

We need your support to keep journalism independent.

KNOW MORE

OPINION GOVERNMENT

A Few Questions from an MP to the Prime Minister About the New Parliament Building



Jawhar Sircar

30/Jan/2023 5 min read



Rajya Sabha MP Jawhar Sircar says parliamentarians are totally in the dark even a few days before the grand historic inauguration of the edifice.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the new parliament building. Photo: PIB

Respected Prime Minister,

Like many other ordinary Members of Parliament, we wait with bated breath for the day that we shall all be herded in silence into the august presence of the interior of the new Parliament building. We shall gaze with yokelish amazement at the latest wonder that you are bestowing upon India. We, who are to be its daily users, are however totally in the dark even a few days before this **grand historic inauguration**. Some are actually audacious enough to ask whether we really needed to spend Rs 1,200 crore on a new building as the old heritage edifice looks fine. After all, lakhs come every year to view its unique architecture and stately demeanour. But then we were informed, quite pompously, by your housing and urban development minister, that the existing parliament

Latest



LAW

Calcutta HC Tells CBI to Add GJM's...

The Wire Staff 2 mins read



GOVERNMENT

Manipur: Jiribam Has 943 IDPs in...

The Wire Staff 1 min read



LAW

Gujarat HC stays Netflix Release of...

The Wire Staff 1 min read



ENVIRONMENT

A Scientific Mission to Save the Sharks

Angela Posada-Swofford 12 min



POLITICS

Party That Became Arrogant Was...

Deep Mukherjee 2 mins read



POLITICS

Graphics: Modi's Divisive Election...

The Wire Analysis 1 min read

building is a colonial structure. He said it may be unsafe as it is a hundred years old.

By the way, sir, are all colonial buildings also on the way to the slaughterhouse? There is much too much 'colonial' public architecture in Delhi that was built with revenues extracted from Indians and almost all blend in distinctive Indian elements with foreign. Despite your specific aversion to Mr Lutyens, you may like to admit that he was the first to ensure that our local (made-in-India) architectural features like the *jharokha*, *chhattri* and *chhaja* rubbed shoulders with better-known elements from Greece and Rome. It may also gladden you to learn that his structures had practically no features of Islamic or Saracenic architecture. The regal Rashtrapati Bhavan, the finest specimen of 'colonial architecture', intertwined indigenous and European features, but its crown is a replica of our very own Buddhist stupa.

We are wondering whether you also plan to demolish the many colonial bungalows that your ministers squabble to grab, when they hit a century soon. We, taxpayers, would then need to shell out thousands of crores of rupees more, and to tell you the truth, many of us feel that this mammoth expenditure could improve the lives of the 30 crore Indians who live in absolute penury. And, isn't it contradictory that you also commanded that the utterly colonial North and South Blocks on the commanding heights of Raisina Hill be preserved and strengthened? We believe that in **September 2019**, your CPWD declared them to have "outlived their utility" and that "they are not earthquake safe". Why then did your government decide that these two Blocks would soon house the National Museum? We hope your minions possess the extraordinary skills required to move each of the 2 lakh treasures of India (many priceless) without either damaging them or ensuring that some are not 'switched in transit' with copies. How they squeeze in some of the larger artefacts into those little rooms constructed to house perennially worried bureaucrats will be something to watch.



North Block, Raisina Hill, where the home and finance ministries are housed. Photo: Wikimedia

It's a great pity that impressive buildings like the National Museum, the National Archives, our sentimental Vigyan Bhavan (with its imposing Buddhist Chaitya gate), the recently-inaugurated, swank multi-crore rupee Jawahar Bhavan of the Ministry of External Affairs would all be levelled to dust. In their place would arise stodgy stone blocks of the Central Vista, to house mandarins – who never asked for them. We are told that this tasteless architecture was proposed by your trustworthy but otherwise unknown architect from Gujarat (he's charging us a

whopping Rs 250 crore) at your bidding. It is a pity that no one else of consequence was consulted and parliamentarians were never even asked about their new workplace. Critics say this is so overbearingly Tughlaqi. A nation of 140 crore people surely deserved that some very distinguished urban planners and architects (not just agreeable *sarkari* ones) be brought into the design and planning process – before thrusting those lumpy Central Vista blocks-for-babus down on us.

