



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

March 2026

KEY THEME

The social media discourse around the protest held at the University of Jaffna premises protesting the alleged Sinhalization of the university.

BACKGROUND

On March 20, a protest was held in front of the University of Jaffna, where members of the Faculty of Arts Students' Union spoke to the media about concerns regarding recent developments at the university. During the protest, the union's media spokesperson said that the university is undergoing a process of Sinhalization and described it as a deliberate development.

He stated that lecture activities in several academic departments had been shifted to the English medium without opposition, and argued that this has contributed to an increase in the admission of Sinhala students to the university. He said this was a matter of serious concern for the student community.

Further he also said that the University of Jaffna is not only an educational institution but also an important part of the history, culture, and identity of the Tamil community. Referring to the present government, he questioned whether these developments reflected the change it had promised when it came to power. He further said that, in this matter, students did not see a difference between the current government and the previous administration.

NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

Social media discussions emerged around a protest at the University of Jaffna concerning allegations of Sinhalization at the institution. What stood out most in the spread of this story was the imbalance in language-based attention it received. The issue gained relatively wide circulation in Sinhala social media spaces, while drawing very limited engagement in Tamil social media, which is unusual given the nature of the issue and the university involved. Ordinarily, concerns relating to discrimination, injustice, or structural pressure affecting Tamil students at the University of Jaffna tend to generate notable discussion among Tamil-language media outlets, social media pages, and activist networks. In this case, however, that pattern was largely absent.

Another notable feature was the lack of coverage from Tamil web media. Major Tamil outlets, including Tamil Guardian, did not appear to report on the issue. Instead, one of the only visible media reports came from GossipLanka, a platform often criticized for sensationalism and for promoting Sinhala-Buddhist majoritarian narratives. This makes the circulation pattern particularly significant, as the story appears to have entered the wider online space not through Tamil media ecosystems or rights-based platforms, but through Sinhala-language pages and accounts.



The early Sinhala-language reporting itself was presented in a relatively formal and professional style. At first glance, many of these posts did not contain openly racist language or direct attempts to incite hostility. However, several of the captions were strikingly similar, and in some cases nearly identical, including their use of the same hashtags and framing. This repetition suggests the possibility of coordinated dissemination, whether through organized cross-posting networks, aligned page ecosystems, or other forms of inauthentic amplification. While this alone does not conclusively establish coordinated inauthentic behaviour, the pattern raises important questions about how the narrative was seeded and spread.

Chathura Madugoda
 chathura.madugoda1 • 23 Mar 2026, 08:10

යාපනය සරසවිය 'සිංහලීකරණය' කරන බවට ශිෂ්‍ය සංගමයෙන් රජයට බරපතල චෝදනාවක්!

යාපනය විශ්වවිද්‍යාලය ක්රමානුකූලව සිංහලීකරණයට ලක් කිරීමේ සැලසුම් සහගත වැඩපිළිවෙළක් ක් රියාත්මක වන බවට යාපනය විශ්වවිද්‍යාලයේ කලා පීඨ ශිෂ්‍ය සංගමය දැඩි විවේචනයක් එල්ල කර තිබෙනවා. ඊයේ (20) විශ්වවිද්‍යාල පර්යේෂණ ඉදිරිපිට පැවති විරෝධතාවයකට එක්වෙමින් එහි මාධ්‍ය ප්රකාශක කවිතරන් මහතා පෙන්වා දුන්නේ විශ්වවිද්‍යාලයේ දේශන කටයුතු ඉංග්රීසි මාධ්‍යයට පරිවර්තනය කිරීම හරහා වැඩි වශයෙන් සිංහල සිසුන් විශ්වවිද්‍යාලයට ඇතුළත් කරගැනීමට බලධාරීන් කටයුතු කරමින් සිටින බවයි.

යාපනය විශ්වවිද්‍යාලය යනු දෙමළ ජනතාවගේ පාරම්පරික උරුමය සහ සංස්කෘතිය නියෝජනය කරන ජර්මානුකූල මධ්‍යස්ථානයක් බවත්, මෙවැනි ක් රියාත්මක හරහා එම අනන්‍යතාවය විනාශ කිරීමට උත්සාහ කරන බවත් ඔහු වැඩිදුරටත් ප්රකාශ කළා.

