

Media Empowerment for a Democratic Sri Lanka (MEND) Program



# FINAL PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION REPORT – YEAR 01

Verité Research (VR)

May 10, 2018 to May 15, 2019

# ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

*VR – Verité Research*

*IREX – International Research and Exchanges Board*

*USAID – United States Agency for International Development*

*MOMSL – Media Ownership Monitor Sri Lanka*

*ToR – Terms of Reference*

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## I. SUBGRANT OVERVIEW/SUMMARY

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Name of Implementing Partner:</b>                 | Verité Research ( <i>Private</i> ) Limited                                      |
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| <b>Website:</b>                                      | <a href="https://www.veriteresearch.org/">https://www.veriteresearch.org/</a>   |
| <b>Activity Name:</b>                                | Creation of improved media governance and enabling environment for media sector |
| <b>Subgrant Start Date:</b>                          | May 10, 2018  |
| <b>Subgrant End Date:</b>                            | May 9, 2019   |
| <b>No-cost Extension Period</b>                      | -   |
| <b>Sub Grant Number:</b>                             | FY18-MEND-VR-01   |
| <b>Geographic Coverage (cities and or countries)</b> | Sri Lanka   |
| <b>Reporting Period:</b>                             | May 10, 2018 – May 9, 2019  |
| <b>Report Submitted by</b>                           | Verité Research (Private) Limited   |

## 1.1 Activity Description/Introduction

Verité Research (VR), in partnership with the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) and United States Agency for International Development (USAID), commenced work in May 2018 on the role played by the Sinhala and Tamil print media in areas of transitional justice, reconciliation and minority/women's issues in Sri Lanka. For this purpose, two activities were outlined: (1) quarterly reports, and (2) a public senti-meter analysis.

Activity (1) focused on producing quarterly reports that analyse the treatment of public issues by the Sinhala and Tamil press. Meanwhile, activity (2) focused on developing a web platform to visually illustrate polarised reportage between the Sinhala and Tamil press. In featuring these issues on a web platform, the team hoped to cultivate online discussions and organically initiate and encourage the print media to promote responsible and ethical reporting.

## 2. IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS

### 2.1 Progress Narrative

The implementation progress is detailed under the specific activities carried out by the team: (1) quarterly reports and (2) a public senti-meter analysis.

#### (1) Quarterly Reports

VR published a total of four quarterly reports that analysed the polarity of coverage of a key issue in the Sinhala and Tamil press. The issues that were analysed were selected in consultation with IREX. VR oversaw the coding, monitoring and summarising of the relevant newspaper articles as well as the overall analysis and publication of the reports. The four reports published by VR are chronologically listed below:

- i. **Media and Reconciliation: Media Coverage of the Office on Missing Persons and the Devolution of Power** submitted on 12 September 2018
- ii. **Media and Reconciliation: Media Coverage of the Political Situation in Sri Lanka in relation to Minorities** submitted on 14 December 2018
- iii. **Media and Reconciliation Press Coverage on The Drafting of a New Constitution during the Tenure of the *Yahapaalanaya* Government** submitted on 11 March 2019
- iv. **Media and Reconciliation: Press Coverage on Sri Lanka's Progress as Outlined during the 40<sup>th</sup> Session of the UNHRC** submitted on 23 May 2019

Each report provided quantitative and qualitative insights into the issue selected for analysis. The reports also included findings from VR's platform, Ethics Eye whenever relevant and applicable to the issue selected for analysis. Following the submission of each report, IREX provided feedback which was incorporated by VR to publish revised editions of the reports. IREX also conducted

two media salons to publicly discuss the findings of the report. These media salons were attended by journalists, students interested in local media and the VR team. VR also participated in the panel discussions at these media salons.

## (2) Public senti-meter analysis

The public senti-meter analysis, also known as The Divide, was launched on 07 February 2019. The initial launch for the year 2018 was postponed mainly due to the time taken by VR and IREX to reach an agreement on a common vision and visual layout for The Divide (also see section 2.1). At the meeting held on 06 February 2019, VR and IREX agreed that VR would oversee the design and analytical content of The Divide to mitigate further communication delays and proceed with the launch.

