

'We are going to worship a famous temple and the Department of Archeology, and the Department of Forest Conservation has banned us from going there. Banning us from going to the temple is a violation of human rights,' said Vairamuthu Poobalasingam, who regularly participates in Vedukunari temple worship.



When worship services are held at Vedukunarimalai temple

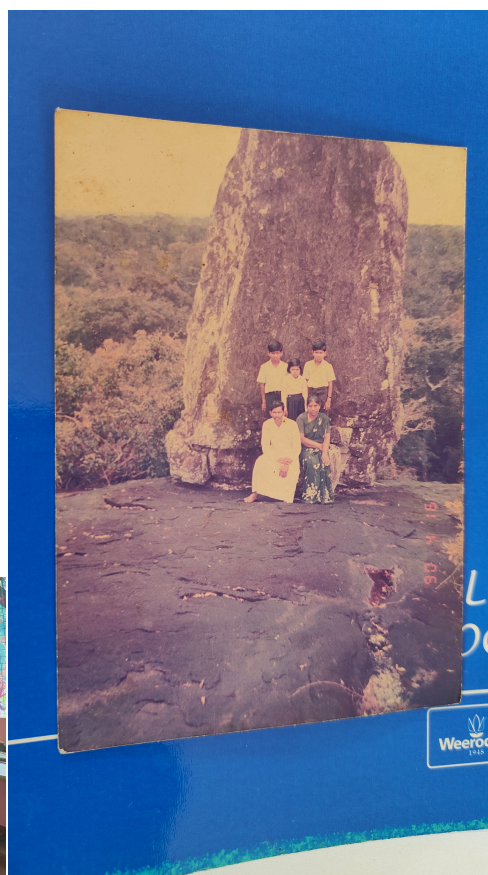
I have been living in this village for more than 60 years. The hill is known as Vedukunari because of the Vedukunari trees found around the mountain. When we visited there were remains of destroyed Hindu temples. There is evidence that the Nagas gave it. There is a temple carved out of stone in the shape of a Naga,' he said.



Archaeological Evidence and Early Temple at Vedukunarimalai

There are various evidence such as Nagar pond, Brahmic inscriptions on the hill, evidences of king's residence, well, pool, Hindu temple where the king worshiped in Vedukunari temple. As such, they are currently creating barriers to enter the temple premises. Vairamuthu Bubalasingham believes that the reason for the lack of good governance in Sri Lanka is because of the destruction of religions.

Also, the wonder of the Vedukunari temple is that the linga called Adilingam is similar to the Tanjore temple in India. The wonder is that the Linga was lifted over 300 feet of the mountain. It could be divine power. Vairamuthu Poobalasingam, who proudly mentions the miracle of Vedukunari, shows that the lingam he took with his family in front of the mountain in 1990 is proof.



Vedukunarimalai Adilingeswarar Temple is in Olumadu Palamottai Village in Vavuniya North Nedungeni Region. The village is called Olumadu because of the abundance of 'Olu' plants in the pond here. To the east of the village, the Vedukunari Adilingeswarar Temple is situated on top of about 200 to 300 feet hill in a natural environment surrounded by Vedukunari trees. It has a history dating back to the second century BC.

To the north of this hill is Nedunkeni village, to the east is Olumadu village, to the south is Nochikul village and to the west is Nainamadu village. Vedukunarimalai, which is surrounded by dense forest between these villages, can be reached only through a three-and-a-half-kilometer forest road.

