

**As others say it**

**A Bill and its politics**

WITH remarkable speed and without much discussion, the Lok Sabha has passed the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, criminalising the practice of instant triple talaq among the Muslims. The Bill provides a three-year imprisonment for the violators. A law to this effect indeed recommended itself after the Supreme Court had declared the instant triple talaq as illegal. Union Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad has chosen to term the Bill as "historic." Confident of its majority in the Lok Sabha, the government did not accept the Opposition's demand that it be sent to a parliamentary panel for further finessing. In the event, the Bill got passed with a voice vote, and none in the Opposition wanted to insist on a division.

The Opposition's ambivalence and the government's tearing hurry pointed to the very intense political context of the triple talaq legislation. Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad tactfully conceded that though marriage was a civil contract, there were enough laws in the statute book — like the Dowry Prohibition Act, the child marriage laws and the adultery laws — that empowered the state to interfere and criminalise certain offensive practices; and, so why should the Muslim marriage not be excised of a disagreeable practice that has been proscribed by the apex court?

More relevant than the provisions of the proposed law are the political calculations at work. Ever since the Shah Bano case and its subsequent nullification, the Indian polity has been made to stand up and be counted on the demand for a uniform civil code. Very many political parties subscribe to the view that the Muslim sensitivities needed to be taken into account and that the larger commitment of social harmony and a promise of partnership demanded that the matter of reforms in the institution of Muslim marriage be better left to the wisdom of the community's leadership and clergy. On the other hand, what began as an argument for a progressive legislation has over the decades morphed into a clever manoeuvre to mobilise the Hindu constituency against the "backward" Muslim community, already being demonised in our popular culture and on social media. The "appeasement" argument would continue.

-Tribuneindia

**Fin Min must decide**

FINALLY, the government woke up on Friday to press the alarm bell against cryptocurrencies. The finance ministry publicly admitted that there is a "phenomenal increase" in the prices of virtual currencies, including bitcoins, which are like "Ponzi schemes". Undoubtedly, the finance ministry's invocation of the Ponzi scheme is noteworthy. It is named after Charles Ponzi, the notorious scamster who duped investors of about \$20 million way back in the 1920s. The US regulator defines a Ponzi scheme as an "investment fraud" that pays existing investors with funds collected from new investors. Eventually, the scheme caves in when it fails to lure new investors or a large number of existing investors decide to cash out.

Many Indians are tempted to make a quick buck by investing in cryptocurrencies, particularly bitcoins. These promise phenomenal returns. One bitcoin, which was available for \$0.09 in 2010 had surged to almost \$20,000 in just seven years. It, however, had a rollercoaster ride, where for every winner there were several losers. The finance ministry admits that "there is a real and heightened risk of investment bubble" and "sudden and prolonged crash" would expose retail consumers who would lose their hardearned money. The ministry is also apprehensive that the virtual currency could be used for subversive activities such as terror-funding, drug-trafficking or money-laundering.

The RBI has been issuing similar cautionary notes since 2013. Despite cautions from the guardians of the economy, about a dozen bitcoin exchanges are flourishing in the country. Why is the government soft on them? Is it because the rich and powerful are associated with this new rage? The finance ministry must not tackle this matter half-heartedly by merely issuing cautionary notes. It will be failing in its institutional duty if it did not move proactively to protect gullible investors from a Ponzi-like scheme. No virtual currency, not even the popular bitcoin, has been accepted as legal tender by any country. Countries like South Korea, Bolivia, Ecuador, Kyrgyzstan and Bangladesh have already banned cryptocurrencies. It is the time for India to act.