In the last four months since its launch, The Divide has managed to create a sizeable societal impact and gain positive traction for its trilingual, insightful content. Currently, The Divide has 30 posts that are accessible in English, Sinhala and Tamil. The site primarily publishes succinct, analytical write-ups (see annexure). These posts illustrate the split in attention between the Sinhala and Tamil press. For instance, on 18 May 2019, the Sinhala front page headings focused on commemorating the 'war heroes', while the Tamil front page headings gave prominence to the Mullivaikkal commemoration.<sup>1</sup> The team also published a pictorial analysis of the imagery featured in the Sinhala and Tamil press to commemorate ten years since the end of Sri Lanka's armed conflict.<sup>2</sup> The team hopes to branch into newer areas of identifying the divide in press reporting such as cartoons in the Sinhala and Tamil press.

The content published on The Divide was shared on social media via VR's Twitter and Facebook pages to strengthen public discourse by disseminating information. These posts received significant traction and were liked/shared by prominent journalists (e.g. Nalaka Gunewardena and Amantha Perera), state and political figures (e.g. Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam and Sudarshana Gunawardena), researchers (e.g. Sanjana Hattotuwa and Shamara Wettimuny), organisations/citizen media (e.g. MinorMatters, Groundviews, Maatram, International Truth and Justice Project, Global Tamil Forum and Pearl Action).

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<sup>1</sup> <http://divide.lk/press-headings-18-20-may-2019/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://divide.lk/photo-analysis-commemoration-of-10-years-since-the-end-of-war/>

## 2.2 Implementation Status

- Quarterly Reports – VR submitted the four quarterly reports on issues covered in the Sinhala and Tamil press. These issues were selected in consultation with IREX. The continuation of coding, monitoring and analysis for the report is subject to agreement between VR and IREX in the new contract.
- The Divide – As per the initial scope of work, VR agreed to publish content that was relevant and available for a period of 45 weeks per year. This was provided that the website launched before 30 November 2018. However, as the website was launched on 07 February 2019, VR and IREX agreed to revisit the quarterly targets. Following the launch, The Divide received significant online traction and has managed to be a site of public interest. VR is currently managing the website by posting trilingual content.

## 2.1 Implementation Challenges

- The Divide – The development of the website became a lengthier and costlier process than the team initially anticipated. This was due to (1) logistical issues and (2) backdrop during the date agreed for the launch.

### (1) Logistical issues

- (i) Design - The website was subject to three overall design phases in light of the feedback provided by IREX at different stages of development (second design change requested on 06 November 2018 and third design change requested on 06 December 2018). While the team appreciated the feedback provided, the incorporation of these changes made it difficult for the team to launch the website in 2018 since a section of the team was also working on the quarterly reports and since the changes proposed required time and resources to change the website's design
- (ii) Proactive disclosure – The launch of the website was withheld until USAID responded on the proactive disclose.

### (2) Backdrop during the date agreed for the launch

- (i) Launch of Budget Promises and the Media Ownership Monitor Sri Lanka (MOMSL) - VR conveyed that public attention would be split between the launch of two of its initiatives, Budget Promises and MOM. As such, VR requested for the website to be launched following these two initiatives to generate better public traction onto the website. However, VR posted the teasers for the website during this time period in preparation for the launch.
- (ii) Crisis that happened on 26 October in 2018 – In light of the crisis that took place in Sri Lanka in October, IREX discussed the need to revisit strategies for the launch. The need to revisit strategies, coupled with the

incorporation of feedback provided by IREX, led to revising the date selected for launch.

While the website has achieved several successes during the past few months following the launch, the above issues made it difficult for the team to utilise financial and time-based allocations efficiently. The team felt it may have been beneficial to outsource the development of the website to a web designing company and focus the team's resources on generating analytical content. The feedback VR got from IREX on a number of times on the site which resulted in revising the site several times had not been factored in with regard to time, resources and finances on the site.

- Quarterly reports – The issues selected by VR and IREX for the series of quarterly reports proved to be timely topics of discussion in the public sphere. However, the high volume of press content, was challenging for the team to manage on a weekly basis and meet the date of delivery. Nevertheless, the team worked towards providing an insightful report for each quarter.