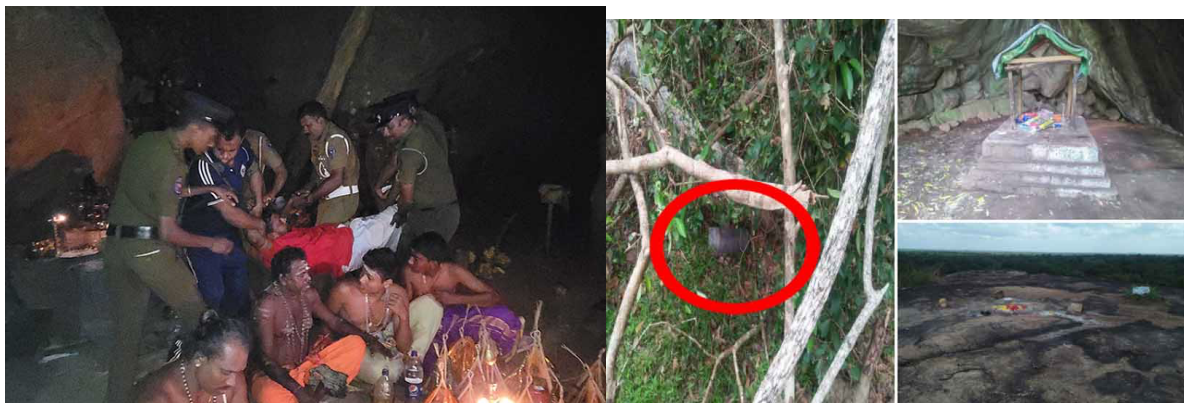
Due to the war situation in the country, it was not possible to visit this temple and worship. However, during the post-war period, the villagers, including the descendants of the ancestors who maintained the temple, performed special prayers on Fridays and full moon days and continued worshipping again.

At the top of Vedukunarimalai sits Adilingeswar and next to it Amman. Piliyar, Vairavar, Murugan and Nagathambaran idols were worshiped at the lower foothills of this mountain. The people of the region are also worshipping Ayyanar on this mountain, considering it as its boundary deity.

In this situation in 2018 Sri Lanka Department of Archeology and Forestry Department banned people from visiting this temple and declared the area as an archaeological site. After that, a case was filed in the court in 2021 against the temple administrators and the priest who entered the area.

In this background idols of Vedukunari temple were smashed on 26-03-2023. However, due to protests by Hindu religious and civil organizations and the Vavuniya court order, the idols were consecrated.

However, last February, restrictions were imposed on rituals on the day of Shivratri by the police. Also, 8 people who went to worship were arrested and detained for 14 days and released by the court due to lack of sufficient evidence.



Although Shivratri Day has been declared as the national Hindu event of the country, the priest of the temple, Thampirasa Madhimugarasa, pointed out that there are restrictions on the worship, and the Buddhist monks are present at the temple area under the protection of the soldiers, and the southern politicians also visit from time to time, and they are allowed to move freely.

Ellawala Methanthana Thera in his study mentioned Vedukunari Hill as 'Vattamana Parvata Viharai' and called it 'Land of Buddhism'. It is because of this that Buddhist monks tend to take over the Vedukunari Hill.

Not only Vedukunarimalai, but also in the eight districts of Sri Lanka's northern and eastern provinces, Hindu traditional places of worship, indigenous sites have been declared important archaeological sites, and subsequently Buddhist Viharai constructions have been undertaken.

In addition, the lands of the native Tamil people in the northern and eastern provinces are being occupied, and Buddhist temples are constructed, and monuments are being erected amid planned settlements and military camps.

Excavations were started on 18.01.2021 by the Department of Archeology at Kurundurmalai, Mullaitivu. At that time a lingam was found there. History professor C. Padmanathan pointed out that the symbols including the said lingam date back to 2300 years ago.



In such a situation, in violation of the rules of the Department of Archaeology, a Buddhist Vihara has been set up in Kurundurmalai and worship has been allowed there. However, a case has been filed against us insisting on confirmation of land rights,' said Durairasa Ravikaran.

Also, on 12.05.1933, a land measuring 78 acres and 2 roods has been notified for archaeological survey. However, continuous steps are being taken to acquire 306 acres of land surrounding the Kurundur hill. He also mentioned that 67 viharas have been constructed in Mullaitivu district since the end of the war.

Like Vedukunarimal, more than 4 cases have been filed in the Mullaitivu District Court in the Kurundurmalai issue.



Meanwhile, there is no evidence of an old Shiva temple in the Kurundi Vihara area, said Kalgamuva Shanthabodhi Thera, head of the Kurundi Vihara. Late minister Cyril Mathew who visited here in 1979 to develop this place of worship along with Thirukonamalai District Governor. Later he went to Colombo and getting the necessary permission he came back here in 1981 and said that the Tamil people in this area had illegally built a temple above the pedestal of the statue,' referring to history.



Also, 'Tamils have acted illegally; The aim is to prevent Kurundimalai from being developed into a vihara by Cyril Mathew. Several letters have since been issued demanding them (Hindu monuments) to be removed. After 1983 there were no activities due to the war. After that I visited here in 2018. Kalgamuva Shanthabodhi Thera said, "I carried out constructions based on historical evidence".