-Tribuneindia

**Violators must pay: On fire tragedies**

The loss of at least 14 lives in the fire in a Mumbai rooftop restaurant on Thursday night must compel a relentless campaign for safety in buildings. Earlier this week, in another tragedy in the city, at least 12 migrant labourers were killed in a fire in an industrial area. This is a catastrophe that can befall anyone, which is why the fires in the upmarket building in the Kamala Mills compound and the snacks shop in Saki Naka in India's financial capital need to become examples: of fixing of accountability of owners, managers and official agencies; punishment for those guilty of breaking rules; exemplary compensation for families of the dead and for the injured; and zero-tolerance enforcement of safety requirements. It should sting the conscience of governments that they learnt nothing from the Uphaar cinema hall fire in New Delhi in 1997 that killed 59 people. In that episode, the exits had been blocked by unauthorised seating. An impartial inquiry is needed to determine what building and other rules were violated in Mumbai, and to identify the officials who allowed them. It would be wrong to categorise deliberate acts as instances of mere negligence. Those responsible must be prosecuted without leniency.

Assessing a fire professionally involves an inquiry that focusses on established construction codes: whether the possibility of igniting it was actively reduced, whether provision was made for controlling the spread of fire and smoke, whether the design enabled occupant escape and firefighter access, and whether the structure was built to avoid collapse. The inquiry ordered by the Maharashtra government must produce a public report on all these parameters. It must be followed up with meticulous prosecution. Given how the Uphaar case played out, it is important to see that the guilty do not use every device available to prolong the judicial process. It would ill-serve the cause of justice to the victims if the judiciary takes a lenient view of such a crime. The urgent need is to make examples of violators, invoking the most stringent provisions. Long as it has been, the struggle waged by the families of Uphaar victims who came together to form an association is in itself a commendable effort that has exposed the indifference of the executive. The absence of a strong law of torts accompanied by a slow criminal justice process and rampant bureaucratic and political corruption have contributed to the brazen violation of building norms and a system of special schemes to regularise such death traps for a fee. It is wrong for courts to take a benign approach to such blatant, complicit measures. On the other hand, they should be concerned that their orders issued to ensure public safety — road safety is one example — remain mostly on paper. It should worry us that the lives of Indians seem to be of little value.

-The Hindu

Parmanand Pandey

**Sri Lanka Abounds With Breathtaking Beautiful Places**

We know so little about our neighbouring countries was realised by me during my six days visit to Sri Lanka in the second week of December 2018. I was the part of the 23-member delegation of the Indian Federation of Working Journalists, which travelled to many places in Sri Lanka. While Indians have known it as Sri Lanka from time immemorial, it was called Ceylon when it was a British Colony and its original name was restored in 1972, after 24 years of her gaining independence in

1948. Sri Lanka is credited to have the first woman Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike in the entire world, way back in 1960. Most of us started our journey by Air India on 10th of December in the afternoon from Terminal 3 of the Indira Gandhi international airport of New Delhi reached within three and half hours at Colombo's Bandaranaike international airport. Colombo is one of the modern cities of the world with the all-natural

mainly due to huge remittances from the Gulf countries. In all these years grand mosques have sprung up particularly in the North-Eastern part of Sri Lanka. Three language formula- Sinhalese, English and Tamil- is observed Sri mainly in all Government programmes. Tamil has been given more importance possibly to assuage the feelings of the Tamilian population, who were on the war path for very long period hampering the development of Sri Lanka.

noticed between India and Sri Lanka is that in public functions everybody sits as an audience. Only those persons go up to the podium or stage whose names are called out by the moderator. He or she is supposed to immediately come down from the stage and then

Our columnist Parmanand Pandey was in Sri Lanka for one week in December last year. He has written this travelogue for the newspaper, which will be published in two parts – Editor



The Author



Group photograph of Indian journalists at Gunners' Club near Batticaloa.

gorgeousness of ocean, lagoons, gardens and greeneries. Manmade high-rise buildings, modern airport, potholes free roads, all round cleanliness and abounding of comfortable hotels etc, make this city all the more attractive. Hospitality in Sri Lanka is, to say the least, par excellence.