## 3. INTEGRATION OF CROSSCUTTING ISSUES AND FORWARD PRIORITIES

### 3.1 Sustainability Mechanisms

The sustainability of The Divide is currently subject to financial support as the contracted period ended on 15 May 2019. VR is managing The Divide and generating content to maintain the site's transformative impact in society. Financial support from IREX is crucial in terms of sustaining the site for a significant period of time. Thus, supporting the site at least for four consecutive years will help VR to achieve the goals of The Divide.

### 3.2 Policy and Governance Support

This section is beyond the scope of work outlined in the Terms of Reference (ToR). However, The Divide was utilised to organically foster public conversations on social media about polarised reporting in the Sinhala and Tamil press. Moreover, the findings in the quarterly reports were used by IREX to promote responsible reporting by holding media salons. VR also attended and participated in these discussions.



### 3.3 Local Capacity Development

As outlined in section 3.2, The Divide served to create public conversations on social media about polarised reporting in the Sinhala and Tamil press. Content analysed on The Divide was shared and liked on social media platforms by prominent media personnel, researchers and political figures.

IREX conducted two media salons based on the findings of the quarterly reports to promote responsible and ethical reporting. These salons were attended by media personnel and university students interested in the local media. VR also participated in the panel discussions at these salons.

## 4. STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION AND INVOLVEMENT

As mentioned in the previous sections, VR participated in media salons conducted by IREX. The Divide was used to generate online conversations on topics of national significance.

## 5. LESSON LEARNED

1. Using the expertise of a web development company may have helped to fasten the launch of the website while the team focused on the research and analytical content required for the site. Changes that had to be made on the site based on frequent feedback slowed down the launch which could have been avoided by outsourcing the site development or by going ahead with a simpler version of the site so that changes could have been made as we were going ahead with uploading of the site.
2. Topics of national significance in the Sinhala and Tamil press resulted in the team having to process a high volume of content that was not previously anticipated.

## 6. PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR YEAR TWO

*Explain clearly the stakeholders, deliverables, outcome and expected impact of the planned activities*

Based on further support in terms of funding by USAID and IREX, VR will continue to manage The Divide. As recommended by IREX, VR will discontinue the publication of quarterly reports

# 7. ANNEXURES

Regular analytical write ups

POLITICS / WOMEN / JUSTICE / MINORITIES

## TAMIL PRESS DOESN'T WANT TO FORGET; SINHALA PRESS DOESN'T WANT FORGIVENESS



ENGLISH **සිංහල** தமிழ்

“අප්‍රේමයේ සහ අසාධාරණයේ පසුබෑමක් අවශ්‍යවන බවට අපි විවිධ ආකාරයෙන් අවධානය යොමු කළා” යැයි 2019 ඔක්තෝබර් 15 සහ 16 දිනවලදී පුවත්පත් පුවත්පත්වල පුවත්පත්වලදී ප්‍රකාශයට පත්වූ ප්‍රකාශනයක් පිළිබඳව ප්‍රකාශනයක් දුන්වා දී ඇත. [1]

අප්‍රේමයේ සහ අසාධාරණයේ පසුබෑමක් අවශ්‍යවන බවට අපි විවිධ ආකාරයෙන් අවධානය යොමු කළා” යැයි 2019 ඔක්තෝබර් 15 සහ 16 දිනවලදී පුවත්පත් පුවත්පත්වල පුවත්පත්වලදී ප්‍රකාශයට පත්වූ ප්‍රකාශනයක් පිළිබඳව ප්‍රකාශනයක් දුන්වා දී ඇත. [2]

අප්‍රේමයේ සහ අසාධාරණයේ පසුබෑමක් අවශ්‍යවන බවට අපි විවිධ ආකාරයෙන් අවධානය යොමු කළා” යැයි 2019 ඔක්තෝබර් 15 සහ 16 දිනවලදී පුවත්පත් පුවත්පත්වල පුවත්පත්වලදී ප්‍රකාශයට පත්වූ ප්‍රකාශනයක් පිළිබඳව ප්‍රකාශනයක් දුන්වා දී ඇත. [3]

[1] ප්‍රකාශනයේ මෙහෙයුම: <http://www.siddhanta.lk/news/53279/time-to-forget-forgive-and-move-forward-qm>

