

**Exclusive Cremation of COVID-19 Dead Bodies in Sri Lanka:
Provoking the Ethnoreligious Tensions Amidst the Pandemic?**

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Abstract

Strict adherence to the funeral rites of loved ones is often not possible during infectious disease outbreaks due to heightened public health risks. The government of Sri Lanka initially allowed either cremation or burial of the dead bodies from COVID-19 in their clinical management guidelines. However, mandatory cremation was strictly implemented subsequently, which created concerns and worry among Muslims and Christians. The objective of this paper was to describe public opinion on the decision of mandatory cremation in Sri Lanka.

The content of the written responses to open-ended questions on COVID-19 dead body management from 773 persons received through an online trilingual public opinion survey was analyzed to identify the key narratives through an iterative process. Those who agreed with the decision of cremation saw it as a bold step by the government and argued that public health risk to the community must take precedence over individual preference for funeral rites and that the same law must be adhered to in a single country, irrespective of religion or ethnicity. Those who disagreed with the decision of mandatory cremation argued that it was beyond evidence or logic, harmful both to the health system and the environment, and violated dignity and human rights. It was seen as a tool for discrimination, marginalization, and retribution against ethnic and religious minorities, and to gain political mileage over the majority. This decision was also seen as a red flag of the systemic absence of good governance or sound risk communication strategies. Provoking ethnoreligious tensions could be a deadly move, especially during a pandemic. Governments must be mindful and respectful of and be sensitive to the socio-cultural diversities, rights, and emotions in addition to evidence during the disposal of dead bodies of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key words: COVID-19, Cremation, Burial, Ethnoreligious tensions

1. Introduction

Rituals on making the passage of the loved ones have been remarkable aspects of human civilizations across the world since ancient times, symbolizing a critical connection between the deceased person and their socio-cultural networks and values (1). Inability to perform such rituals during crisis such as disasters and outbreaks could have social, cultural, emotional, and spiritual effects on the loved ones of the deceased. It has been natural to observe opposition by communities, when pre-existing funeral practices had to be changed during outbreaks. During the Cholera Outbreak in 2008 – 2009 in Zimbabwe, changes in funeral policies have fueled increased resentment against the authorities (2). Similarly, in 2014 – 2016, during the early phase of the Ebola outbreak in Liberia, it was not possible to offer individual burial plots and there were concerns over rising water tables, leading to mass cremation of the dead bodies. However, people were deeply troubled by the above decision since individual ashes could not be identified. Despite being a criminal offence, people resorted to hiding the dead bodies to prevent cremation. Besides, experience of Ebola in Liberia clearly demonstrated the lack of knowledge about handling of dead bodies and bereavement among journalists, anthropologists, and biomedical professionals alike (3). More over, a study conducted in Sierra Leon on the barriers for safe burial of dead bodies during the Ebola outbreak of 2014, found out that, misconceptions on dead body being improperly handled prior to burial and concerns about the family members being not allowed to view the burial were hampering community acceptance of the procedures (4). Nevertheless, people would be adaptive, resilient and ready to adjust their practices, if the need is understood and the valid alternatives are provided. For this to happen, the restrictions must be culturally appropriate and well communicated (1).

Diverse responses have been mounted by countries in relation to the management of the dead bodies of the COVID-19 pandemic. Mandatory or recommended cremation has been practiced in Asia and beyond. For example, in China, cremation of the deceased following COVID-19 is compulsory for which the family's agreement is not necessary. South Korea too has adopted a similar practice. It should be noted that mandatory cremation has been practiced by both

countries following SARS epidemic, which would have affected their acceptability of mandatory cremation. Cremation is an acceptable means of disposal of dead bodies in Hinduism and Buddhism, however, those who do not routinely practice it, from the faiths of Islam and Judaism may find it difficult to adopt such practices during the urge and speed of a crisis.

