Union of higher education in the Eastern Sri Lanka has urged that Tamil representation should be included in the Presidential Task Force for Archaeological Heritage Management in the Eastern Province.²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁷ *Virakesari*, June 14, p. 1.

¹⁹⁸ *Virakesari*, June 14, p. 2.

¹⁹⁹ *Thinakaran*, June 16, p. 1.

²⁰⁰ *Thinakaran*, June 16, p. 3.

²⁰¹ *Thinakaran*, June 16, p. 9.

²⁰² *Virakesari*, June 16, p. 1.

²⁰³ *Virakesari*, June 16, p. 2.

²⁰⁴ *Virakesari*, June 16, p. 12.

Resolution passed against the PTF for the East A resolution was passed urging the Presidential Task Force for Archaeological Heritage Management in the Eastern Province be stopped by the president at the Porativu Pattu Divisional Secretariat.²⁰⁵

“Presidential Task Force to protect archaeological sites” – Gunaratne (N. Thanuja) Secretary to the Ministry of Defence Maj. Gen. (Retd) Kamal Gunaratne said that the various criticisms are being placed on the Presidential Task Forces (PTFs), adding that role of the PTF on Archaeological Heritage Management in the Eastern Province would be protecting all archaeological sites of all communities in the Eastern Province. He made the remarks at a press briefing held yesterday (16th). He further added that PTF to build a Secure Country, Disciplined, Virtuous and Lawful Society would not control the state officials.²⁰⁶

PTF and activities turning point -- P. Manikavasagam Civil society organisations have raised voices that authoritarian rule has been practised following the Presidential election. Such rule is danger for democracy. President Gotabaya rajapaksa has taken forward a military assisted administration especially during the COVID-19 outbreak. The PTFs have been empowered immensely. The president should review whether the PTFs are to strengthen the rule of law or to weaken them.²⁰⁷

“PTF if formed to change the ethnic ratio in the North-East” – Sampanthan condemns (N. Thanuja) Leader of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) R. Sampanthan said that told President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in a statement that the establishment of a Presidential Task Force for Archaeological Heritage Management in the Eastern Province in order to change the ethnic ratio by settling Sinhalese people in the lands which would be encroached under the guise of archaeological sites. He added that both provinces are connected by Tamil language, adding that the breaking up of the Tamil linguistic continuity between the Eastern and Northern provinces had been an objective of majoritarian political leadership for a long time.²⁰⁸

"Tamils in the East will have to face the same problem like people of Palastine had faced"- Shivajilingam (P. Mohanthas) In an interview with the Virakesari, Tamil People's Alliance (TPA) Jaffna District candidate M.K. Shivajilingam said that the Presidential Task Force for Archaeological Heritage Management in the Eastern Province will create the same situation where the Palestinian people. He added that it is obvious that there is a law for the Sinhalese and another for the Tamils. He added that since the independence, the Sinhala Buddhist governments have been working for establishing a Buddhist majoritarian rule by spread of Buddhism across the country especially in the East.²⁰⁹

Do not ignore the concerns of the minority communities Intellectuals, political leaders, international human rights civil societies, organisations and foreign countries have criticised the establishment of Presidential Task Force for Archaeological Heritage Management in the Eastern Province which does not include any minority communities and full of Sinhalese. A

²⁰⁵ *Virakesari*, June 16, p. 12.

²⁰⁶ *Virakesari*, June 17, p. 1.

²⁰⁷ *Virakesari*, June 17, p. 13.

²⁰⁸ *Virakesari*, June 18, p. 1.