[2] ඔක්තෝබර් 2019 ඔක්තෝබර් 18, පි. 04

[3] ඉරිදා, 2019 ඔක්තෝබර් 20, පි. 03; සිංහල, 2019 ඔක්තෝබර් 20, පි. 12



04/18/2019

## UNHRC: SINHALA PRESS SAYS TOO MUCH; TAMIL PRESS SAYS TOO LITTLE

JUSTICE | MINORITIES | POLITICS

[READ THE POST](#)



UNHRC:  
Sinhala press says to  
Tamil pres says to



New Constitution:  
Is it 'federal' or is it 'unitary'

04/10/2019

## NEW CONSTITUTION: IS IT 'FEDERAL' OR IS IT 'UNITARY'?

POLITICS | MINORITIES

[READ THE POST](#)



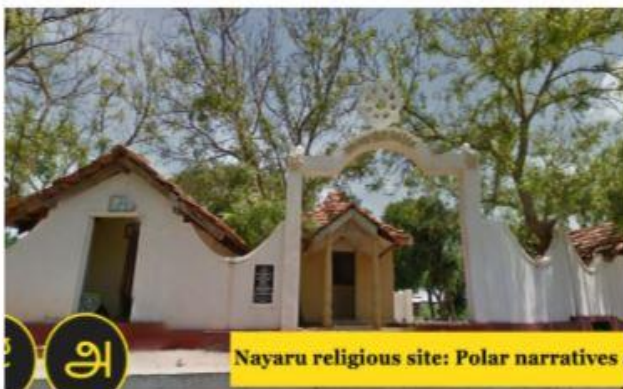
International involvement: To help or to me

03/28/2019

## INTERNATIONAL INVOLVEMENT: TO HELP OR TO MEDDLE?

JUSTICE | POLITICS | MINORITIES

[READ THE POST](#)



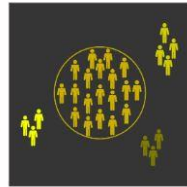
Nayaru religious site: Polar narratives a

03/12/2019

## NAYARU RELIGIOUS SITE: POLAR NARRATIVES AT PLAY

MINORITIES | POLITICS

[READ THE POST](#)

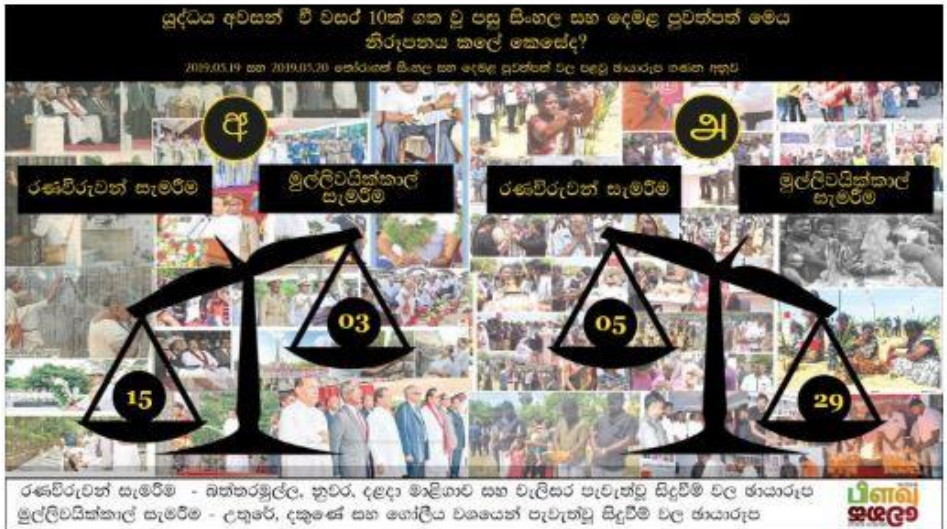
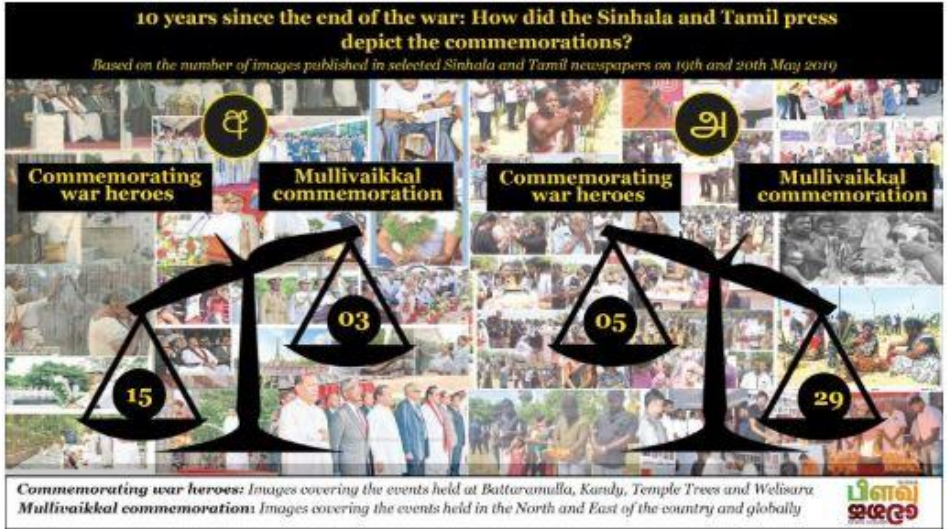