Sri Lanka has witnessed an internal conflict, mostly fought between the government of Sri Lanka armed forces and minority extremist terrorist group Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, lasting over 30 years in the North and the East with massive, repeated displacement of populations which reached a peak towards the end of the conflict in 2009 causing nearly 250,000 internally displaced persons (5,6). Despite sporadic incidents of interreligious tensions in the island, a period of relative peace was maintained for over 10 years since the end of the 30-year-old internal conflict (7,8). The Easter Sunday attacks of April 2019, a series of simultaneous bomb explosions in three churches and three luxury hotels in Sri Lanka for which Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has claimed responsibility has not only killed 265, and injured 504, claimed many lives, but also heightened the mistrust and tensions between the Majority Sinhalese and minority Muslims (9,10). The issue around the decision by the government of Sri Lanka on exclusive cremation of COVID-19 dead bodies surfaced in this sensitive backdrop.

Even through either cremation or burial was accepted in Provisional Clinical Practice Guidelines on COVID-19 suspected and confirmed patients issued by the Ministry of Health (MoH), a subsequent version issued on 31 March 2020 recommended exclusive cremation (11). A gazette notification issued on 11th April 2020 made it mandatory for all dead bodies of COVID-19 to be cremated (12). Cremation of all COVID-19 dead bodies has strictly been implemented by the government of Sri Lanka (13,14).

There had been considerable opposition by Muslim community in Sri Lanka against exclusive cremation of COVID-19 dead bodies, which has been formally brought to the notice of the health authorities (15). Mandatory cremation has been interpreted by some as a means of “punishing” minority Muslims by the majority Sinhalese (16,17).

The international community also was quite alarmed over this matter and made critical observations. A joint letter sent by the United Nation's Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, the Special Rapporteur on minority issues, and the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism to Sri Lanka government, referring to the decision of mandatory cremation of COVID-19 dead bodies states "We are concerned of the lack of consideration provided and the lack of sensitivity in the MoH Guideline to different communities and their religious and cultural practices." (18). Fundamental rights petitions have been filed before the Sri Lanka Supreme Court in relation to the decision of the government of exclusive cremation 19. These petitions have been rejected by the same court subsequently (20).

The government of Sri Lanka has justified the decision on exclusive cremation of COVID-19 dead bodies based on a public health security point. It should be noted that the whole country has been declared as a disease locality under the Quarantine and Prevention of Diseases Ordinance No. 03 of 1897 on 18th March 2020.

Governments should be open to listen to the public, which becomes even more important during times of crisis, pandemics being no exception. The public may have their own viewpoint and narrative, which may be arising within the totality of reality of ethnic, religious, social, cultural and spiritual conditioning with their own deep-rooted values and biases. Feeling the pulse of communities, especially during a pandemic could help the governments to frame their interventions in a culturally acceptable manner. The objective of this paper is to describe the public opinion of the government decision of mandatory cremation of COVID-19 dead bodies in Sri Lanka.

2. Methodology

An online public opinion survey targeting Sri Lankans currently residing in the country was conducted from 15.04.2020 to 27.04.2020 using snowball sampling technique 21. This paper is based on the in-depth analysis of the written responses given by the participants of this survey to the following open-ended question:

"What would have done better to improve dead body management during the COVID-19 crisis in Sri Lanka? Do you have anything else to say?"

The survey was developed using google forms in English, and subsequently were translated to Sinhala and Tamil, and was administered using all three languages. A total of 773 responses to the above question were downloaded as a excel sheet from google forms. The Sinhala and Tamil responses were translated back into English by persons who were fluent in English and who had Sinhala and Tamil as their mother tongue. A content analysis of the responses was done. Key themes were identified and categorized through an iterative process.

3. Results

The findings were characterized by two opposing viewpoints on cremation of dead bodies following COVID-19. First group denied that there was any issue about the government's decision on exclusive cremation. The second group were not satisfied with the decision of cremation and demanded for its change.

The first group strongly supported the government decision on mandatory cremation. "Just do as the authorities say as they know the best", some of them said. They praised the government for making a bold decision and adhering to it despite criticisms thereof. Furthermore, some of them even questioned the need of any additional discussion on the decision made by the government. Some went to the extent of questioning the need of the public opinion survey which was conducted by us.

“I do not even see why this survey is required! What else is there to discuss or manage when the government has already expressed their stand on COVID-19 dead body management?”

Those who supported the decision of cremation used two narratives to justify their choice. First narrative highlighted the importance of greater good of the community before that of an individual. According to them, the needs of the relatives and loves one of the deceased was less important than those of the community at large.

