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## Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments

### COMMUNICATION

by

**Shri P. C. Mody, Secretary-General, Rajya Sabha of India**

**(To be presented by Mr. Mahesh TIWARI, Deputy Secretary General of the Rajya Sabha of India)**

on

**“Restructuring and Rebuilding of Parliamentary Buildings- Keeping up with the Needs and Aspirations of Modern Times”**

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**Communication on the topic ‘Restructuring and Rebuilding of Parliamentary Buildings – Keeping up with the Needs and Aspirations of Modern Times’ for the use of Secretary-General, Rajya Sabha at Association of Secretaries General of Parliament (ASGP) Meeting to be held in Nusa Dua (Bali), Indonesia from 20<sup>th</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> March, 2022**

**Importance of Parliament buildings:**

1. Every nation has a parliament building which serves as the seat of the legislative body of the government of that country. In all democratic countries the Parliament buildings epitomize and uphold the institution of Democracy. The buildings reflect the shared norms of governance and underlying patterns of political behaviour that constitute political culture<sup>1</sup>. Parliamentary buildings are held very sacred by the public as they reflect the ethos of the people being governed and are the bearer of ideas over time. In tune to the sense of national pride and utmost respect that these buildings elicit and command they are usually as gigantic, grand and ostentatious as possible. In most countries they are akin to palaces.

**Structure of building:**

2. Most of the national Legislative Buildings across the world were built more than fifty to hundred years ago. Despite the fact that due diligence is given in conceiving the design and then constructing the structure of Parliament, not only do they require regular maintenance but also revamping over time. Most countries invest a lot of time and money into the upkeep of their Parliament buildings.

3. The changes that have taken place in the last century have been massive and are ever-evolving. As Parliamentary Buildings should reflect the

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<sup>1</sup>The Architecture of Parliaments: Legislature Houses and Political Culture by Charles T. Goodsell, British Journal of Political Science (Vol. 18, no. 3, July 1988) available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/193839>

contemporaneous values and ideas, the time is ripe to evaluate whether these buildings have kept up with the changing requirements of the modern times. Most of the Parliament Buildings need upgradation given the demand for increased space, better seating arrangements, inclusion of new technology infrastructure, safety concerns, universal accessibility, modern office spaces and energy efficiency. Some of these aspects were not in the realm of consideration when the Parliamentary buildings were constructed. However, one cannot ignore these aspects in today's times where technology is rapidly advancing, climate change concerns are primary in every nation's agenda, and building designs need to ensure universal accessibility, safe and modern office spaces. It is imperative that the most important building i.e. the National Parliamentary Buildings embody these current day concepts as buildings of such import have powerful cueing effects and the structure and design of the building is a strong form of non-verbal communication with the public for whom it's a place of reverence.

### **Need for revamping the parliamentary buildings:**

#### *Heritage status*

4. Many of the parliament buildings in the world are heritage buildings and reflect the fundamental architectural inclinations of the country. These structures preserve cultural values of the polity over time, articulate political attitudes and values, and contribute to the formation of the political culture.

These structures symbolize the state they are built-in whilst ensuring continuity of the political traditions. Architectural features like chambers, seating arrangement, aisles, spatial relationship with the other legislative structures are important aspects while designing to shape and manifest the political culture of the place it is built-in. Nevertheless after a lapse

of a certain period it becomes a challenge to preserve its heritage value while upgrading it to meet the requirements of the modern times.

5. The Parliament House of India is almost 100 years old whose construction started in 1921 and was inaugurated in 1927. It is a vintage and heritage building with a splendid structure representing the best of India's distinctive architecture and building style. Within its walls, the Parliament of Independent India has functioned for the last 75 years, representing the supreme will of the people and serving the nation and writing new chapters everyday in the evolution of parliamentary democracy. Appropriately, the Parliament House has been declared a heritage building.<sup>2</sup> To maintain the heritage and the grandeur of the Parliament House Building, measures have been taken from time to time by the Presiding Officers of both Houses. For instance, a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) on Maintenance of Heritage Character and Development of Parliament House Complex was constituted in December 2009. To advise the apex JPC a Standing Technical Committee (STC) was further constituted for the purpose comprising representatives/ technical experts of specialized organisations.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Dilapidating structure***

6. As stated earlier most Parliamentary buildings are decades or centuries old and many require massive revamping.

7. In India, the requirement for a new parliament house began to emerge a decade ago due to the deteriorating condition of the existing parliament structure. Almost a century old, the existing parliament poses numerous

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<sup>2</sup>Parliament House Building has been declared as a Grade – I heritage building in the New Delhi Municipal Corporation area vide Gazette Notification dated 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2009

(Heritage Management in Parliament, Lok Sabha Secretariat, New Delhi  
<http://164.100.47.194/our%20parliament/Heritage%20Management.pdf>)

<sup>3</sup><http://164.100.47.194/our%20parliament/Heritage%20Management.pdf>

problems concerning structural issues and space. The walls have been turned down several times in the process for installation of new sound systems, fire safety or ICT systems. The walls have also been removed to increase the seating capacity in the Lok Sabha.<sup>4</sup> Due to drilling holes in the walls to run electrical and telecommunication lines, water and sewage pipes, air conditioning ducts, etc have also weakened the structure a lot.<sup>5</sup>

8. There is no record or document of the original design of the building. Therefore, the new constructions and modifications have been done in an ad-hoc manner. For example, two new storeys constructed in 1956 over the outer circular part of the building hid the dome of the Central Hall and changed the facade of the original building. Further, the coverings of Jaali windows have reduced the natural light in the halls of two houses of the Parliament. Therefore, it is showing signs of distress and over-utilization and is not able to meet the current requirements in terms of space, amenities and technology.