Differences in the front pages of Sinhala and Tamil press

| අ   | 10 years since the end of the war:<br>How did the front page headings of Sinhala and Tamil newspapers report on it? | அ  |
|---|---|--|
| <p><b>ලංකාදීප</b><br/>Lankadeepa</p> <p>National celebration to commemorate war heroes to be held tomorrow</p> <p><b>දිවයින</b><br/>Divaina</p> <p>10th Victory Day celebration to commemorate war heroes of peace to be celebrated tomorrow</p>  | <p>18 May 2019</p>  | <p><b>விரகேசரி</b><br/>Virakesari</p> <p>Preparations afoot for an emotional Mullivaikkal commemoration</p> <p><b>தினக்சூரல்</b><br/>Thinakkural</p> <p>Mullivaikkal commemoration day in Tamil areas today</p>  |
| <p><b>සිලුමිණ</b><br/>Silumina</p> <p>10th Victory Day celebration to commemorate war heroes</p> <p><b>දිවයින</b><br/>Divaina</p> <p>10 years of victory: National celebration of the war heroes will be held today</p>   | <p>19 May 2019</p>  | <p><b>விரகேசரி</b><br/>Virakesari</p> <p>Tears flow in Mullivaikkal</p> <p><b>தினக்சூரல்</b><br/>Thinakkural</p> <p>Justice has been evaded even after a decade has passed – Mullivaikkal Declaration condemns</p>   |
| <p><b>රිසා</b><br/>Resa</p> <p>"I completely trust the tri-forces" – President</p> <p><b>දිනමිණ</b><br/>Dinamina</p> <p>"Motherland is secured through the protection of the war heroes' sacrifices and excellence."- President</p> <p><b>මවුබිම</b><br/>Maubima</p> <p>"Tri-forces will win this terrorist challenge for sure" - President</p> | <p>20 May 2019</p>  | <p><b>விரகேசரி</b><br/>Virakesari</p> <p>"Assistance of the international community will be obtained depending on necessity" - Sirisena</p> <p><b>தினகரன்</b><br/>Thinakaran</p> <p>Eradicating international terrorism: Responsibility handed over to security forces who have 30 years of experience</p> |



Pictorial analysis



## Some screenshots of public discussions based on The Divide

 **Sarinda Perera** @sarindaperera · May 17


#lka has two distinct types of threats: (1) radical Islamist violence targeting non-believers; (2) ultra-nationalist Sinhalese mobs targeting Muslims more generally. Failure of Sinhala press at large to capture the latter contributes to dangerous skewing of public understanding.

**Shamara Wettimuny** @shamara4w


Sinhala press, in contrast to Tamil press, fail to mention that Muslims are the TARGETS of violence. Attacks on Muslim shops and mosques vaguely alluded to through euphemism of 'tense situation'. Refer to curfew instead of violence. Why? [twitter.com/verite\\_tma/sta...](https://twitter.com/verite_tma/status/1128111111)

Show this thread

6 23 52

 **Shamara Wettimuny** @shamara4w Following

Sinhala press, in contrast to Tamil press, fail to mention that Muslims are the TARGETS of violence. Attacks on Muslim shops and mosques vaguely alluded to through euphemism of 'tense situation'. Refer to curfew instead of violence. Why?

