

New Parliament: A moment of pride and reckoning

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The inauguration of the nation's new Parliament building by Prime Minister Narendra Modi is a moment of pride; a historic event that sheds India's past colonial legacy. Unfortunately, the ceremony was marred by political controversies and boycott by a number of political parties, with trust deficit being a key factor. In fact, the very rationale of constructing a new

Parliament building at **Refugees** a cost of around Rs 1,200 crore, part of the “Central Vista Redevelopment Project” was questioned by certain sections of society. Reconciliatory consensus on the issue amongst the political fraternity would have been a befitting manifestation of India’s credentials as a mature democracy and its unity in diversity.

The new Parliament building with state of the art facilities and enhanced capacity to accommodate 884 Lok Sabha and 384 Rajya Sabha Members of Parliament (MPs) is futuristic and personifies the idea of New India. However, for common citizens the moot question of genuine concern is: how the sanctity and sacredness of the new “temple of democ-

racy” will be preserved. Going by the current profile of the Lok Sabha, almost 50% of the MPs i.e., 233 have declared criminal cases pending against them. It marks an increase of 44% in comparison to the number of MPs with declared criminal cases since 2009. The trend is almost similar with respect to the legislators in the state assemblies.

Incidentally, the scepticism on the nexus between crime and politics was evident right from the first general elections held in 1952. In fact, this trend had been anticipated by the founding fathers, in particular by C. Rajagopalachari, the first Governor General of India, way back in 1922. As per experts, the character of the nexus changed over a period of time, especially since the 1970s. Hereon, from the earlier pattern of politicians having links with criminal networks, a new trend started to set in where persons with serious criminal record began to enter politics.

The degeneration of our political system has been taken note of, from time to time. The 1993 Vohra Committee report underlined the emergence of the systematic practice of bonding between criminal networks, bureaucrats, politicians and the media. Even the 2002 report of NCRWC (National Commission to Review the Working of Constitution) reinforced the same concerns. Given “winnability” being the overriding factor for the selection of candidates by the political parties across the board, the criminals now enjoy open access to be constitutionally elected as legislators and hold key ministerial posts. Ironically, from the available data, those with criminal records fair better than those with clean credentials.

During his inaugural speech, Prime Minister Modi stated that when India is celebrating “Amrit-kaal”, the people of India have gifted its democracy a new Parliament. Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla expressed confidence that the new atmosphere in the new Parliament will engender new ideas and take forward the good principles of our Parliamentary system. Taking cue from the above passionate statements, perhaps the best return gift the new Parliament could offer to the democracy and its people is, when the Indian Republic marks its centenary in 2050, both the Houses will free be of the tainted elected representatives. This will require the introduction of path breaking political reforms to dismantle the existing gridlocks.

Embracing the past tradition of governance, the Sen-gol, a symbol of righteousness will act as a beacon of inspiration for future parliamentarians to be the worthy trustees of the nation’s democratic spirit. It will also act as a nudge towards self-reflection and conscience keeping by the political fraternity; marking transition from the culture of “being served” to “serve”.

The nation today stands at the threshold of breaking into the big league. It is also a time of reckoning for ordinary citizens about their ability to bring about a tectonic difference, and pave the way for “Young India” to realise its dream within the country rather than seeking it in distant lands, thus making “Amrit Kaal” a reality. *Maj Gen (Dr) G.G. Dwivedi (Retd) is a war veteran, a former Assistant Chief; currently, Professor of Strategic and International Relations.*