



NARRATIVE WATCH

Key Online Narratives Shaping
Sri Lanka's Public Discourse

This report analyses a key online narrative shaping Sri Lanka's socio-political landscape. Using trend monitoring, keyword analysis, and observations of influential pages and channels, it explores how digital conversations emerge, spread, and influence public opinion. As social media increasingly drives civic and political discourse, understanding these narratives is vital for promoting informed engagement, countering harmful content, and strengthening inclusive dialogue in Sri Lanka.

Guest contributors include Darshatha Gamage and Mandana Ismail Abeywickrema.

NARRATIVE PERIOD

Feb/March, 2026

KEY THEME

The social media discourse around the alleged recognition of the controversial archeological site at Kurundurmalai as a Hindu kovil

BACKGROUND

The archaeological site known as Kurundi Temple (Kurundurmalai) has been at the center of controversy for several years. It has been identified by some as a Buddhist archaeological site, while others, particularly within the Hindu community claim it to be the Ayanar Kovil.

More recently, a series of social media posts have circulated alleging that the site has been officially registered as a Hindu religious site, sparking renewed concern and debate among sections of the Sinhala Buddhist community

NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

The archaeological site of Kurundi Temple, also known as Kurundurmalai, has re-emerged as a focal point of ethno-religious contestation in Sri Lanka, reflecting broader tensions around heritage, identity, and political mobilization in the post-war context.



Kurundurmalai, located in the Mullaitivu District, has long been identified by the Department of Archaeology as a Buddhist site, with ruins believed to date back to the Anuradhapura period. However, segments of the local Tamil Hindu community assert that the site is historically associated with Aiyandar (Ayyanar) worship, a form of folk Hinduism prevalent in parts of South India and Northern Sri Lanka. These competing narratives, Buddhist archaeological heritage versus a living or remembered Hindu religious site have contributed to recurring disputes over ownership, access, and use.

The most recent wave of controversy appears to have been catalyzed by the circulation of claims on social media, primarily by Sinhala Buddhist nationalist actors. These posts reference a letter attributed to the

Maritimepattu Pradeshiya Sabha, which allegedly indicates that the site had been registered in 1981 as a Hindu religious property under the Department of Hindu Religious and Cultural Affairs.

This claim was framed as evidence of an institutional attempt to reclassify or appropriate a historically Buddhist site, and it rapidly gained traction among Sinhala Buddhist audiences. The framing positioned the issue as a threat to national heritage, amplifying anxieties about the erosion of Buddhist historical presence in the Northern Province

Shortly before the controversy intensified online, a group of Buddhist monks launched a multi-day pilgrimage—the 'Kurundi to Sri Pada Pada Charikawa'—linking the contested site to Sri Pada, one of the most revered locations in Sri Lankan Buddhism. This act was not merely devotional. As a public, spatially extended claim of religious affiliation, it served to assert Buddhist presence and belonging at Kurundurmalai in a form that is difficult to contest without appearing to oppose religious freedom.

Such pilgrimages function simultaneously as religious observance and as political geography: they map sacred terrain and, in disputed contexts, they stake claims. The timing—coinciding with the intensification of online controversy—suggests coordination or at minimum a shared agenda among actors.





On 6 March 2026, former parliamentarian Channa Jayasumana launched a publication titled 'Historic Buddhist Heritage in the Northern Province.' While not directly linked to the Kurundurmalai dispute in its stated focus, the thematic overlap was substantive: the publication contributed to an ambient narrative asserting that Buddhist historical heritage in the North is under threat and requires active documentation and defence.

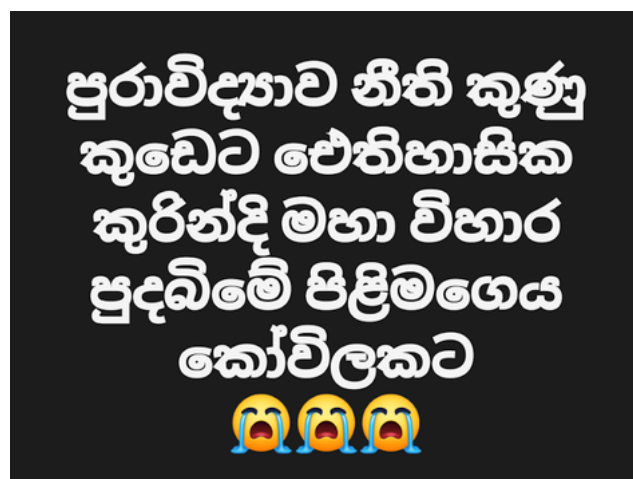
Online discourse was further intensified through the circulation of video clips depicting past confrontations at Kurundurmalai, including instances in which members of Hindu groups engaged in confrontational behaviour. These clips were circulated without temporal context, without the framing events that preceded the confrontations, and without any acknowledgment that they documented past rather than current incidents.