For any Indian visitor to Sri Lanka, what conjure up are the places associated with Ramayana. So, on reaching Colombo when we were told that this time the delegation would not be taken to the places of Ramayan trail, some of the journalists were disappointed a bit, but later after seeing other places, they felt happy that their visit proved to be more educative than what they had actually thought of. We were received at the airport by the office bearers of 'Sri Lanka Press Association' (SLPA). Its energetic and young Foreign Secretary Kurulu K. Kariyakarawana and his Indian wife, Gitika Talukdar, who herself is an accomplished journalist accompanied us from the beginning of our journey to the last day. This duo took all pains to ensure our comfortable stay and elaborate arrangements for our reception at various places. All Indian journalists felt very happy when they were told that this time they would have the opportunity to see the post-conflict areas of North-East Sri Lanka, particularly from Batticaloa and Trincomalee. Sri Lanka Press Association was given generous assistance by the Ministry of Tourism of Sri Lanka to take care of visiting Indian journalists

The climate of Sri Lanka remains hot and humid throughout the year mainly because it is situated near the equator and surrounded by the ocean from all side. The total area of Sri Lanka is nearly 67,000 square kilometres and the population is slightly more than two crores. It is a multi-religious and cultural society More than 75 percent population consists of Buddhists and Hindus are the second largest religion. Quite a large number of Muslims and Christian also inhabit the island. During the last two decades, the Muslim population has become assertive because economically they have become more prosperous

Sinhalese, by all means, is the dominant language of the country but in the North-eastern part of Sri Lanka, Tamil is widely spoken and understood, where Tamil population is mainly concentrated. Tamilians are settled in considerable numbers in other parts of the country as well. Sinhala is a very sweet language and like any other Indian language, it is replete with Sanskrit words.

It was a delightful experience for all of us to see the love of Sri Lankans for National Song. While there is a controversy raging in India whether at the time of the singing of the National Song one should stand up in its honour or not, in Sri Lanka people pay their obeisance to their national song by standing in attention. Let me narrate an incident. While some of us, including a few Sri Lankans, were chatting, gossiping, watching television and reading newspapers in the lobby of the Sri Lanka Foundation, where we were put up for the first two days as we were waiting for others to board the bus, which was to take us to some other places but in the meantime the National Song of Sri Lanka begun playing. And to wonder to our wonders, everybody including sweepers, who were mopping the floors,

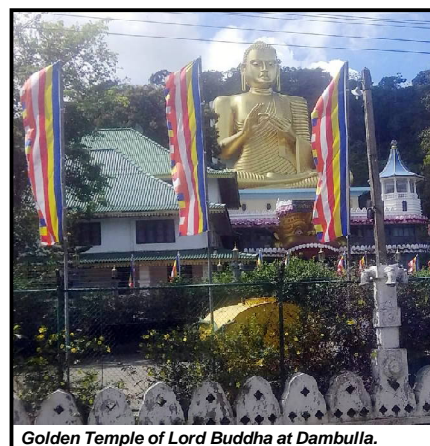
sit among the audience as before. In India, on the contrary, we find that there is always a pell-mell for grabbing a seat on the stage. Those who do not get the seat on the stage they feel frustrated and show their unconcealed indignation. It may sound strange but it is a fact that even the President of the country and the Ministers, Army Generals and top bureaucrats they all sit in the audience and move to the stage when their names are called out.

To my utter surprise, I found that number of people speaking/understanding Hindi has gone up many times during the last two-three decades. Indian High Commission in Sri Lanka is also doing its own bit for the promotion of Hindi in Sri Lanka. However, to our surprise, we found that many Sri Lankans have picked up Hindi from Gulf countries, where they have been going as the migrant workers. When we enquired it from many young persons, who were eager to converse in Hindi with us, they told us that more than 90 percent migrant workers in Qatar a country in other Gulf countries, speak in Hindi or Urdu and therefore, everybody has to learn Hindi/Urdu, out of compulsion, so as to communicate with other fellow workers.

Last time when I visited Sri Lanka in 1995 as a member of Press Council of India and I had found that there an atmosphere of fear of the indiscriminate bombings and terrorist attacks was lurking all-around even in the shops, offices and other public places in Colombo but now there is no such fear.