The second narrative called for a “One country – one law” approach. They argued that there could not be any place for variation on the law based on ethnic, religious or cultural diversities, simply because there is only one country. They referred to the government decision of exclusive cremation as “the law”, in this narrative. The decision of exclusive cremation was executed as a public health intervention coming under the purview of this act. A respondent stated, “Religious viewpoints do not matter in this kind of a deadly outbreak!”: They called for uniform action by all segments of the society to rise against COVID-19, since they believed that during critical times, humanity must come before ethnicity, religion or belief. One respondent openly expressed his strong non-inclusive standpoint:

“I totally agree with the measures taken by the government. We should not dance to the tune of minorities! This is not their country!”

Some respondents thought even discussing about the management of the dead bodies was a waste of precious time which could otherwise be invested in taking proper measures to protect the people from getting infected with COVID-19.

The alternative group who disagreed with the decision of exclusive cremation had their own set of narratives to support their decision. The evidence narrative was one of the strongest, which requested the government to use the scientific evidence that was out there to decide on the method of disposal of the COVID-19 dead body, cremation or burying. All of them had the guidelines of

the World Health Organization (WHO) as their anchor for their arguments against cremation, and in support of burial, and in some cases of deep burial. They said:

“WHO guidelines are being followed in 182 countries. Why only Sri Lanka wants to modify them?”

Some respondents were not ready to accept any justifications by local experts on the decision of cremation. Firstly, the respondents thought that there was no sufficient evidence locally to defer WHO guidance. Secondly, they argued that local opinions may be insensitive, biased or arbitrary. Some directly expressed their mistrust over the opinions from the government officers, health officials and professionals.

“Let me die but don’t try to cremate me by giving useless reason and excuses than scientific reason. Some say ground water could be contaminated. Another said body parts could be used as biological weapons! What laymen justifications from so-called racist professors!”

However, one respondent stated the local virologists must be the only trusted source of information, with regards to the problem of concern.

Some respondents used a logical reasoning narrative to justify their preference of burial against cremation.

“If staying a distance of 3 ft away can prevent COVID-19, then burying a dead body under 8 ft will be a much stronger measure to prevent COVID-19.”

The common advice to maintaining a social distancing of one meter (3 feet) apart was used to question if burying a COVID-19 dead body 8 ft deep was unsafe. Some referred to the history of epidemics to rationalize their choice.

“Since before Stone Age, there were epidemic, and burials were taken place... Up to this [there is]

no evidence of spreading from buried corpses.”

Some used a health system narrative, which was found to be quite insightful in the hindsight.

“The mandatory cremation has immensely added to the stigma associated with the disease in the Muslim community. This would adversely affect the health seeking behavior and might lead to patients hiding their contact histories too. This would in turn increase the spread in the community. We have to think of systems implications”.

As stated in the above quote, mandatory cremation would increase stigma, especially among the Muslims, who are not allowed to cremate the loved ones as per their belief system. This could in turn reduce the health seeking behavior by the Muslim communities against COVID-19. They are reluctant to get diagnosed with COVID-19 because they do not want to die of COVID-19, as the dead body would then be subjected to cremation, which is dead against their spiritual belief. What the respondents pointed out was that the decision of exclusive cremation could have detrimental effects on the health seeking behavior of the minority communities.

Some respondents used an environmental narrative to justify their preference of burial against cremation. They had counter arguments against the fact that burial of COVID-19 dead bodies would contaminate ground water.

“If burial of COVID-19 patients can contaminate ground water, we would like to question where the wastewater contaminated from the COVID-19 patients are going? Where are the faces, urine and bathing water of COVID-19 patients going?”

While building counter arguments in a responsive manner, some respondents even made suggestions of practical solutions for discarding the dead body instead

of cremation. Deep burial in a pit with a concrete covering performed under the supervision of government officials, assigning a burial ground which is in a remote area with low ground water table, and public awareness programs targeting communities living around burial grounds to alleviate their fears were some of such suggestions. In the same way, some stated that cremation itself was a cause of air pollution.