At the same time, in the borders of Mullaitivu and Vavunia districts, the villages where the Tamil people originally lived were renamed and majority Sinhalese settlements were carried out. A recent example of this is Kachalsammalam Kulam, a native Tamil village that has been renamed as Sappumalgaskada, where a Viharaya is being built. The Viharai is currently managed by the Ramannapura Peeda.



The government has declared a Tamil village called Manalaru as Welioya in the border areas of Mullaitivu and Vavuniya districts and established 9 Grama Niladhari Divisions there.

Ceylon Theatres has been renamed as Gajabapura, Mayilankulam as Monarawa, Kent Farm as Kalyanipura, Dollar Farm as Ahethugaswewa, Kokkuthoduvai as Janakapura and Katharneerankulam as Nikawewa.

All these villages have a majority Sinhalese population now and Buddhist Viharas have been built there at least one per village.

However, Monaraweve chief incumbent and secretary of Northern Buddhist organization, Ranavana Thammika Thera, says that the Sinhalese people were displaced from the above villages due to the war in the eighties, and after 2011, they were resettled and given agricultural land by the government.

According to him, it is confirmed that they have been settled under the auspices of the government. However, Sabarathinam, a servant who served as a Grama Niladhari in this area before 1965, said that there were no Sinhalese people in this area when I was working here from 1965. Moreover, no land distributions were held after 1981. So how could the Sinhalese people have lived here?

At the same time, private lands in the North have been encroached upon and temples are being constructed.

In 2012, with the intervention of a Thero in the land belonging to my father Somasundaram Thirugnanasambandar in Kokkilai area in Mullaitivu the land was acquired, and the construction of the Vihara was carried out. Subsequently, in 2015, when a complaint was made about the construction of this temple to a Mobile Service to resolve land disputes, an order was issued to return the land," said Thirugnanasambandar Manivannadas, the eldest son of the landowner.



"Since the order was not implemented, I went to court later. I have gone to everyone in politics and government officials. But the construction of the temple is continuing with the help of the army. I am continuing the struggle to reclaim the land," he said sadly.

Similarly, the Thissa Raja Maha Viharaya has been built in a private land in Thaiyiddy in Jaffna and the Army has given all the support for its construction.

According to the documents received in this regard, in 1945 a Sinhalese obtained 20 acres of land through a declaration deed and later it was given to two monks. Since Thaiyiddy was in the High Security Zone until 2019, it is confirmed that the temple has been constructed on that land.



However, the Sectoral Oversight Committee on National Security has sent a letter to the Valikamam North Divisional Secretary requesting him to ensure that the private land where the Valikamam North Thaiyiddy Tissa Raja Maha Viharaya is built is handed over to the Vihara and instead steps should be taken to provide lands elsewhere to the Tamils in the area.

At the same time, Kemunu Vihara has been set up in Kangesanthurai with the help of police and soldiers and it is also noteworthy that General Shavendra Silva, the Commander of the three forces, was the chief guest in the ceremony of constructing the vihara and placing the casket in Navakuly.

Similarly, S. Sivayoganathan, a representative of Batticaloa Civil Society Unions, mentioned that Buddhist occupations are ongoing in the Eastern Province, including Batticaloa, Trincomalee, and Amparai, under the guise of archaeology. He highlighted that these activities are systematically progressing in the border villages.



He said a presidential task force headed by Major General Kamal Gunaratne was formed to identify and protect the archaeological sites of the Eastern Province. He pointed out that even though it is not fully operational now, it has not yet been dissolved.

Also, after the end of the war, 246 places in Amparai district, 74 places in Trincomalee district and 55 places including 28 viharas in Batticaloa district have been marked as Buddhist places.

He also listed the areas identified by the Department of Archaeology at district level and subjected to Buddhist occupation as follows.

According to him, in the legendary Tamil village of Thennan Maravadi under Kuchaveli Divisional Secretariat in Trincomalee, the archeology department has claimed to have identified Buddhist symbols in the surroundings of Kandasamy Hill Murugan Temple, which has been around for a long time, and worshiping in the Kandasamy Hill Murugan Temple has been banned.

The native Tamil village of Mukattuwarem in Sri Lanka has now been renamed as 'Lankapatna' and the Balamurugan temple on Kunjitapada Hill has been demolished and a Buddhist monastery has been built there.