 **The Media Analysis** @verite\_tma

How did the #SinhalaPress and #TamilPress capture the recent tensions in #lka on 14 May 2019? Find out more on: [bit.ly/2EfmOqC](https://bit.ly/2EfmOqC) #thedividelk #FrontPage @NalakaG @GehanDG @sanjanah @groundviews ...


Show this thread

2:53 PM - 16 May 2019

97 Retweets 130 Likes

13 97 130

Tweet your reply

 **Shamara Wettimuny** @shamara4w · May 16

#lka #EasterAttackLK #riotslk

5



**The Media Analysis** @verite\_tma · 3h

Ten years since the end of the war: How did the front page headings of #SinhalaPress and #TamilPress report on it? Find out: [bit.ly/2VQ8n6Y](https://bit.ly/2VQ8n6Y) #May18sl #May18 #SriLanka #lka

10 years since the end of the war: How did the front page headings of Sinhala and Tamil newspapers report on it?

| Date        | Sinhala Newspaper | Sinhala Headline   | Tamil Newspaper | Tamil Headline   |
|-------------|-------------------|--|-----------------|--|
| 18 May 2019 | Lankadeepa        | National celebration to commemorate war heroes to be held tomorrow                                       | Viraasaari      | Preparations afoot for an emotional Mullivaikkal commemoration   |
|             | Dinashan          | 10th Victory Day celebration to commemorate war heroes of peace to be celebrated tomorrow                | Thinkkural      | Mullivaikkal commemoration day in Tamil areas today  |
| 19 May 2019 | Silumina          | 10th Victory Day celebration to commemorate war heroes   | Viraasaari      | Tears flow in Mullivaikkal   |
|             | Dinashan          | 10 years of victory: National celebration of the war heroes will be held today                           | Thinkkural      | Justice has been evaded even after a decade has passed - Mullivaikkal Declaration condemns                         |
| 20 May 2019 | Rena              | "I completely trust the tri-forces" - President  | Viraasaari      | "Assistance of the international community will be obtained depending on necessity" - Sirisena                     |
|             | Dinashan          | "Motherland is secured through the protection of the war heroes' sacrifices and excellence." - President | Thinkkural      | Eradicating international terrorism: Responsibility handed over to security forces who have 30 years of experience |
|             | Dinashan          | "Tri-forces will win this terrorist challenge for  |                 |  |



**Sanjana Hattotuwa** @sanja... · 22m

Complements what I tweeted looking at [#Twitter twitter.com/sanjanah/statu...](https://twitter.com/sanjanah/status...)  
Two entirely distinct #srilanka's, at odds with each other. Inter alia, a good moment to ask @ONURgovLK et al to explain exactly how they've measured impact of their projects & programmes. [#lka twitter.com/verite\\_tma/sta...](https://twitter.com/verite_tma/sta...)



**Nalaka Gunawardene** @Na... · 28m

#SriLanka: A land divided and polarised by its media? Or is #MediaLk simply reflecting our deeply fractured society? #May18sl







Verité Research

May 9 at 6:25 PM · 🌐

...

Today's main headlines in press were divided. The Sinhala press focused on the swords that were recovered from a well in Maligawatte, while the Tamil press focused on President Maithripala Sirisena's statement in made in Sainthamaruthu. Find out more: <https://bit.ly/2V7zWDK>

**අ** The divide between the Sinhala and Tamil press headlines on 09 May 2019 **அ**

**Recovery of swords in Maligawatte**





**President Maithripala Sirisena's statement in Sainthamaruthu**





**பிளவு**  
**ஊடகம்**

👍❤️ 27

2 Comments 11 Shares

👍 Like

💬 Comment

➦ Share

Most Relevant ▾



Write a comment...



**Ravi Kulatunga** Sad but true... Sri Lanka's division was started, embedded by our invaders for their benefit and to ensure existence. Sadly but truly.. 99% of our politicians have and continued to do so and act with personal intent at the cost and detriment of the ge... See More

Like · Reply · 1w · Edited



**Siva Lokanathan** Commending you'll for highlighting this provoking discrepancy

Like · Reply · 1w