The narrative of dignity and human rights was used strongly by some respondents against exclusive cremation. The paternalistic decision-making by the government in selecting cremation over burial was much criticized by some respondents. They emphasized that the right to make a choice between cremation or burial lies not with the government, but with the following:

1. Next of kin or the close relatives of the loved one. One respondent said: “Respect not only the dead body, but also the family members who are in a bad and sorrowful mindset”.
2. The diseased person himself. The preference of the patient could be documented on admission, for example similar to a last will.
3. Respective community of the disease person. The consensus of the community from which the deceased person originated could be used as a proxy of the patient’s preference.

Correspondingly, the right to select the method of dead body was seen as closely linked to the dignity of the individual.

“Cremation of all the COVID 19 deaths without respecting religious beliefs is an insult to the dignity of the dead and a severe human rights violation.”

While echoing dissatisfaction over the decision of exclusive cremation, respondents highlighted the need to respect the rights of all Sri Lankans irrespective of their diversities. Even through the government framed the reason for exclusive cremation from a public health point of view, the respondents highlighted several alternative narratives for the above decision. Some

respondents stated that the decision of exclusive cremation was targeting minority communities. One Muslim respondent stated that the issue of burial affected not only Muslims, but also Christians; hence requested burial to be allowed for Christians as well.

It was highlighted that the media and some government officers were using the decision of exclusive cremation to promote racism. They also pleaded the government not to allow racist individuals or groups to hijack the conversation online and offline. The respondents strongly demanded the government to be more sensitive to the culture and traditions of minorities especially Muslims.

From a political narrative, some respondents stated that pushing the Muslims to a corner was used as a strategy by the politicians to gain advantage of the majority Sinhalese votes. They asked the government not to practice the principle of “Divide and rule” and requested to keep politics and racism out of the process. The respondents pleaded the government not to harm the subtle human sentiments, based on faith and belief, which are deep rooted within them.

With growing political interest over the parliamentary elections to come, some respondents even warned that the government of possibility of missing the opportunity to win the hearts of the minorities:

“If Government didn't convert the COVID-19 [dead body management] issue to political benefit and to target and marginalize minorities, their efforts would have been appreciated heavily even by the minorities. However, this is pure racism filled with vengeance with election ahead. The Government's only motive is to win election and not about any betterment to the public.”

Adding to the above, one respondent expressed the relationship between the politics and the disposal of dead bodies in a cynical manner: “After they are elected,

it does not matter to them, if dead bodies are cremated or buried!”.

Some respondents noted that the short-sighted and hateful decision of exclusive cremation was yet another red flag of chronic, systemic issue of poor governance within the government bureaucracy.

“The government officials of Sri Lanka conducted the procedures in an extremely racist and crude manner which reflects our current government policy towards minorities. Change the mindset of government officials to deal with the deceased and the bereaved with sensitivity and consideration. That is all. Just treat them like human beings.”

Most respondents who did not like exclusive cremation echoed dissatisfaction and deep pain. One participant quoted Martin Luther King Jr to express his emotions precisely and powerfully: “Nothing in the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity.”.

Nevertheless, some respondents were quite progressive, and made recommendations to improve the governance in relation to the decision-making process. The need to consult religious leaders at large, not limiting to those who are selected by the government to support their viewpoint was highlighted. However, even those who were against cremation did not have a uniform opinion on this. Some doubted if religious leaders could be of any use at all, since they, by nature are not trained to think within the scientific reasoning. In contrast, getting the participation of the civil society members as well as women was suggested as a promising remedy.

Few actually did not have a problem with the decision of cremation, if that was the last resort available, but they were more concerned about the poor process of adopting the above decision.

“If cremation is the option, it must be backed by sound evidence. Government would have given more logical and satisfactory explanations regarding whatever

the executive or administrative decisions taken”

The need to adopt a more empathetic and non-stigmatizing risk communication approach was recommended by some respondents. The lack of meaningful engagement of sensible religious leaders and other dignitaries from different ethnicities was seen as a flaw, under the risk communication narrative.

4. Discussion

One might identify, Sri Lanka as a nation recovering from the bitter history a three-decade old conflict with deep-rooted ethno-religious tensions. This ugly conflict ensured repeated, displacement of populations which reached a staggering peak of 250,000 peak towards the end of the conflict in 2009. The bitter brew of inter-ethnic tensions among Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims again resurfaced as a result of the brutal Easter Sunday Attacks conducted by ISIS inspired home-grown extremist Islamic group not only claiming 265 deaths and 504 injured, but also adding strong flavors of religious tensions in its aftermath. In this backdrop, the decision by the government of Sri Lanka to exclusively cremate all COVID-19 dead bodies was an ideal trigger to further provoke ethno-religious tensions in the country.