The effect was to create a perception of ongoing hostility and to generate grievance affect—the emotional readiness to accept claims of threat and to support protective responses.

A recurring feature of the online discourse was the use of maximalist framing: claims that archaeological protections were being 'destroyed,' warnings of 'cultural genocide,' and suggestions that the site was being converted from a Buddhist ruin into a Hindu kovil. Such language performs a specific function in contested-heritage disputes: it forecloses negotiation by representing the stakes as existential rather than administrative, and it delegitimises moderate or contextualising voices as naive or complicit.

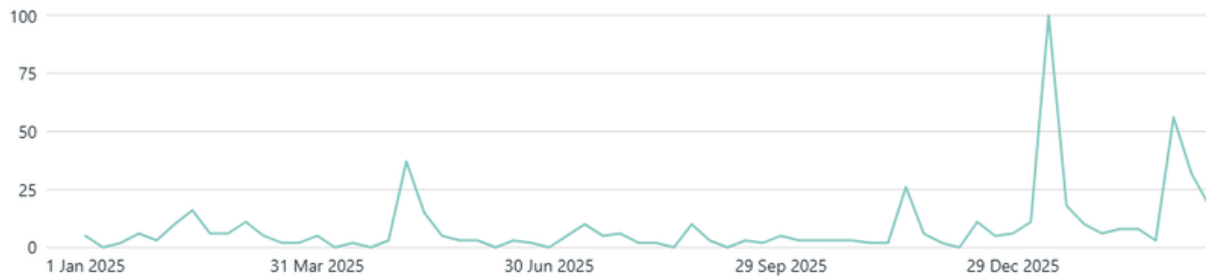


The controversy also evolved to include personal attacks and disinformation targeting political leadership. Claims circulated alleging that President Anura Kumara Dissanayake is not a Buddhist but a Christian (variously described as Anglican or Catholic), and that he is therefore complicit in allowing the “destruction” or conversion of the Kurundi site into a Hindu kovil.



Trends in posts created

Metrics displayed in the graph are normalized.



May Spike -

Reactions: 99
Comments: 22
Shares: 70
Views: 2.2K

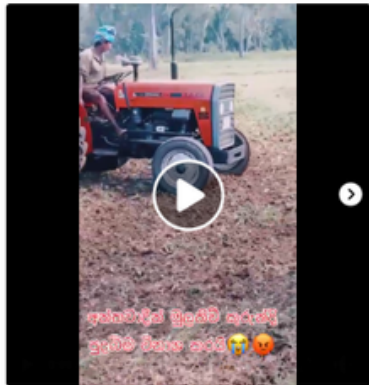


Nilmini Welivita

10 May 2025, 12:29

වත්තමාදීන් පසුව, ජයග් රහස්‍ය සමරමින් උතුරේ
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View comments

Reactions: N/A
Comments: 2
Shares: 27
Views: 600



Follow Shana

13 May 2025, 02:12

අත්තමාදීන් කුරුන්දිය පුදබිම විනාශ කරයි
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මරෙහිම නැගිටින්නට හැමෝම එකතු වන්න..... [See more](#)



Reactions: 32
Comments: 1
Shares: 18
Views: 1.2K



අසේල ධර්මසිරි

10 May 2025, 10:22

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View comments

Reactions: 6
Comments: 3
Shares: 0
Views: 101

Reactions: 15
Comments: 5
Shares: 5
Views: 709



Sheikh Irshad Sahabuddeen

10 May 2025, 10:18

කුරුන්දිය පුරාවිද්‍යා රක්ෂිතය අනතුරේ



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10 May 2025, 04:13

කුරුන්දිය පුරාවිද්‍යා රක්ෂිත ඉඩම අනවසරයෙන්
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නිලධාරී.... [See more](#)



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View comments

Reactions: 1
Comments: 0
Shares: 0
Views: N/A



අකුර අපි

10 May 2025, 09:40

Kurundiya archaeological reserve in danger again
කුරුන්දිය රක්ෂිත අනතුරේ

Read More -
https://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking_news/Kurundiya-archaeological-reserve-in-d... [See more](#)

Chathuranga Weerasinghe
chathuranga.weerasinghe.18132 · 17 Jan 2026, 02:44
බෞද්ධයෝ ශ්‍රී ලංකා බෞද්ධ පසුකරන් සිල්ලාගන්නා යන්තේ මෙවරයක් නිසා නොමෙයි උතුරු නැගෙනහිරත් ලියු එතනේ මේ පහසු ලැබු මෙතෙර විහාර, රහතන් එතනේදා වැඩසිටි ස්ථාන නිසෙන්නිසා. පල්ලිය... See more



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Reactions: 524
Comments: 130
Shares: 399
Views: 10.6K