The new Parliament, which is part of this Vista, may not look like those eyesore sandstone barracks coming up on Rajpath (oops, Kartavya Path), but it does not appear to be a beauty either. We are unable to judge it in its entirety, as it is blocked from view on all sides and only bits of dolled-up visuals are revealed. After all, *prajas* need to know only thus. By the way, the frontal view of this triangular edifice looks quite like the grille of a Mercedes car. It's all so far removed from the awe-inspiring old parliament building or the other magnificent creations we accost in Delhi. Somehow, it does not exude the magnificence of Raisina Hill or the Red Fort. Instead, we get the unmistakable stamp of yet one more CPWD building (yawn!) in Dilli *shehar* – just a hugely bigger one – built in a tearing hurry before that annoying year, 2024. We can see frenzied activity and very geometric (Islamic) stone *jalis* being cut and affixed, but we scratch our heads wondering which school of Indian architecture it all represents. With so many beautiful awe-inspiring indigenous styles available – which one inspired this? Perhaps, you could enlighten us, Pradhan Mantriji?

The interiors look plush and commodious – though we see disturbing pillars blocking our paths in many a lobby. The ceilings appear glitzy, rather showy, and some look too gaudy and garishly nouveau riche. At least this part of the aesthetics could have been more sober and stately – if better tastes were allowed to prevail. We are informed that the Lok Sabha chamber is so very large that it can accommodate all the members of the Rajya Sabha as well. We do not, therefore, require the present Central Hall of the existing parliament, where members of both houses sit during ceremonial speeches. But this Central Hall also serves as a great informal meeting ground where members from both Houses meet all the time – to discuss and sort out, across political lines, vexing issues and differences. We were first informed that the new building does not need or have this common Central Hall, but the minister later wrote to say we shall now have two Central Halls. A vital component of parliamentary life, the Central Hall, is thus being cut into two, by the adroit use of divide and rule.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Lok Sabha speaker Om Birla at the new Parliament building for the unveiling ceremony of the national emblem in July, 2022. Photo: PIB

Some feel quite strongly that your megalophobia-stimulating large spaces in the new chambers are far in excess of the number needed to accommodate all elected parliamentarians, now or in the foreseeable future. The superfluous blank spaces in both Houses may be panned by television cameras to prove that parliamentarians hardly attend, despite fat allowances. What is missed out is that the number who are actually seen inside either House (usually half or even less) appears low because many are engaged in tasks that are as important as sitting in the House. Several are lobbying with various political proposals or negotiating among themselves or planning strategies and political responses in the Central Hall. Several are busy attending parliamentary committee meetings. In this context, some suspect that sparsely filled Houses would strengthen an inspired narrative that parliament is a largely redundant institution.

This is an extension of the concerted campaign that even the right to dissent and occasional disturbances (when debate is stifled) are just too awful and lower the 'productivity' of Parliament. A section of the media joins the chorus to foist a one-leader-no-criticism model. You, sir, became the first PM to kiss, rather dramatically and before television and cameras, the steps of the Lok Sabha. But you were also the first to reduce the actual number of working days to the minimum. After a decade as CM of Gujarat, you could reduce the number of days of the state assembly to the lowest ever – less than 30 days a year. Is this your target where parliament is concerned, as well?

There are several other issues, but we hope you will respond to these few at least.

Ever so respectfully,

Jawhar Sircar
Member of Parliament

Suggested Reads



TOPICS

- Politics
- Economy
- World
- Security
- Law
- Science
- Society
- Culture

VOICES

- Opinion
- Editor's Pick
- Analysis

NAVIGATE

- About Us
- Support Us
- Contact Us

Readers like you make The Wire possible

Your contributions can help us provide in-depth reporting on social, political, and economic issues that affect our daily lives.

SUPPORT NOW