²⁰⁹ *Virakesari*, June 18, p. 4.

question has arisen whether the PTF was established in order to grab the archaeological sites of the other religions and communities other than the Buddhist sites through the task force.²¹⁰

"The TNA spread false news on PTF"- Viyalanderan (R. Hashan) Former Tamil National Alliance (TNA) MP and current Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) candidate S. Viyalanderan said that the politicians from the TNA had been spreading false information over the establishment of the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on 'Archaeological Heritage Management in the Eastern Province. He added that Hindu religious places were identified as archaeological sites during the previous regime and the TNA had not opposed it.²¹¹

Is the new PTF based on democratic means? It was reported that hardline Buddhists have urged President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to bring the North under the surveillance of him. Meanwhile, member of the Presidential Task Forces (PTFs) on archaeological Heritage Management in the Eastern Province Ven. Ellawala Medhananda Thero said that they would urge President Rajapaksa to empower the task force to monitor the archaeological sites in the North as well. The Hindu kovils in the East have not been developed as they have been connected to the Anuradhapura era.²¹²

"North and East are native homelands of the Tamils"- Ariyanenthiran Former Tamil National Alliance (TNA) MP P. Ariyanenthiran said that the North and the East are the native homelands of the Tamil people. He added that General Secretary of the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) Ven. Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara Thero should know the history.²¹³

"Sampanthan's accusation is bassless"- Gunawardena (Robert Antony) Minister of Foreign Relations, Skills Development, Employment and Labour Relations Dinesh Gunawardena said that the accusations levelled against the Presidential Task Forces (PTFs), adding that role of the PTF on Archaeological Heritage Management in the Eastern Province was bassless. He added that role of the PTF on Archaeological Heritage would be protecting all archaeological sites of all communities in the Eastern Province.²¹⁴

"The Samagi Jana Balawegaya is not a single party to travel based on Sinhala Buddhist ideology"- Ganesan, Hakeem (R. Ram) Leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) Rauf Hakeem and Leader of the Tamil Progressive Alliance (TPA) Mano Ganesan said that the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) is not a single party to carry out politics based on Sinhala Buddhist ideology.²¹⁵

Police personnel at the door of Nainativu Kovil with footwear (T. Virushan) Various Hindu organisations have expressed concerns over the incidents where police and Navy personnel appeared at the door of the Nainativu Kovil (Nagatheepa) with footwear.²¹⁶

²¹⁰ *Virakesari*, June 18, p. 4.

²¹¹ *Virakesari*, June 19, p. 7.

²¹² *Virakesari*, June 20, p. 11.

²¹³ *Virakesari*, June 20, p. 13.

²¹⁴ *Virakesari*, June 21, p. 1.

²¹⁵ *Virakesari*, June 21, p. 3.

²¹⁶ *Thinakaran*, June 22, p. 1.

Statures of Lord Ganesa vandalised in Mannar A stature of Lord Ganesa and potraits of other gods at a small Hindu kovil in Mannar vandalised by unidentified people.²¹⁷

Hindu priests who provided reliefs felicitated The Hindu priests who provided reliefs for the affected people during the COVID-19 outbreak were felicitated. The event happened at the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources.²¹⁸

"Contesting and winning the ruling party would be the real victory for the Muslims" - Faris (Iqbal Ali) Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) Kandy District candidate A.L.M. Faris said that the Muslims should contest in the election as part of the ruling party which would be the real victory for the community. He added that President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has done lots of things for the Muslims. He said that Rajapaksa had helped release many youth who were arrested over Easter Sunday attacks.²¹⁹

Achaeological preservation gets military dimension (S.A. Jothilingam) President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has established the Presidential Task Forces (PTFs) on archaeological Heritage Management in the Eastern Province. Though the Tamils are the majority ethnic group in the East, there is no Tamil or Muslim member in the task force. It contains of Sinhala Buddhists and military personnel as members. The Tamil people look at this PTF as the continuation of ethnic cleansing.²²⁰

"No need of divolution of powers" Member of the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on Archaeological Heritage Management in the Eastern Province Ven. Ellawala Medhananda thero said that there is no need for power sharing as the country is governed by the central government. He added that the PTF was not established to target the East, adding that the preserving process in the South has ended and now process are taken forward to another region. He also noted that there is no place for the Tamils to declare that it was their native homeland in the country.²²¹

²¹⁷ *Thinakaran*, June 22, p. 9.

²¹⁸ *Thinakaran*, June 28, p. 19.

²¹⁹ *Thinakaran*, June 28, p. 5.

²²⁰ *Virakesari*, June 28, p. 3.

²²¹ *Virakesari*, June 28, p. 16.