

# LS passes triple talaq bill, Opp walks out

Govt says bill not aimed to target particular community

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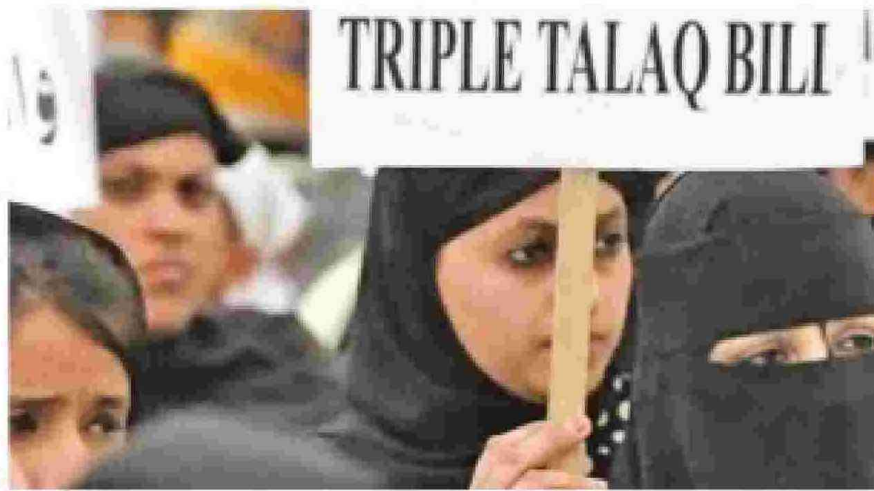
For the second time in less than one year, the contentious triple talaq bill criminalising instant divorce by Muslim men was passed by Lok Sabha after a heated debate on Thursday, with the government projecting it as a matter of “*Insaaniyat aur insaaf*” for Muslim women, and rejecting the contention that it was aimed at targeting a particular community.

The Opposition, including the Congress, objected to many of its provisions as “unconstitutional” and claimed that its real purpose was not to empower Muslim women but to penalise Muslim men, as it demanded the revised legislation to be sent to a joint select committee of Parliament for greater scrutiny.

With the government rejecting their demand, the bill was put to vote and passed after an over five-hour debate with 245 members voting in its favour and 11 against it. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was not present during the debate.

The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill was passed by LS in December 28 last year but got stuck in the Upper House amid protest by opposition parties. The government had then cleared some amendments, including introduction of a provision of bail, to make it more acceptable.

However, as the bill continued to face resistance in the Rajya Sabha, the gov-



ernment issued an ordinance in September, incorporating the amendments.

The fresh Bill to make the practice of triple talaq among Muslims a penal offence was introduced in Lok Sabha on December 17 to replace the ordinance.

Under the proposed law, giving instant triple talaq will be illegal and void, and will attract a jail term of three years for the husband. Key Opposition parties, including the Congress and Trinamool Congress as also AIADMK, which has often been an ally of the government in Parliament, staged a walkout soon after Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad concluded his reply.

The BJP is set to use today's passage of the bill as a major talking point ahead of the 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

The saffron party and its ideological affiliates, including the RSS, have long railed against the practice of instant divorce, projecting it as an evidence of its Congress-led “secular” rivals' vote bank politics.

However, the bill's fate remains uncertain as it will now go to Rajya Sabha, where the government lacks numbers and it can-

not become a law unless passed by both Houses.

Piloting the bill, Prasad rejected the contention of some opposition members that it was aimed at targeting any community. It is about “*insaaniyat aur insaaf*” (humanity and justice), he said, adding that it should not be weighed on the scales of politics.

Over 20 Islamic countries have also barred the practice, he said, adding that over 477 cases of triple talaq have been reported since January 2017. It has continued despite the Supreme Court declaring the practise “unconstitutional”, he added.

Leader of Congress Party in Lok Sabha, Mallikarjun Kharge said the bill was against the spirit of the Constitution and has violated several articles dealing with the rights of individuals. Congress MP Sushmita Dev said the real purpose of the bill was not to empower Muslim women but to “penalise” Muslim men. Demanding that the bill be referred to the Parliamentary panel, Dev said criminalisation of triple talaq goes against the Supreme Court verdict.