While these Kanniya hot springs were brought under the administration of the Central Department of Archeology, which was under the administration of Pradeshiyabai, only the remains of the Pilliyar Temple are there.

The Department of Archeology has banned all constructions at the historic Thirukoneswaram.



The 'Monkey garlanded hill' associated with the ancient legend has been broken down and used for road reconstruction in Wagarai Divisional Secretary Division of Batticaloa District.

Theras have raised objections through the Department of Archeology for the reconstruction of the Thandamalai temple and have pointed out that there are Buddhist landmarks.

Theras claim that there are Buddhist religious symbols in Vaganeri, Bulugunavai and the place where the Batticaloa fort is built has been identified by the Department of Archeology as having Buddhist religious symbols belonging to the Rugunu government.

Also, theras have started worshiping at the base of Swamimalai in Kachakkodi region as the Department of Archeology has claimed it.

In Batticaloa, Buddhist Viharas have been established with the permission of the Department of Archaeology in the Mayilathamadu Madhavanai area reserved for cattle rearing.

The remains found in a private land at Villuthottam in the Chenkalady Divisional Secretary's area have been identified as belonging to Buddhism.

In the border villages of the Batticaloa district, 7 temples have been established in the areas identified by the Department of Archaeology.

86 places in the native habitats of the Tamil-speaking minority people in Amparai district have been confiscated by the Department of Archeology and Buddha statues and viharas have been built in all those places.

These include 5 plots in Pothuvi Divisional Secretary Division, 36 plots in Thirukovil Divisional Secretary Division, 13 plots in Irakkamam Divisional Secretary Division, 9 plots in Alaiyadivembu Divisional Secretary Division, 6 plots in Akkaraipattu Divisional Secretary Division, 4 plots in Addalachenai Divisional Secretary Division and 2 plots in Kalmunai.

He said that the Department of Archeology claims that 12,000 acres of land from Kalmunai to Pothuvil belong to the sacred land of Digavapi.

In the meantime, the lands of the Malaineeli Amman Temple located in Kallady area of Verugal Divisional Secretary's Division in Trincomalee District were identified as an archaeological site and acquired. It was confirmed through field visits that a Vihara is being built claiming area as a Buddhist land.



The head of the temple, Velayutham Sivanandam, described the encroachment and said, "People were displaced due to the war situation in 2006. At that time, the Malaineeli Amman Temple, which has an ancient history dating back to 1835, was damaged by air strikes.

He also said that 'when the displaced people resettled again in 2007, the said temple was occupied by the army and the ruins of the temple were removed and taken over as an archeological site and the goddess's idol was placed on the street'.

In such a situation, the Buddhist monks have occupied the temple in 2009 claiming that it is Buddhist, and many structures are being carried out continuously by bringing huge stones from outside. Now we don't have room to worship. But Buddhist worship and construction are taking place in the area declared as an archaeological site," Velayutham Sivanandam pointed out.



Districts Identified Archaeological Sites

Gazetted desolate areas to be protected.

Districts	Identified archaeological sites	Gazetted	Desolate areas
Jaffna	135	63	04
Kilinochchi	18	08	-
Mullaitivu	176	88	02
Vavuniya	90	29	01
Mannar	60	32	-
Batticaloa	529	03 Places	14 desolate places 02
Trincomalee	223	37	12
Ampara	430	354	03
Total	1661	628	24

In response to the RTI application, the Department of Archeology stated that there are 479 identified archaeological sites in the North, of which 221 have been gazetted and 7 have been identified as protected forest areas.

Similarly, 1182 archaeological sites have been identified in the Eastern Province and 408 of them have been gazetted and 17 have been identified as protected forest areas.

Meanwhile, the number of registered Viharas in the other seven districts except Ampara in the north and east is 195, and the number of unregistered Viharas in the other six districts except Batticaloa and Ampara is 105, according to the statistics of the Ministry of Buddhist, Religious and Cultural Affairs.

Meanwhile, in response to a RTI application on the number of archaeological sites based on Buddhism in the North and East that have been identified the Department of Archaeology stated that first of all the Department does not identify archaeological sites on religious grounds.

However, in response to a question asked on a previous occasion as to which areas are identified as Hindu, Christian, and Islamic religions archaeological sites in the north and the east it has been reported that 1,102 places have been the number of Buddhist archaeological sites found in Amparai, Batticaloa, Vavuniya, Mannar, and Mullaitivu districts.

