

### **Cheddimalai (Mullaitivu)**

In 2013, the Archeological Department declared 33 hectares of land as 'Cheddimalai - Naayaru Thathukibam' in Mullaitivu. The area includes paddy land belonging to locals as well the Pillayaar statue, worshipped by Hindus. In 2018, Ven. Kolamba Medhalankara Thero began construction of a Buddha statue in the area and claimed that it was the first location the Buddha's tooth was brought to from India. In May 2019, the Mullaitivu Magistrate's court confirmed that the Pillayaar temple had been there for generations so Hindu religious practice there should remain uninterrupted, also, the temple's name should be reverted from 'Ganadevu Devalaya' to its original name, 'Neeraviyadi Pillaiyar Temple.' Worshippers are still disturbed by police and Buddhist monks. The Vavuniya High Court placed an injunction (July 10th, 2019) on works being carried out in the temple and adjourned the case until August 26th 2019. Protests have been taking place since 2015 both against and in favor of the expansion of the Buddhist infrastructure. According to Verite research, there is a disparity between Tamil and Sinhalese reporting on this issue: Tamil press related to the site as 'Semmalai Neeraviyadi Pillayar Kovil,' had 30 news reports, 2 editorials, feature articles, opinion pieces, interviews, and 2 photographs. The Sinhala press referred to it as 'Gurukanda Rajamaha Viharaya,' had 11 news reports, and no editorials, feature articles, opinion pieces, interviews, or photographs.

### **Mahaweli (Mullaitivu)**

In 1966 the 'Manal Aru' area in the Mullaitivu and Vavuniya districts was renamed as 'Weli Oya' in Sinhala. In 2012, it was brought under the Mullaitivu district, however, judicial matters are handled by Anuradhapura. At the same time, the land given to 14 Tamil entrepreneurs, on a 99-year lease was canceled and taken over by the government. A zone was established specially for coconut cultivation and each Sinhalese family was given 5 acres of land. In 2018, a case was filed against the distribution of permits by the Mahaweli Authority to 8 Sinhala families and upon the insistence of the Mullaitivu and Vavuniya courts no more land permits were given this year. Furthermore, there are 204 Sinhalese families living in Kokkulai East and Kokkulai West grama niladhari divisions (GNs) whereas, in 1990, only 21 Sinhalese families lived there. In this area, 7 acres of government land was given to Tamils in the 1960s-70s. However, the National Housing Development Authority has begun giving houses (and paddy fields in Kokkuthoduvai Center and Kokkuthoduvai North GNs) on that land to Sinhalese families. 386 Tamil families lost around 1,483 acres of paddy lands (irrigable and rainfed) in these areas. The issue of Tamil land being converted to Sinhala GNs is also prevalent. The Kiribbenwewa GN was formed from part of the Kokkuthoduvai Centre and the Janakpura GN was formed from a part of the Kokkuthoduvai North. Additionally, CSOs feel that district government authorities do not pay sufficient attention to the concerns of the public who are affected by the Mahaweli development works.

### **Kanniya (Trincomalee)**

In Kanniya, Trincomalee, the construction of a Buddhist viharaya threatened to remove the remnants of a Hindu kovil, and worshippers and activists were barred from entering the sacred site which falls under the

purview of the Department of Archaeology. Minister Mano Ganesan, intervened and halted the renovation indefinitely. The minister also accused the Archaeology Department of being a hindrance to reconciliation efforts and pointed out that the 32-member board that advises the Department is devoid of a Hindu or Tamil historian. The Department decided that they would find a place to relocate the Hindu temple since the 'law makes provisions for officials to demolish structures that are new to protected sites.' Hundreds of protesters were at the site and despite an injunction to disallow anyone entering the area, only Tamils were barred and anti-Tamil assaults took place against individual protesters. According to Verite Research, the front page headings of Sinhala and Tamil newspapers covered the situation in Kanniya, Trincomalee very differently. The 3 Sinhala newspaper headlines antagonize the TNA and frame the protest as anti-conservationist. The 5 Tamil newspaper headlines depict the protests as civil and religious rights activism; framing the conservation as a threat to the Kanniya Pillayar temple.