

COOPERATION Speaker Birla insists interactions between the two Parliaments would be regular and that the scope of cooperation will remain multifaceted

Indian Parliament Speaker on political relations, leadership

Tanzania and India have a long history of cooperation. In this interview, Speaker of the Lok Sabha (Parliament of India), Mr Om Birla details more. Read on:

Give us an overview of the parliamentary cooperation between India and Tanzania

We have had several exchanges of parliamentary delegations from both sides in the past. A parliamentary delegation from India had attended the 55th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Tanzania in 2009. A delegation of Indian origin MPs had attended the first PIO Parliamentarian Conference in New Delhi in January 2018. These visits have added value to our political relations and we should strive to have frequent exchanges of parliamentary delegations aimed at renewing Parliamentary contacts and strengthening bilateral Parliamentary cooperation and dialogue.

The periodic high-level visits between our two countries have been an important feature of sound political ties, understanding and appreciation over the last fifty years. Our current visit assumes special significance which comes fifty years after the visit of the Indian Parliamentary Delegation led by Dr. G.S. Dhillon, Speaker, Lok Sabha from 10 to 13 October 1972.

The Tanzanian parliament went through a change of leadership, with Tulia Ackson coming in as Speaker. How has India engaged with Ackson since she assumed her role?

I had an excellent interaction with the Honourable Speaker of Tanzanian Parliament. I thank her for hosting me and my delegation. We agreed that the interactions between the two Parliaments would be regular and the scope of our cooperation will remain multifaceted.

Let's talk about the role of the parliament in gaining more political influence. Often times, it becomes more complex when there's no multi-party representation. How do you navigate such situations?

In the last 75 years we have had governments of different political parties both in the Centre as well as in different States, elected by the people.

This is a reflection of the will of people and the dynamism and maturity of our democracy which had a long



The Speaker of the Lok Sabha (Parliament of India) Om Birla
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democratic tradition going back to thousands of years. Not only in the Parliament of India but also in the State Legislative Assemblies we have healthy multi party representation. Our experience has been that democracy and the governments get enriched with ideas and views from different political parties. It also strengthens the checks and balances system which is an essential part of a democratic system.

Give us your views on the doctrine of separation of powers in light of the role of the legislature.

Separation of power is a fundamental pillar of a strong democracy. The Parliament of India as the apex democratic institution in the country has always remained at the forefront of translating constitutional values and ideals into action by enacting appropriate laws towards building a better future for the society.

With the mandate from the Constitution and the directives given in the Directive Principles of State Policy, the Parliament of India has been enacting suitable laws over the years to keep pace with the time and needs. The Constitution also lays down the role of the executive and the judiciary. You would be happy to know that they all work in perfect harmony and with

mutual respect.

What are the key focus areas of your visit, and what are the projected outcomes?

We believe that the current visit of the Indian Parliamentary Delegation to Tanzania is very significant in the backdrop of the deepening Indo-Tanzanian relationship which has evolved, in recent years, into a modern and pragmatic partnership with greater emphasis on diversified trade, investment and economic engagement, development partnership covering capacity building, training, concessional credits and grants, and mutual understanding at political level.

I am sure that this visit by our Parliamentary Delegation will further enhance and deepen our bilateral relationship.

Our Parliamentary Research and Training Institute for Democracies (PRIDE) organises capacity building programmes catering to parliamentarians/government officials of Parliament of friendly foreign countries under the ITEC program.

We are happy to see regular participation from Tanzania. Tanzania is a major beneficiary of training courses allocated under India's ITEC & ICCR scholarships. India has offered 450 ITEC seats and 70

ICCR scholarships for 2022. Since 1972, about 4600 Tanzanians have benefited from the ITEC scholarships programme.

We are also ready to organise workshops specifically catered for Tanzanian parliamentarians on the areas of their interest on request from Tanzania.

If Tanzania has any specific proposal in mind relating to parliamentary cooperation, we are ready to consider it positively. We agree that the interaction between the two Parliaments would be regular in the scope of our multifaceted cooperation.

Gender inclusivity in politics is very important. Two of Tanzania's three organs of state—the executive and legislature—are headed by women. What's your view on this milestone, and the gender factor?

Gender inclusivity in politics as well as women empowerment are critical in a healthy democratic structure.

I applaud the fact that women are strongly represented in the Parliament as well as the Government of Tanzania. In India, we have a similar situation. You would be happy to know that my predecessor, Speaker of Lok Sabha during 2014-19, was a well-respected lady parliamentarian. We have strong representation of women in all walks of life in

India including in Government, Parliament, State and local Government legislative bodies and even in judiciary.

What major challenges entail your role, considering the changing political dynamics?

It has been close to four years now that I have had the privilege of presiding over the Lok Sabha—the Lower House of the largest democracy in the world.

I am glad to have enjoyed the unstinted co-operation and support of the Honourable Members which has been the constant source of inspiration for me.

The Seventeenth Lok Sabha, in its journey so far, has many landmark achievements.

There were path-breaking legislations, insightful discussion, constructive debates, landmark committee recommendations, outreach initiatives, among others, all of which upheld people's aspiration and the dream of the New India.

It has been our constant endeavour to create an enabling environment for Honourable Members, with all relevant work amenities, smart research cum information support, advanced infrastructure, and up-to-date digital cum IT tools.

Besides, sessions for awareness generation on issues of topical concern, capacity building programmes, welfare facilities, health camps, easily accessible e-resources, and expeditious medical assistance, were ensured to facilitate productive participation of Honourable Members in the House.

Another challenge we faced was coping with the catastrophic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. By initiating appropriate measures like speeding up the vaccination drive, insistence upon observing Covid-19 appropriate behaviour, regular testing camps, shift-wise sitting of the Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha and staggered cum rotational working modes, we were able to seamlessly sail through those harsh and challenging times. The Seventeenth Lok Sabha has, in fact, set a new paradigm and tall benchmarks in terms of overall work excellence and productivity that will continue to inspire the future journey of the Parliament of India.

What are some of the similarities between Tanzania's and India's parliaments, and what processes can be replicated to improve efficiency?

While India is a bicameral Parliament and Tanzania is having a unicameral Parliament, most of the parliamentary procedures, rules and functions are similar to each other.

As I have said earlier, there has been a long tradition of parliamentary exchanges including training of Tanzanian Parliamentary staff members in India. We learn from each other the best practices and it will continue in the future as well.