### ***Seating capacity of Lower House***

9. The space carved out for Legislators and offices in the old Parliament Building is seen to be falling short in terms of seating capacity and functionality. An urgent need was felt to address these space constraints. With increase in population, countries like India are set to see an increase in the number of public representatives thus leading to a need for increase in seating arrangements.

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<sup>4</sup>Address delivered by the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi on 10 December 2020 at New Delhi, The Journal of Parliamentary Information , Volume LXVII No.1 March 2021 available at [http://loksabhaph.nic.in/writereaddata/JPI/JPI\\_March\\_2021.pdf](http://loksabhaph.nic.in/writereaddata/JPI/JPI_March_2021.pdf)

<sup>5</sup>Central Vista Project: Why India needs a new parliament building and a central secretariat complex, and how they will look like available at <https://www.opindia.com/2020/12/central-vista-why-india-needs-new-parliament-building-and-secretariate/>

10. In India's case, post independence the number of Lower House (Lok Sabha) seats has remained unaltered at 545 based on the delimitation carried out on the basis of 1971 Census. It is likely to increase substantially after 2026 when the freeze on total number of seats will get over. The Lok Sabha can seat a maximum of 552 persons. The existing seating arrangements in the lower chamber are thus already cramped and cumbersome.

### ***Insufficient space for joint sessions***

11. Similarly, the Central Hall of the Indian Parliament, used to hold joint sessions, actually does not have enough seats for the MPs of both Houses. The Central Hall has around 400 seats, less than the size of Lok Sabha. During joint sessions, at least 200 temporary chairs are placed on the aisles so that all the members can sit which certainly is undignified. Thus, we see that the present Lok Sabha and Central Hall are full to their capacity and cannot be expanded any further. Due to limited space for movement, it is also a huge security risk.

### ***Space Management***

12. Over the years, the parliamentary activities and the number of people working therein and visitors have increased manifold. So there is also a demand for increase and improved workspace in the Parliament Buildings so as to enable the legislators and the officials to perform to the best of capabilities. Integrating modern workspace in Parliament buildings is urgently required which would need upgrading infrastructure of existing buildings leading.

### ***No dedicated lounge***

13. In India, the Central hall also serves as the lounge of the Parliament, as the building does not have any dedicated lounge for the members to spend their time outside session hours. It is notable that a lounge is not just a place for passing free time, it is also a place where informal discussions take place,

networks are built etc. It is a very important place for discussing bills in an informal setting. In the absence of a dedicated lounge it creates a lot of problem.

<sup>6</sup> Members are public representatives but they also don't have any space to meet people from their constituencies that come to meet them. A parliament building should take care of this need of the Members.

### ***No dignified sitting***

14. The sitting arrangement in both the Houses of Indian Parliament are of bench type, with longer benches as one moves towards the back of the House. This means, when members enter or exit their place, they have to pass over other members sitting in the same bench. The members also don't have any desk in front of them, except for the first two rows. From the third row onwards, microphones and voting panels are actually fitted on the backrests of the benches in front of the respecting benches. This is a very clumsy arrangement and does not offer any place for the members to keep their documents and other personal belongings.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Need for State-of-Art Facilities in the Parliament Buildings***

15. With the onset of 21st century, the changes witnessed with each passing day in civil and technical facilities and services are monumental. Integrating facilities like air conditioning, fire-fighting systems, CCTVs, Audio Video systems is essential part of Parliament buildings. Old Parliament buildings need to be restructured to include new water lines, better sewage management, modern audio visual communication facilities, interior design for better acoustics, data network systems etc. The furniture provided to the Members

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*

needs to be avant-garde with smart displays, biometrics for ease of voting with intuitive and graphical interface and programmable microphones. The Buildings should possess digital language interpretation and recording infrastructure to produce real-time metadata. The new Parliament Building of India envisions keeping in pace with the technology and will include all these facilities in the design and structure.

16. During the pandemic special seating arrangements were made in the Indian Parliament for members to ensure that they sit in adherence to COVID protocol. Accordingly, audio-visual integration of both Chambers and their Galleries were made for providing seamless participation of the Members in the proceedings as members of each House were sitting in all three places.

17. Seamless live telecast of the proceedings of all the three seating places was made possible by interlinking the coverage of television channels of the respective Houses and installing display screens in Chambers and their Galleries. The audio system at all the three places were integrated through an Audio Conferencing System, digitally linked through “Analogue Output System” using optical fibres and feedback suppressor. However, these kind of arrangements should be permanently installed in view of any similar emergency in future.