Dinesh Rathnayaka
DineshStyleStory · 17 Jan 2026, 06:34
| බෞද්ධයෝ ශ්‍රී ලංකා බෞද්ධ පසුකරන් සිල්ලාගන්නා යන්තේ මෙවරයක් නිසා නොමෙයි උතුරු නැගෙනහිරත් ලියු එතනේ මේ පහසු ලැබු මෙතෙර විහාර, රහතන් එතනේදා වැඩසිටි ස්ථාන නිසෙන්නිසා. ප... See more



Anjana Udara
anjana.udara · 9 Mar 2026, 19:29
කුරුක්කි රජමහ විහාරය රැකගැනීම - ශ්‍රී ලංකාවේ ආගමික හා උරුමය ආරක්ෂා කිරීමේ වගකීම
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View comments

Reactions: 425
Comments: 16
Shares: 67
Views: 21.5K

Channa Jayasumana
jayasumanachanna · 4 Mar 2026, 01:54
ආදි ස්ථාන 30 බෞද්ධ මහා සමමේලන සමිතීන් රැස් ගැනීමට පැමිණෙන ලෙස දැනුම් දීමක් සිටින්නන් කරමි.
ආදි දින මෙම මහා සමමේලන "කුරුක්කි විහාර වංසය" කෘතිය ද අඩු මිලකට ලබා දීමට සැලසිමි. See more



Prasanga Alwis
prasanga.alwis · 18 Jan 2026, 16:06
"ආනන්දාසිරිපාය පසුකරන් ස්ථානයට සිල්ලාගන්නා යන්තේ මෙවරයක් නිසා නොමෙයි උතුරු නැගෙනහිරත් ලියු එතනේ මේ පහසු ලැබු මෙතෙර විහාර, රහතන් එතනේදා වැඩසිටි ස්ථාන නිසෙන්නිසා. පල්ලිය... See more



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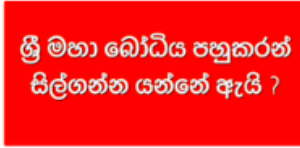
Reactions: 267
Comments: 17
Shares: 96
Views: 3.6K

Lal de Alwis
lal.de.alwis.338755 · 17 Jan 2026, 06:16
හදිසියේ අවස්ථා නිවැරදිව සිටින බුදු සිටිමි හැරෙන්නට සමස්තයක් ලෙස ගත් කළ,
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මෙතන ස්ථානයකට ආගමික... See more



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Sonala Gunawardana
kuppamaniblog · 17 Jan 2026, 02:23
බෞද්ධයෝ ශ්‍රී ලංකා බෞද්ධ පසුකරන් සිල්ලාගන්නා යන්තේ මෙවරයක් නිසා නොමෙයි උතුරු නැගෙනහිරත් ලියු එතනේ මේ පහසු ලැබු මෙතෙර විහාර, රහතන් එතනේදා වැඩසිටි ස්ථාන නිසෙන්නිසා. පල්ලිය... See more



View comments

Reactions: 53
Comments: 8
Shares: 29
Views: 2K

Rukmal Samarakoon
zuhw49s9 · 10 Jan 2026, 15:13
මෙම නව වස්ම මා ඉදිරි මාසයේ පළාතේ ලියු පද්ධති ලිපිය (2026/01/04)
ඒත් කතාකරන්නේ නිසි ප්‍රකාරයෙන් ගෙන මම ඉදිරි පළාතේ ලියු පද්ධති ලිපිය ද මෙයයි... See more



මෙලයෙන් රකින මෙලයෙන්
49w8s1m · 9 Mar 2026, 15:54
කුරුක්කි පුද්ගලික ආගමික ස්ථාන රැස් කිරීමේ නොවැඩිව හැකි නොවුණද මෙය කෙරෙහි සමස්ත ප්‍රජාවේ ආශ්‍රිත මේ ඉන්නේ...
#CP



View comments

Reactions: 595
Comments: 85
Shares: 245
Views: 9K

Rukmal Samarakoon
zuhw49s9 · 9 Mar 2026, 16:30
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Sheikh Irshad Sahabuddin
sahabdeen.mohamadinshad · 7 Mar 2026, 06:35
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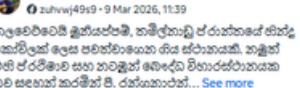
Shalinda Niroshan Wijesingha
shalindaw · 8 Mar 2026, 03:27
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Rukmal Samarakoon
zuhw49s9 · 9 Mar 2026, 11:39
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POLITICAL ANALYSIS

The social media discourse surrounding the alleged recognition of Kurundi Temple (Kurundumalai) as a Hindu kovil reveals the dynamics of ethnoreligious politics in post-war Sri Lanka. Although the claim of official “recognition” was circulated widely online, it has been largely misleading. Nevertheless, the rapid spread of disinformation online demonstrates how, in highly polarised environments, the political impact of a narrative often outweighs factual accuracy. What emerged was not simply a debate over an archaeological site, but a digital campaign on the struggle over identity, history, as well as territorial legitimacy and the simmering pot of continuing ethno-religious tensions promoted by ultra nationalist elements backed by some political powers.

