

SRI LANKA TO BAN BURKHA, SHUT 1,000 MADRASAS

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While the Minister said he had signed documents outlawing the burkha, the move awaits Cabinet approval. Over 1,000 madrasas would be shut, he said.

The announcement on the burkha ban comes after a year-long controversy over the government's policy of mandatory cremation of COVID-19 victims, based on unsubstantiated claims that the bodies would contaminate ground water.

The government reversed its decision recently, amid persistent calls for burial rights from Muslims, who make up about 10% of the 21-million population, as well as international bodies including the U.N.

Following the Islamic State-inspired Easter terror bombings in Sri Lanka in April 2019, attributed to a local Islamist radical network, the government temporarily banned the face veil using emergency laws. A small section of Sri Lankan Muslim women wears the burkha, and some of them reported harassment in public spaces at that time, when they were barred entry into banks and commercial establishments.

Some sections criticised the move then for 'targeting' the women of the community that had not only condemned the attacks but also provided evidence that investigators said was crucial to their probe.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa was elected to office in November 2019, following his campaign on the plank of enhancing security, promising a crackdown on extremism.

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