### ***New IT requirements***

18. The COVID-19 pandemic has made it evident how Information Technology could be used to enable the Parliament to discharge its constitutional mandate during a pandemic when everything else is paralysed. It became obvious that there is a need to keep pace with changes in technology and explore ways to become less dependent on physical appearances and more receptive to online options. Number of countries had conducted their full

parliament sessions in a virtual mode during the pandemic. Cabinet meetings and interaction with political leaders were also held through video conferencing.

19. The pandemic made us realise that Parliaments should be prepared with technology-centric solutions to ensure work continuity in law-making institutions. That is why globally, Parliaments are increasingly embracing evolving technologies. However, in India conducting online parliamentary committee meetings were not found feasible. Even plenary sessions were held only in physical form after elaborate infrastructural arrangements.

20. It is clear that technology will become an omnipresent feature of Parliaments given the degree and the pace of digital penetration into almost all facets of life. It has become imperative to adopt new technology in the Parliamentary system as well. This will also be in tune to the Digital India Campaign that the government is already running and a paperless society that is in vogue now.

### ***Green Building***

21. There are growing concerns all over the world about climate change and its effects and there is also a growing consciousness about safekeeping of the environment and sustainable way of living among the people. As the most important building in a nation, Parliamentary Buildings have the onus to uphold values and ideas of public and ensure the building is energy efficient, eco-friendly and the carbon footprint of the building is minimal.

### ***Safety issues***

22. Most of the Parliament buildings built 50-100 years are bound to have distressed architecture due to addition of different instalments over the years which give rise to safety concerns. Moreover, there has been change in the seismic zones of the territory on which the buildings have been built on. The

Parliament building of India was built when Delhi was in Seismic Zone-II; currently it is in Seismic Zone-IV.

23. Fire safety is also major concern as the designs of Buildings built earlier are not according to the present fire norms. Today's security concerns are very different from the ones that existed when these buildings were built. There is an urgent need to revamp and restructure the Parliamentary Buildings to adequately address these concerns.

### *Security issues*

24. In the prevailing heightened security scenario it is critically important to provide the Parliament building adequate security. With the proliferation of terrorist activities across the globe, the democracies are experiencing greater risk and vulnerabilities to safeguard institutions of democracy from the acts of terror. Parliament of India was attacked by the terrorists on 13 December 2001. Ever since, the security of the parliamentary buildings was revamped and state-of-the-art security gadgets were put in place.

### *Universal Accessibility*

25. Parliament Building should be a model building for a nation by ensuring universal barrier-free environment in its precincts. Provisions of accessibility like ramps, handrails, tactile pathways, wide entry gates, disabled friendly washrooms, accessible elevators, etc. need to be incorporated in the building designs of Parliaments.

### **New Parliament Building in India**

26. To address all the above concerns, a new Parliament Building reflecting the aspirations of 1.3 billion people is being built beside the existing Parliament Building. The New Parliament Building of India under construction has a built-

up area of 65,000 sq.mt. and has a triangular shape to ensure optimum space utilization. The new Parliament building will have much more floor space as it will have larger chambers for both the Houses. The Lok Sabha Hall in the new building will have a maximum fixed seating capacity of 888 extendable up to 1200+ wherein in the old building it is 554. Similar to Lok Sabha, the Rajya Sabha will also be much larger in the new Parliament House. It will have around 400 seats, to accommodate more members which will be necessitated due to creation of several new states over the last several years. In the current building maximum seating capacity stands at 245.<sup>8</sup>

27. The new Parliament House will have a Lok Sabha hall, a Rajya Sabha hall, a Lounge around a courtyard, and a central space called the Constitution gallery. It will not have a separate central hall as the Lok Sabha seats will be much larger in size and they would be able to actually hold 1272 persons. Therefore, it will easily accommodate joint sessions of the Parliament, not requiring a separate hall for joint sessions. The Lok Sabha will also have more space for visitors on the gallery on the first floor.<sup>9</sup>

28. Every parliamentarian will have the facility in this vast complex where he can meet the people from his constituency and discuss their problems.

29. For seating arrangement in both Houses, there will be individual benches for two members so that every member will have an aisle seat, with proper desk in front of them. The technology will be also much improved, with modern touch interfaces on the desks to help run a paperless digital parliament. The interiors will be built while considering acoustic aspects, so that viewers viewing live proceedings will have much better sound experience.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://centralvista.gov.in>

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*

30. The new Parliament Building of India, a Platinum rated Green Building, will be a symbol of India's commitment to environmental sustainability. It will also be accessible for people with disabilities. They would be able to move around freely and independently in the building.

31. The public draws strength and inspiration from Parliamentary Buildings and these buildings symbolize the stability of the nation. It is of paramount importance that the buildings are the most stable, strong and secure places. The construction of a new Parliament House is a step in that direction. Reflecting the hopes and aspirations of the billion plus population, the new Parliament building will facilitate the Members of Parliament to discharge their responsibilities efficiently and equip them to address the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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