පසුගිය රජයත් සිදුකළ මෙවැනි අහිතකර ක්රියාවන් වෙනස් කරන බවට පොරොන්දු වෙමින් බලයට පත් වූ චන්මත් රජය යටතේද කිසිදු වෙනසක් දැකිය නොහැකි බව ශිෂ්‍ය සංගම නියෝජිතයා මෙහිදී අවධාරණය කළා. ශිෂ්‍ය ජරජාවට ලබා දෙන පොරොන්දු වූ වෙනස මෙයදැයි ඔහු බලධාරීන්ගෙන් ප්රශ්න කර සිටිනවා.

#JaffnaUniversity #UniversityStudents #ProtestNews #HigherEducationSL #LkaNews #BreakingNewsLka #FeedX #Lka #Srilanka #Puwath #AdaPuwath #TrendingLka #GossipLka #SrilankaDaily #March21Update [See less](#)



Arabepola Rathanasara Thera
 ArabepolaThera1 • 28 Mar 2026, 09:00

යාපනය සරසවිය 'සිංහලීකරණය' කරන බවට ශිෂ්‍ය සංගමයෙන් රජයට බරපතල චෝදනාවක්!

යාපනය විශ්වවිද්‍යාලය ක්රමානුකූලව සිංහලීකරණයට ලක් කිරීමේ සැලසුම් සහගත වැඩපිළිවෙළක් ක් රියාත්මක වන බවට යාපනය විශ්වවිද්‍යාලයේ කලා පීඨ ශිෂ්‍ය සංගමය දැඩි විවේචනයක් එල්ල කර තිබෙනවා. ඊයේ (20) විශ්වවිද්‍යාල පර්යේෂණ ඉදිරිපිට පැවති විරෝධතාවයකට එක්වෙමින් එහි මාධ්‍ය ප්රකාශක කවිතරන් මහතා පෙන්වා දුන්නේ විශ්වවිද්‍යාලයේ දේශන කටයුතු ඉංග්රීසි මාධ්‍යයට පරිවර්තනය කිරීම හරහා වැඩි වශයෙන් සිංහල සිසුන් විශ්වවිද්‍යාලයට ඇතුළත් කරගැනීමට බලධාරීන් කටයුතු කරමින් සිටින බවයි.

යාපනය විශ්වවිද්‍යාලය යනු දෙමළ ජනතාවගේ පාරම්පරික උරුමය සහ සංස්කෘතිය නියෝජනය කරන ජර්මානුකූල මධ්‍යස්ථානයක් බවත්, මෙවැනි ක් රියාත්මක හරහා එම අනන්‍යතාවය විනාශ කිරීමට උත්සාහ කරන බවත් ඔහු වැඩිදුරටත් ප්රකාශ කළා.

පසුගිය රජයත් සිදුකළ මෙවැනි අහිතකර ක්රියාවන් වෙනස් කරන බවට පොරොන්දු වෙමින් බලයට පත් වූ චන්මත් රජය යටතේද කිසිදු වෙනසක් දැකිය නොහැකි බව ශිෂ්‍ය සංගම නියෝජිතයා මෙහිදී අවධාරණය කළා. ශිෂ්‍ය ජරජාවට ලබා දෙන පොරොන්දු වූ වෙනස මෙයදැයි ඔහු බලධාරීන්ගෙන් ප්රශ්න කර සිටිනවා.

#JaffnaUniversity #UniversityStudents #ProtestNews #HigherEducationSL #LkaNews #BreakingNewsLka #FeedX #Lka #Srilanka #Puwath #AdaPuwath #TrendingLka #GossipLka #SrilankaDaily #March21Update [See less](#)



As the story continued to circulate, a smaller but more concerning layer of engagement began to emerge. Some accounts and pages shared the issue with increasingly divisive captions, introducing ethnicized framing, inflammatory interpretations, and in certain cases language that appeared to encourage hostility or violence. This later phase of amplification shifted the tone of the conversation from straightforward reporting to one that carried greater potential for communal tension. Even though the story did not appear to gain immediate mass traction in Sinhala social media, the repeated reposting across different accounts and pages may have helped sustain visibility until it was gradually picked up more widely over time, whether through organic spread or networked promotion.