It would suffice to note that the heart of this discourse lies in the power of disinformation as a political trigger. Social media posts have framed the situation as an urgent threat, prompting calls for mobilisation and protection of religious heritage. The speed and scale at which these claims spread transformed what may have been a localised dispute into a national issue, reflecting a broader pattern in which emotionally charged but inaccurate information generates perceptions of existential threat. This is particularly so when tied to religion and ethnicity since the truth becomes secondary to the narrative’s capacity to mobilise communities at such times.

The ongoing discourse presents different interpretations that affect the Sinhala Buddhist majority and Tamil Hindu minority differently. Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist narratives tend to frame the site as an ancient Buddhist temple, emphasising continuity with a long civilisational past. Within this framework, Tamil or Hindu claims are often portrayed as encroachments or attempts to erase Buddhist heritage. On the other hand, Tamil narratives present the site — often referred to as Kurunthoor Malai — as a place of Hindu religious significance and a symbol of longstanding Tamil presence in the region. These narratives are frequently intertwined with broader claims of marginalisation and dispossession in the post-war period.

Also, there has been an increase in elements of Hindu revivalism and transnational ideological influences can also be observed, adding another layer to the discourse.

A crucial factor shaping these narratives is the segmented nature of Sri Lanka's digital public sphere. Sinhala- and Tamil-language social media ecosystems operate largely in parallel, with limited interaction or shared information. As a result, each community encounters a distinct version of events, reinforcing pre-existing beliefs and grievances. This fragmentation contributes to the emergence of "parallel realities," where misinformation can flourish unchecked within each linguistic and cultural sphere. The absence of a shared factual baseline makes dialogue more difficult and increases the likelihood of mutual suspicion.

The role of political elites, especially representing the ultra-nationalist camp, who also enjoy significant followings on social media coupled with viral media moments further intensifies these dynamics. When high-profile figures engage with or are seen to validate aspects of the controversy, the issue gains national prominence and legitimacy. Viral videos and public statements can act as catalysts, transforming online debates into broader political controversies. This has been witnessed throughout the Kurundumalai controversy and is continuing to present a political discourse that could be ignited into an ethno-religious tension if and when required in line with the agendas of the ultra-nationalist political elites.

Emotion plays a central role in sustaining and escalating the Kurundumalai discourse with the Sinhala Buddhist nationalists and the Tamil Hindu nationalists relying heavily on narratives of sacred space and collective victimhood. For Sinhala-Buddhist actors, it represents heritage under threat; for Tamil communities, it signifies historical erasure and state-backed encroachment. These emotionally resonant frames leave little room for compromise, as any concession can be perceived as a betrayal of identity or history.

The intensity of the continuing discourse online and offline on the Kurundumalai controversy was witnessed in a speech delivered by President Anura Kumara Dissanayake (AKD) during a recent visit to the North where he vowed that neither he nor his government would leave any room for extremism to raise its head. He went on to speak of the extremist elements in the south as well as in the north. AKD claimed that those who organise pilgrimages to the north passing historically significant places of Buddhist worship in the South and those who

organise protests during poya days outside Buddhist religious sites in the north were all extremist elements. The underlying message of the President's statement was that there is close attention being paid to the sensitivity and risk of ethno-religious flare ups.

There is no doubt that the incumbent Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)-led National People's Power (NPP) government is well aware that ultra-nationalist elements, both political and politically-backed, from both sides (Sinhala and Tamil) are using ethno-religious tensions as a political tinder box that could be ignited to regain their lost vote bloc at the 2024 presidential and parliamentary elections and propel a regime change eventually. It is evident that the JVP/NPP's victory in the north and east during the 2024 elections touch a sensitive nerve for the nationalist Tamil political parties while the same victory is being interpreted by the southern political parties as the JVP/NPP's pandering towards the minority communities. Social media posts stating that the President and JVP/NPP are not Sinhala Buddhists while questioning their religious status are further evident of the anti-government campaign of ultra-nationalists.

It is also important to note that the effects of this continuing discourse are not confined to the digital realm. Online narratives have translated into real-world tensions, including protests and confrontations linked to religious observances. Hence, social media functions both as an early warning system for potential conflict and as a mechanism that accelerates mobilisation. The boundary between online and offline politics has become increasingly blurred, with digital rhetoric shaping on-the-ground realities. It also underscores the challenges of reconciliation with history, religion, and politics remain deeply intertwined, and where digital media amplifies rather than resolves these tensions.