The natural beauty of Sri Lanka is seen to be believed. It is simply breath-taking. The vast expanse of the land from south-west Sri Lanka to

northeast in Batticaloa, Trincomalee is largely virgin and unexplored. This is mainly due to nearly three decades long drawn civil war. The unfortunate war waged by the 'Liberation of Tamil Tigers Eelam' (LTTE) must have caused heavy causality of men and materials in Sri Lanka. Thousands must have been killed by the police, army, administration and the general public. According to an estimate, hundreds of Indian Jawans of the 'Indian Peace Keeping Force' (IPKF), sent by the government of India for restoring peace, were killed in Jaffna and Trincomalee. Those gallant Jawans were killed unsung and unwept. We spoke to an officer at Gunners' Club in the Central Province of Dambulla on way to Batticaloa, who told us that no Army man wants to die without fighting a battle, that too, when he is working for the restoration of peace. It is true indeed because if an army man dies in the battlefield then his family members and the society and the country remembers him as a martyr but if he dies without fighting then it is the saddest thing for him. He was very happy to have arranged a sumptuous and delicious lunch for us.



Golden Temple of Lord Buddha at Dambulla.

Another significant contrast which could be

To be continued.....

**Rain affected match ends in a draw**

The first Test match between India and Sri Lanka which was recently played at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata ended in a draw after very little play was possible due to rain on the opening two days. However the weather cleared up and there was bright sunshine on the next three days of the rain-affected game but no result was possible as the two teams fought till the very end at the historic venue. Although the Test match was badly affected due to rain there was plenty to cheer about for both teams as they put up a great show during the course of the Test match. While the Indian team performed very well there were some encouraging signs for the Lankan side too as they surprised the home team with a fighting display. For the home team, skipper Virat Kohli came up with a magnificent century in the second innings while for the Sri Lankan side Rangana Herath and Suranga Lakmal did a great job. Apart from Kohli, Bhuneshwar Kumar also did an outstanding job with the ball and was also named the 'Man of the match'.

**A wonderful performance**

The recent Test match between India and Sri Lanka which was played at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata will be remembered for a long, long time because of Bhuneshwar Kumar's brilliant display with the ball. Bhuvi bowled a dream spell in the first innings and followed it up with another impressive display

in the second innings of the first Test at Kolkata. He was very well-supported by Mohammad Shami and Umesh Yadav as the Indian bowlers provided the Sri Lankan batsmen with plenty to think about. In recent times Bhuneshwar has done very well in all three formats of the game and he came up with another wonderful display during the recent Test match at Kolkata. His brilliant performance at the Eden Gardens also earned him the 'Man of the match' award. In the coming days a lot more will be expected from the young man from Uttar Pradesh as the Indian team prepares for the tough tour of South Africa.

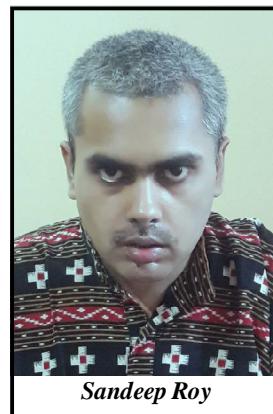
**An impressive display**

The Kolkata Test match will also be remembered for the way the Sri Lankan team fought against the strong Indian side led by Virat Kohli. For the visitors, Suranga Lakmal bowled brilliantly in the first innings and was well-supported by Gamage, Shanaka and Dilruwan as the Indian team was bowled out

for just 172. The Sri Lankan team gained a crucial first innings lead due to a fighting knock by the old warhorse, Rangana Herath. In the second innings, Lakmal did a great job with the ball once again as the visitors put up a fighting display against the formidable Indian side. Overall, it was an impressive display by the Sri Lankan team and they can take a lot of pride from the way they fought against the strong Indian team in the recent Test match at Kolkata.

**Plenty to cheer about**

Although the recent Test match was badly affected by rain there was plenty to cheer about for the Indian fans as the Indian team performed very well at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata. For the home team, Bhuneshwar Kumar and Mohammad Shami bowled brilliantly while skipper, Virat Kohli scored a magnificent hundred in the second innings of the Test match. The recent success at home has provided a lot of hope for the future and with the tour of South Africa coming up shortly we can expect a lot more from the Indian team in the coming days. So, let us hope that the Indian team will keep up the good work and do well in the near future.



Sandeep Roy

SPORTS