විජයබාහු මුදියන්සේ
 30 Mar 2026, 00:54
 කොහොමද suckකිලි ගිහිනි නියෙන උඩ🙄🙄🙄
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Nalaka Elladeniya
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 පේරාදෙණියේ සිසුන් දෙමළ සිසුන් බඳවා නො
 ගන්නා ලෙසට උද්ඝෝෂණය කළ... See more



යාපනය සරසවිය 'සිංහලීකරණය' වෙනවැයි විරෝධතා!
 යාපනය විශ්වවිද්‍යාලය දමිල ප්රජාවගේ අයිතියක් හා එයට සිංහල සිසුන් බඳවා ගැනීමට විරෝධය පළ කරමින් එහි විරෝධතාවයක්

Ranil Jayanetti
 ranil.jayanetti • 23 Mar 2026, 06:06
 යකෝ මය වියව විද්යාලය හදලා නියෙන්නේ චුඩි හරියක් සිංහල මිනිස්සු ගෙවපු බදු සල්ලි වලින්. දැන් සිංහලයෝත්ම එන්න එපාලු. ජාතිවාදී හැන්න! උතුරෙන් මාලිමාවට දොල පිදේනි ගන්න ඡන්ද එනකොට "අනේ සහෝදරත්වයේ දැන්" කියපු එවුන් කෝ? තොපි වගේ මැරි මෝල් නර්! [See less](#)



යාපනය සරසවිය 'සිංහලීකරණය' වෙනවැයි විරෝධතා!
 යාපනය විශ්වවිද්‍යාලය දමිල ප්රජාවගේ අයිතියක් හා එයට සිංහල සිසුන් බඳවා ගැනීමට විරෝධය පළ කරමින් එහි විරෝධතාවයක්

RESPONSE

The most visible direct response to the issue came from Arun Siddharth, a controversial politician affiliated with Sarvajana Balaya (Aithigaram). He publicly criticized the statement made by the student union representative and called for action against the university students, alleging that they had insulted the national flag. His intervention appears to have been one of the few clearly identifiable political responses to the matter and may have contributed to reframing the issue away from the original student concerns and toward a more nationalist and punitive discourse.

In Tamil-language spaces, discussion remained extremely limited. The issue appears to have been mentioned only on Arun Siddharth's own Facebook page and on one additional Tamil news page. This limited engagement is particularly striking because issues involving perceived unfairness, discrimination, or unequal treatment of Tamil students at the University of Jaffna would usually trigger wider debate across Tamil social media networks. The relative silence in this instance may indicate hesitation within Tamil media ecosystems, a lack of trust in the original source of the story, uncertainty about the facts, or simply the absence of early reporting from credible Tamil outlets that might have legitimized broader discussion.



Arulanandam Arun

arunsiddharthjaffna • 23 Mar 2026, 13:31

ஊடக அறிக்கை
சர்வஜன அதிகாரம்
யாழ் மாவட்டம்
23/03/2026... [See more](#)



Arulanandam Arun

arunsiddharthjaffna • 23 Mar 2026, 13:56

ஊடக அறிக்கை
சர்வஜன அதிகாரம்
யாழ் மாவட்டம்
23/03/2026... [See more](#)



Overall, the trajectory of this story is notable not only because of the subject matter, but because of how the narrative moved across platforms and language communities. Rather than beginning with strong engagement in Tamil media and then crossing into Sinhala discourse, the pattern appears to have been reversed. The story was first circulated and amplified mainly within Sinhala-language online networks, initially through neutral-seeming posts and later through more divisive commentary. This unusual flow, together with the repetition in captions and hashtags, suggests that the case warrants closer attention as an example of how sensitive ethnic and political narratives can be selectively amplified, reframed, and weaponized in social media environments.

POLITICAL ANALYSIS

The protest held on 20 March in front of the University of Jaffna and the resultant social media discussion on it highlights the long-standing tensions between Sinhala-Buddhist majoritarian nationalism and Tamil minority nationalism in post-war Sri Lanka. Although the immediate trigger for the protest was a set of institutional changes — particularly the expansion of English-medium instruction and the perceived increase in Sinhala student admissions — the deeper significance of the event lies in how these developments are interpreted through competing political and historical narratives.