Number of religiously identified archaeological sites in certain districts in the north and east

District	Buddhism	Hindu	Christianity	Islam
Ampara	462	01	04	01
Batticaloa	510	12	05	01
Vavuniya	48	00	00	00
Mullaitivu	63	00	00	00
Mannar	19	00	08	00

At the same time, in the north and east, there are Oddusuttan Tanthonri Easwaran Temple, Mantai East Paththirakali Amman Temple, Kumarapuram Sri Chitravelayutham Murugan Temple, Pandiankulam Shiva Temple, Vavunikulam Sivapuram Srimalai Temple, Mannar Thirukketheeswaram Temple, Kilinochchi Maniththalai Shiva Temple, etc Othiyamalai hill Temple, Mulliyavala Kumarapuram Murugan Temple, Thirukonamalai Tennamaravadi Kandasamimalai, Chemmalai Neeraviyadi Pillaiyar Temple, Pulmoddai Rice Mill Hill Temple, Mudur Soodaikuda Hillside Murugan Temple, Thirukonamalai Koneswarar Temple, Thirukonamalai Kannagi Amman, Sivapuram Shivalayam, Manthai East Adhishivan Temple, Kunjumap Periyasamy Temple, Malai Niliyamman Temple, Kallumalai Pillaiyar Temple, Batticaloa Thanthamalai Temple, Batticaloa Kachakkodi Swamimalai, Kurundurmalaiyadi Iyanar Temple, Batticaloa, Chithandi Murugan Temple, Kanniya Hotspring, Uruthrapuram Shiva Temple, Kusalamalai Saiva Kumaran Temple, Vatrappalai Kannagi Ambal temple, Kilinochchi Krishnapuram Pilliyar Temple, Kirimalai Adilingeswarar Temple, Palali Uchip Pilliyar, Sulipuram Paralai Murugan Temple, Vavuniya Nedunkerni Nochiyadi Iyanar Temple have been identified as archaeological sites by the department and some of these temples have been declared through notice board and gazette.

In such a situation, Senchoselvar Kalanithi Aru Thirumurugan, the president of Sri Lanka Shivabumi Trust and Thellipalai Sri Durga Devi Devasthan, and the vice-president of the All Sri Lankan Hindu Mamanram, has made accusations that the invasion is being carried out in the name of Buddhism in the north, east and beyond, and that the Department of Archeology is fully supporting this.

He also expressed concern that the Department of Archaeology has identified and gazetted Hindu temples and cultural heritage sites, particularly in the North and East, highlighting the risk of ongoing encroachment activities.



He said, 'Hinduism was very important in the early days of Eelam. He mentioned how important Buddhism is in the South, similarly, Hinduism is a dominant religion not only in the North and East of the country, but also in all parts of the country.

Also, 'Buddhist theras are trying to weaken Hinduism and Tamils by converting traditional places of worship of Tamils into Buddhist ancient places in the name of 'archaeology'. Buddhism and Saivism have close connections. Tamils have also embraced Buddhism. The Sinhalese Buddhists does not understand this. The Sinhalese's backward act of installing Buddha statues in places where there is no Sinhalese movement is painful,' he said.

"Now the Department of Archaeology has become a full-fledged Buddhist institution. They are not an organization that researches history. It is supporting the establishment of a Buddhist identity by removing the Saivite identity. The encroachments extend from Munneswaram to Koneswaram and from Keerimalai to Kurundurmalai," he points out.

Moreover, the Buddhist Theras and their supporters display chauvinistic tendencies. Following the war, our homeland was occupied, and now our religion is being targeted. If this persists, the survival of our race and religion in the North and East may be at risk.

The Archeology department's communication is crucial to Aruthirumurugan's allegations. The Department of Archeology is utilizing public tax funds for excavations in the North and East regions, encompassing those areas.

At the same time, the Department of Archeology said that it does not take funds from any agency to carry out the excavations and the services of the army are being taken for free.

However, a substantial amount of money has been spent on excavations in the North and East in the post-war environment. The salaries and other allowances of the employees are not included in the total expenditure provided by the Department.