Funeral practices, including the mode of disposal of the dead body are integral parts of the socio-cultural network of any society (1). Communities have practiced such rituals over centuries; hence deviations thereof are not only welcome, but also resisted by the communities, at least in their cultural and spiritual domains.

Besides, it should be noted that, as a South Asian Country, religion and faith play a considerable role in all walks of public life in Sri Lanka, traditions and practices in relation to funerals being no exception. Countries across the world, as much as in Sri Lanka, have prescribed and implemented modified funeral rites in response to the management of COVID-19 (1). The resistance observed by the Muslim community against the decision of exclusive cremation of dead bodies in Sri Lanka during the COVID-19 outbreak has been a common phenomenon following the Cholera, SARS and EBOLA outbreaks earlier (2, 3). Under such circumstances, if the need is understood and valid explanation are provided, people seem to be adaptive

and resilient and would be ready to adjust their practices (4). Nevertheless, this does not seem to be the case in the relationship between the Muslims and the government of Sri Lanka in relation to the decision of exclusive cremation of COVID-19 dead bodies: the grudge continues. As mentioned under results section, refusal of the relatives to pay for the cremation of Muslims has resulted in clogging of the mortuaries, letting the government to do “whatever they want” with the dead bodies (22). Interestingly, the foreign minister of the neighboring island nation of Maldives tweeted “On special request from Sri Lankan President @GotabayaR, President @ibusolih is consulting stakeholder authorities of the Government of Maldives to assist Sri Lanka in facilitating Islamic funeral rites in the Maldives for Sri Lankan Muslims succumbing to COVID19 pandemic” (23). This solution also has been seen with despair by the Sri Lankan Muslims as a slap on them: “We were all born here, we have been living here and we want to die here.”, as Al Jazeera quotes a Muslim politician from Sri Lanka (23).

From the findings of this survey, the polarization of the community based on the government decision of exclusive cremation is clearly visible. Those who support the decision on exclusive cremation had two narratives, the priority of the greater good before that of an individual, as well as the “One country- one law” narrative. The one country one law narrative denies the need to respect the social, cultural and religious needs of the minority communities since one law needs to be respected for the country. Some even mentioned that “we should not dance to the tune of minorities”. The same minority narrative has been projected by those who were not in favor of the decision of exclusive cremation, indicating that the decision has been used as tool to target the Muslim community.

Calling the government for adapting an evidence-based approach has been one of the strongest narratives among those who did not agree with the decision of exclusive cremation. The stand of the WHO on the method of disposal of COVID-19 dead bodies has been seen as the gold standard by many respondents. Thus, Sri Lanka demanding for exclusive creation was seen as a “violation” of WHO recommendations. It is true that WHO agrees with the lack of evidence to the fact that people who died of a communicable disease should be cremated to prevent spread of the disease (24).

However, WHO, in this instance, seems to be diplomatically saving its face from not offending the governments who are against burial by stating “Cremation is a matter of cultural choice and available resources”.

It has been argued that the WHO guidelines suit temperate climates mainly, however, are not suitable for high-temperature, high rainfall countries such as Sri Lanka with fast decomposition rate and varying ground water table (25). However, even the experts in the field did not have consensus on this, at least in their public discourse on the subject (26,27). In the eyes of the public, as represented by the views in this survey, saw that the professional opinion has been manipulated by the government to support their viewpoint. Under the environmental narrative, some even proposed a prototype of an “engineered method” of burial, in a concreted deep burial pit. Additionally, they pointed out the perceived negative effects of cremation on air quality.