The University of Jaffna is a significant institution in the Tamil nationalist ideology and goes far beyond its function as an educational institution given that it has been established in the context of ethnic marginalization and later shaped by the civil war. Hence, the university has become a symbol of Tamil intellectual life, cultural continuity, and a degree of regional autonomy in the Northern Province. It is this reason that any structural or administrative change within the university has often been viewed not as a neutral policy decision but as part of a broader political trajectory through the years.

The claim made by the Students' Union spokesperson that the university is undergoing "Sinhalization" is made in such a backdrop and therefore reflects a historically grounded anxiety. The continuing suspicion between the Sinhala majority and Tamil minority that is fueled by ultra-nationalist political elites from both sides has resulted in the Northern youth in the Jaffna University interpreting state policies — whether in language, education, or administration — as an effort by the southern-led state to reshape demographic and cultural realities in ways that disadvantage Tamil communities. It is in this context that the shift toward English-medium instruction is being interpreted with suspicion. While English may appear as a neutral or global language, Tamil nationalist readings suggest that such a shift can indirectly alter the composition of the student body by making the institution more accessible to Sinhala students educated in English, which is perceived by the Tamil nationalist-backed students union as diluting the Tamil character of a historically Tamil-majority university. It is evident that the concerns expressed by the University of Jaffna students' union are not merely about language preference, but about the long-term implications for cultural identity and local representation. The argument that these changes are "deliberate" indicates a belief that institutional transformation is being guided, or at least enabled, by state structures that have historically privileged Sinhala-Buddhist dominance.

It further indicates the narrative being pushed by ultra-nationalist Tamil political elites that the incumbent Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)-led National People's Power (NPP) government of President Anura Kumara Disanayake (AKD) is not sensitive to the Tamil national question and is not keen on providing a permanent solution to the ethnic issue either and its impact on the youth in the North. President AKD's victory at the last presidential election and his JVP/NPP at the parliamentary election in 2024 where the northern province and a majority of the eastern province voted for them surprising both the Sinhala and Tamil ultra-nationalist political camps has now paved the way for the Tamil nationalist to commence campaigns against the ruling party. Sowing fear and suspicion against the incumbent administration in the minds of the Tamil youth in the north is a move by the Tamil nationalists to regain its lost vote bank. The campaign is mostly focused on asserting that there is no meaningful difference between the current government and its predecessors, the student leadership invokes a recurring theme in Tamil nationalist politics: that changes in political leadership in the South do not translate into substantive shifts in how power is exercised in the North. This reflects a deep-seated trust deficit, where promises of reform or reconciliation are often viewed as superficial or unfulfilled.

On the other hand, the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist camps backed by political elites have interpreted that the administrative changes at the University of Jaffna is a necessary step toward modernization, global competitiveness, and equal opportunity across the country. The majority nationalists have noted that English is a unifying and pragmatic medium that benefits all students irrespective of ethnicity. They have further noted that an increase in Sinhala student enrollment at the University of Jaffna is a positive sign of national integration, breaking down the ethnic segregation that has historically characterized Sri Lanka's social and educational landscapes and a rejection of the notion of "Sinhalization."

Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist thought tends to emphasize the unitary nature of the state and the idea that public institutions, including universities, belong to all citizens equally. As such, assertions that the University of Jaffna should primarily serve or represent Tamil identity may be viewed as exclusionary or even as a residual form of separatist thinking. The underlying concern here is that strong ethnic claims over state institutions could undermine national cohesion and reinforce divisions that the country has sought to overcome since the end of the civil war as well as develop an anti-government campaign targeting ultra-nationalist camps of the South and North.

Given the increasing campaigns witnessed online and offline by nationalist camps from the south and north, backed by political elites and some religious leaders, a close watch on these developments could help prevent these campaigns from being transformed into hate speech or even violence. Also, the protest at the University of Jaffna reveals the persistence of unresolved national questions in Sri Lanka and as long as these issues remain unaddressed, ethno-religious conflicts are likely to recur, with universities, language policies, and public institutions continuing to serve as focal points for deeper political tensions.