Amount spent on excavations in the North and East

Year	Vavunia, Mullaitivu, Mannar, Batticaloa,	Ampara
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2018	285,577.50	189,675.00	1,615,957.00
2019	130,855.00	172,723.00	-
2020	276,093.37	-	-
2021	2,347,454.43	484,738.00	353,044.36
2022	593,276.00	308,467.00	249,856.00

While the situation in the North and East is like this, legal provisions are also found for taking necessary legal measures to protect archaeological monuments using the Archeology Ordinance and related laws and to punish those who violate the provisions of the Act through the courts.

- The Archeology Act No. 09 of 1940.
- The Archeology (Amendment) Act No. 24 of 1998.
- The Increase of Penalty (Amendment) Act No. 12 of 2005.
- Government Repossession Act No. 07 of 1979.

Taking legal action against persons who violate the Antiquities Ordinance, taking action to prosecute offenders in courts, amending the Antiquities Ordinance from time to time, coordinating with the Police Department and the Attorney General's Department, conducting preliminary inquiries into the misconduct of employees in the Department, framing of charge sheets, disciplinary inquiries. There are also responsibilities including directing the allegations before the Individual Tribunal and taking steps to grant due rewards to the officers and persons concerned through the Archaeological Reward Fund.

Under Archaeology Ordinance No. 9 of 1940 and Amendment No. 4 of 1998, the Director General of Archaeology bears the sole responsibility for heritage protection. It is stipulated that no other officer from any organization may evade their duties.

In such a situation, the Director General of the Department of Archaeology, Prof. Tusitha Mendis, firmly states that 'the Department of Archeology does not work based on race and religion'.



In particular, under its responsibility, it aims to protect the archaeological sites and desolate places of the country. I cannot respond to things that happened in the past. But such bitter events will not happen again,' he says categorically.

At the same time, he also made an important point about the construction of Buddhist Viharas or temples in those areas after they have been identified as archaeological sites.

After being identified as archaeological sites, our department's law enforcement officers will address any illegal activities that occur there. If situations arise that are beyond their jurisdiction, they will act based on the Attorney General's advice, he stated.

At the same time, Professor Senarath Dissanayake and Professor Anura Manathunga, who have held the position of Director General of Archeology since 2020, argue that the activities of the Department of Archeology were not carried out in a biased manner during their tenure.



But they are not ready to give a clear answer about the tense situation in the north and east including Kurundur Hill and Vedukunarimalai during their tenure. The other secondary officers of the department only replied 'orders from above'.

In the case of Sri Lanka, it has been stated that constitutional primacy should be given to Buddhism and preserved. The civil society in the North and East expressed concern that everyone, from the President to the Judges, must follow it.

இலங்கைச் சனநாயக சோசலிசக் குடியரசின் அரசியலமைப்பு

3

அத்தியாயம் II

பௌத்த மதம்

9. இலங்கைக் குடியரசில் பௌத்த மதத்துக்கு முதன்மைத் தானம் பௌத்த மதம். வழங்கப்படுதல் வேண்டும் என்பதோடு, அதற்சினங்க 10 ஆம், 14(1)(உ) ஆம் உறுப்புரைகளால் வழங்கப்பட்டுள்ள உரிமைகளை எல்லா மதங்களுக்கும் காப்புறுதி செய்யும் அதேவேளையில், பௌத்த சாசனத்தைப் பாதுகாத்தலும் பேணிவளர்த்தலும் அரசின் கடமையாக இருத்தலும் வேண்டும்.

Therefore, it is impossible to remove Buddhist monuments from an archaeological site or other indigenous site once they have been erected. Civil societies from the north and east have

highlighted that it is a pitiful situation where no action can be taken even if the court is approached.



However, according to the constitution, all religions, including Buddhism, are given equal status. No encroachments have taken place. No archeology excavations have taken place in the north and east for three decades. Those activities are now underway. The archaeological sites of the country irrespective of religion will be protected from the date of identification. They are the property of the country. Minister of Buddhist, Religious and Cultural Affairs Vidura Wickramanayake said that some politicians are trying to mislead people and gain political benefits.

However, all activities from identifying archaeological sites to conducting excavations are creating a tense situation between ethnic and religious groups, especially in the North and East.

In this case, Senior Professor Paramu Pushparatnam, Head of the Department of History of the University of Jaffna, and Director of the Central Cultural Fund, has put forward suggestions that ethnic and religious conflicts can be avoided by properly dealing with this complex issue that has been continuing in the North and East and about the means of confirming individual identities.