It was interesting to note how the respondents perceived the effects of the decision on exclusive cremation of COVID-19 dead bodies on the health system. The respondents argued that the seemingly remote decision on exclusive cremation would cascade into unwanted ripple effects elsewhere in the health system, and some effects could be quite delayed. Muslim communities being reluctant to seek treatment and trying to conceal deaths due to fear of exclusive cremation were given as possible examples. This has been true during other outbreaks elsewhere in the world. For example, deeply troubled by the government decision of mass cremation during the Ebola outbreak in Liberia due to the inability of providing individual burial pits and rising water tables, communities resorted to hiding dead bodies, though it was unlawful to do so, since people were not being comfortable with the above means of disposal of the dead bodies (3). It should be noted that subsequently the loved ones of diseased persons who were Muslims refused to pay for the cremation, as it was not correct to support the cremation of a loved one, as per their belief system. This led to the clogging of the mortuaries with dead bodies, and eventually government had to cremate the dead bodies at its own expense.

Dignity and human rights narrative caught much international attention in relation to the COVID-19 dead body management in Sri Lanka (23,28,29). It has been criticized heavily from the perspective of freedom of religion or belief, right to physical and mental health, a minority issue and promotion protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. This was in line with the “One country – one law” narrative by those who supported exclusive cremation, that we discussed earlier, as well as the minority narrative proposed by those who were not in agreement with mandatory cremation. The respondents stated that the targeting of the minority groups was done by the government purposefully, in order to get the sympathy of the majority during the forthcoming elections. All these provide evidence to the overlap of public health decisions of broader human rights protection clearly visible through these findings. On top of that, some have cautioned that such discriminatory practices could lead to radicalization of Muslim youth (30).

Quite compellingly, the respondents called the government to listen to the next of kin, persons themselves antemortem or the respective community with regards to their preferred method of disposal of the dead body. While this may sound impractical during the urgency that things should move during a crisis, it also highlights the need for the governments to listen to their people more with regards to personal decisions which are beyond pure reasoning, and are within the spiritual, social and cultural spheres.

One strong narrative highlighted by the respondents was the current decision of exclusive cremation to be a red flag of systemic issue of poor governance within the government. It was stated that even though the government officials are meant to be impartial in relation to the communities they serve, they have allegedly failed to do so. “Just treat them like human beings”, stated a respondent in this regard. It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine if the government officials acted in a biased manner in relation to ethnicity or religion, however, what is clear is that at least some members of the community have felt so. These findings are vital for a government bureaucracy to be more respectful, responsive and unbiased with regards to the decisions that affect the public at large.

While most respondents who were against exclusive cremation did not see it even as the last resort, some thought the problem was not with the solution, but with the means. They stated that if the government had no option but to cremate all COVID-19 dead bodies, then better risk communication and community engagement would have prevented the unpleasant situation that the country is experiencing right now. The need to communicate the information in empathetic and non-stigmatizing manner was highlighted as essential when dealing with such challenging situations.

In a more recent development, observations were made by lawyers, following a government decision to cremate victims of a prison riot, citing the risk of covid-19 spread as the reason (31). Bodies of the victims were not claimed by their loved ones, stating that cremation would ensure destruction of trace evidence against probable crimes committed during the prison riots. This reiterates the fact that, resistance against the decision to exclusively cremate COVID-19 dead bodies escalated beyond the religious realm even to encroach the law and order as well (32,33).

5. Conclusions and recommendations:

In conclusion it is evident that the decision of exclusive cremation of COVID-19 dead bodies has divided the public opinion in Sri Lanka across ethno-religious lines. When community cohesion and resilience are critical, as during times of crisis such as pandemics, such divisions of public opinion do not seem to be a healthy trend.

This paper recommends several actions by the governments to ensure the dignity of the deceased persons from COVID-19, their loved ones and the communities that they come from. Firstly, governments should listen to cultural and religious aspirations by communities in relation to COVID-19 dead body management. Even during a pandemic, cultural and religious needs in relation to COVID-19 dead body management are valid and legitimate. Hence, they must be considered and respected hand in hand with evidence-based public health security decisions by the government. Best unbiased available scientific evidence must be used by the government when deciding on COVID-19 dead body management, considering the impacts of such decision on the health system in the short, intermediate and long term. A transparent, inclusive and consultative process in making decisions

in relation to COVID-19 dead body management including the loved ones of the deceased, the communities they belong to and the religious leaders must be used rather than a paternalistic approach by the government. Neither the vigor of scientific reasoning nor urgency of the pandemic should not be excuses to forget meaningful community engagement and empathetic risk communication.

Editors Comment:

The Government of Sri Lanka subsequently allowed the creation of COVID-19 infected persons.

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