

THE NEW PARLIAMENT BUILDING: A FOUNTAINHEAD OF THE PEOPLE'S HOPES AND ASPIRATIONS

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A screengrab from a video tweeted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi shows an inside view of the newly constructed Rajya Sabha in the new Parliament building. Photo: Twitter/@narendramodi via ANI

In its 75th year of Independence, India is set to witness a historic moment with the [inauguration of the new Parliament House](#) on May 28. After using a Parliament building that is nearly a century old and symbolised a colonial era, we finally have a new structure in independent India. It reflects the vision and aspirations of a country that has evolved significantly since 1947. Some people may be misled by the idea that this is a new Parliament set up. But the new building will be another extension of the existing Parliament complex to signify the spirit of change and continuity; the journey of our Parliament from what it was yesterday to what it would be in the future. The old building gave direction to independent India, while the new one will witness the making of India as 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat'.

The main Parliament House, inaugurated in 1927, consists of the circular-shaped structure which is visible from the outside. Two more floors were added to this building in 1956 to accommodate more staff and other offices. The need for yet more office space led to the construction of the Parliament Annexe in 1975. In 2002, the Parliament Library was added to the complex. For similar reasons, an extension of the Parliament Annexe was constructed in 2016. Despite these new constructions in the Parliament complex to suit administrative needs, the need for modern facilities in the main Parliament House remained unfulfilled.

Apart from the shortage of space inside the Parliament House, there were several other challenges. The existing Parliament House is a majestic structure with a unique architectural style, but it presents a different view from the inside. It had to be retrofitted multiple times, which left little space for further improvements. Swathes of wires are squeezed under covers. The inner ceilings of both the Chambers and the Central Hall were provided with safety nettings to prevent any tiles and plaster from falling down. The multiple wirings for computers, air conditioners and security gadgets gave the complex a highly shabby look. In 2012, the Rajya Sabha proceedings had to be adjourned due to a peculiar stench emanating from AC ducts.

The Presiding Officers of the past have also emphasised the need to find a better solution. In 2012, the Speaker, Meira Kumar, stated that the Parliament building was "weeping," and

approved a high-powered committee to look for an alternative complex. In 2015, the Speaker, Sumitra Mahajan, wrote to the Minister for Urban Affairs to have a new Parliament building with modern facilities. All this points to the fact that the new Parliament building should have been constructed at least a decade ago, if not earlier. This issue was taken up on priority under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. A detailed plan to build a start-of-the-art Parliament was set in motion, and its foundation was laid in December 2020. In just two and half years, this building has been made ready for use. After the work began, India went through three waves of COVID-19. However, the safety of workers was given priority so that construction could continue.

The new building is more spacious, energy-efficient, and accessible. It has the most updated technology, which makes it well-equipped for future needs as well. While laying the foundation of the new Parliament building, the Prime Minister emphasised increasing the efficiency of MPs and modernising our work culture. In the new building, we will be able to accommodate various languages with state-of-the-art facilities for simultaneous interpretations as well as better features for audio-visual communication as compared to the existing Parliament. Better gadgets, access to an e-library, and important reports will be easily accessible for members from their seats. This will enhance the capacity of legislators and improve the efficiency of the Secretariats of Parliament.

The building has publicly accessible museum-grade galleries and a Constitution Hall that showcases India's age-old history of democracy. India is not the first country to have constructed a new Parliament building due to paucity of space and to meet the changing needs. A new Parliament House was constructed in 1988 in Australia in front of the old one. The iconic United States Capitol, which was constructed in 1793, has seen several upgrades. The Parliament building of Israel, built in 1966, was upgraded with new wings in 1981 and again in 1999. The Canadian Senate building was closed recently for major renovation and the sittings were conducted in a makeshift arrangement.

The inauguration of a new Parliament building presents an opportunity for us to seriously introspect on our parliamentary conduct to make Parliament more efficient and productive. The trend of increasing disruptions and long periods of deadlock is antithetical to the demand for politics to respond to the complex governance challenges of our time. One hopes that adequate functional space and modern facilities for the members will contribute to reducing friction and enabling serious discussions. In the coming years, as this complex expands, each member will have their own dedicated space for interacting with people from their constituencies.

A modern legislature is required to work in tune with the challenges of time. The country has already paid huge costs — social and economic — due to the absence of laws when needed the most. The world is changing fast and is on the verge of a tectonic shift due to the emergence of machine learning and artificial intelligence. The new Parliament building should remind us to prepare and equip ourselves to face up the new challenges. As a fountainhead of the people's hopes and aspirations, particularly those of the younger generations, it would work as a lighthouse to guide us in our ambitious journey to build 'Ek Bharat, Shrestha Bharat.'

Harivansh is Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha

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