



## Religious Tensions in Sri Lanka

### What is the issue?

\n\n

\n

- Religious tensions have been simmering within the Sri Lankan society ever since the end of the civil war in 2009.

\n

- While it is important to reign in the Buddhist hardliners, other structural frictions in the social fabric of the island also needs to be addressed.

\n

\n\n

### What are the incidences of social tensions?

\n\n

\n

- When Mahinda Rajapaksa was in power, anti-Muslim violence was unleashed by Buddhist mobs, in Aluthgama in 2014.

\n

- The new government, which was elected in 2015 had promised an end to such violence but the recent events show that things haven't changed.

\n

- Over 200 homes and 14 mosques were destroyed in Kandy district, which is indicative of the fact that the anti-Muslim project is only gaining steam.

\n

- As the intensity of the situation resulted in even curbing social media and imposing an emergency - a sober post-crisis assessment is necessary.

\n

\n\n

### What are the factors that precipitated the crisis?

\n\n

\n

- **Cultural** - Sinhalese see Muslims as aliens who are a growing, united and an economically persevering group, with a strong mooring to religiosity.  
\n
- In contrast, Buddhists are liberal in religious practices and ethno-religious affiliations, which are resented by the Buddhist clergy.  
\n
- These fundamental differences and the keenness of Buddhist hardliners for cultural dominance get translated into hatred and even violence at times.  
\n
- **Geo Political** - The rise of Islamic State in the West Asia had seen an increase in radicalisation of Islamic youth in the eastern province.  
\n
- Some Islamic fundamentalists were also found to be running anti-Buddhist propaganda, which had caused a real security situation in the island.  
\n
- **Domestic** - Although unsubstantiated, fears of increasing Muslims populations had created a demographic scare among some sections.  
\n
- There are also allegations against Muslim politicians of being engaged in land acquisitions and the illegal resettlement of Muslims.  
\n
- A strong community bonding which helped further Muslims businesses has also created economic anxiety among the poorer Buddhist masses.  
\n

\n\n

## What lies ahead?

\n\n

- **Novice Voices** - Many celebrities have voiced against this violence and stressed that the “Sri Lankan identity” is accommodative and diverse.  
\n
- While these assertions are well intentioned, they present an erroneous view that the current crisis is a mere aberration caused by a violent few.  
\n
- Addressing the problem first requires recognizing that there are strong linguistic and religious fault lines within the Sri Lankan polity.  
\n
- **Way Forward** - As a first step, all persons who’ve been involved in the violence need to be prosecuted impartially in order to ensure accountability.  
\n
- This needs to be followed up by initiating a dialogue between Sinhala Buddhist groups, the Muslim leadership and the government for genuine

reconciliation.

\n

- Finally, Sri Lanka needs to evolve into a secular-minded state by according equal status to all religious groups and dominions.

\n

- All citizens needs to be nurture a mindset that is open to diversity, which is critical for lasting peace and progress in the island.

\n

\n\n

\n\n

**Source: The Hindu**

\n\n

\n



**IAS PARLIAMENT**  
*Information is Empowering*  
A Shankar IAS Academy Initiative