

FABC Delegates Savor Sri Lankan Religiosity, Culture

By Santosh Digal

Colombo: The participants of the plenary assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences took a half day break on November 30 to get to know Sri Lanka, their host country.

More than 100 bishops along with FABC officials and guests went around the national capital of Colombo visiting Buddhist and Christian places.

The first stop was the Minor Basilica of Our Lady of Lanka, a national shrine, at Tewatte, Colombo suburb.

Parishioners joined the Sri Lankan bishops to escort the visitors toward the church where Cardinal Albert Malcolm Ranjith Patabendige Don, Archbishop of Colombo and president of Catholic Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka, explained the shrine's history and significance. It was blessed in 1947.

The visitors spent about 40 minutes at the cathedral of the Archdiocese of Colombo.

Their next stop was to Kelaniya Raja Maha Viharaya, one of the most ancient Buddhist Temples in Sri Lanka. A Buddhist tradition and some historians claim that the Lord Gautama Buddha came to the temple on his third visit to Sri Lanka.

The chief priest of the temple guided the visitors and explained to them about various important areas and their history. He also treated the visitors to tea and refreshment. Cardinal Ranjith thanked the chief priest for the gesture and presented him a memento.

Tourist guides who accompanied the delegation explained many key aspects of geography, politics, architecture, history, culture, and tradition, various government establishments, commercial hubs, places of worship and many places of interest and importance.

They include St. Sebastian's Shrine in Kandana, famous Demazanod College established by De la Salle Brothers in 1914, the New Lelaniya Bridge on the Ranking, the fourth largest river in Sri Lanka, Kettaraymaya Stadium and St. Joseph's College that French Oblate missionaries set up in 1896.

Other places the team visited were Town Hall of Colombo, which is now the headquarters of the Colombo Municipal Council and the office of the mayor, Viharamahadevi Park, Nelum Pokuna, or Lotus Pond, the largest performing arts theater in Colombo, premier Catholic Girls' School run by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd (founded in 1902) Independence Hall (monument), Prime Minister's residence known as Temple Trees, Old Parliament and Secretariat, Dutch Hospital leading to President's House, followed by state banquet, the climax of the tour.

"The tour enabled us to know the delightful glimpses of Sri Lanka's rich cultural history," said Michael Roy, secretary general of Caritas Internationalis, Rome. He is an invited guest to the November 28-December 4 plenary assembly of the FABC.

Another guest, Virginia L. Farris, foreign policy advisor to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on International Justice and Peace, said she was impressed by Sri Lanka's "great legacy of religious traditions and cultural pluralism, which is evident from the country's movements, places of worship and other key places of interest."