

Following is the full text of the speech –

“I welcome the recently elected Members of Rajya Sabha to this two-day Orientation Programme beginning today. This programme is primarily meant to equip the new members with a broad understanding of the rules and procedures of the Council of State besides various windows available to the members to effectively express themselves and discharge their responsibilities as a Member of Parliament having been chosen for Rajya Sabha.

In our country, becoming a legislator is the most coveted assignment in public life. There is intense competition to succeed in this aspiration. The competition is much more intense than for the civil services. If the prescribed syllabus is mastered, the chances of becoming an IAS officer are much more than becoming a legislator for which there is no definite curriculum. Another difference is that for an officer, it is a secured job for life and not so for a legislator. On the contrary, the real challenge begins for a legislator after becoming one. To be reelected every five or six years by proving his worth and retaining the confidence of the people is a big task in which many legislators fail.

In this backdrop, I compliment all of you on becoming the members of Rajya Sabha, an integral part of the apex legislature of our country. This is no mean achievement. You could become so based on your association and work with the people of your area, your good will, reputation and other credentials. You now have the constitutional mandate of representing the interests of the State or the Union Territory you have been elected from.

For you to succeed in this noble assignment, you need to perform well as a law maker, in raising the matters of public importance from time to time in the House seeking solutions as appropriate, making quality contributions to the debates in the House and in ensuring the accountability of the executive to the Parliament. These correspond to the legislative, representative, deliberative and oversight functions of the legislature.

For any public servant or other functionaries to effectively discharge their functions, proper understanding of the functional domain, rules and regulations governing the work environment and more importantly, right attitude and orientation are important. This programme is aimed at providing such orientation. I hope that all of you would make good use of this two-day interaction.

Since Independence, the Parliament and State Legislatures have been playing an important role in scripting the socio-economic transformation of our nation. As a result, our country, poor, illiterate and technologically backward at the stroke of freedom has made huge strides and emerged as a nation to be reckoned with now. Legislators across the country who contributed to this change over the years can take pride for the same. Even as the vibrancy of our democracy, the largest in the world, has been asserting itself with every election in rising degree, some areas of concern have emerged with regard to the functioning of our legislatures. These relate to the functioning of legislators including the Members of Parliament, both within and outside the legislative chambers resulting in increasing ‘negative perception quotient’ about the law making bodies and law makers among the people, the patrons of parliamentary democracy. This is not good for the world’s largest democracy. This orientation programme is to sensitise all of you to this rising concern and help you all in making a difference.

I have gone through the orientation module charted by the secretariat for this two-day programme. I am happy to note that a few experienced Members of Rajya Sabha will be interacting with you during these two days on various aspects of functioning of Rajya Sabha highlighting the nuances, the rules, procedures and conventions and the opportunities available for conveying your views and concerns.

Dear members !

With about 30 years of legislative experience and another three and half years as the Chairman of Rajya Sabha, I would like to share with you a dozen tips to prove yourself to be effective parliamentarians.

1.Sound knowledge of the provisions and philosophy of the Constitution

As I said earlier, you have the mandate and responsibility of a constitutional functionary. Our Constitution provides the pathway for socio-economic transformation of our nation based on the principles of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity. You need to equip yourself with proper knowledge of these constitutional principles and the underlying philosophy as they offer the operational matrix for you. The Constitution of India is the law of the land which defines the functional boundaries for the legislature, the judiciary and the executive.

As a Member of the Council of States, you are in particular, required to be conversant with the scheme of distribution of powers between the centre and the States so that you can safeguard the interests of the States and UTs as per the constitutional scheme. Rajya Sabha has been vested with some special powers under the Constitution with regard to legislation on subjects mentioned in the concurrent list, creation of All India Services and ratification of President's Rule when Lok Sabha is not existent. So, be thorough with the provisions of the Constitution.

2. Understanding of the role and evolution of Rajya Sabha

Rajya Sabha is known as the 'second chamber' but is certainly not a 'secondary chamber'. This point was stressed during the debates in the Constituent Assembly on the creation of Rajya Sabha. Except in the case of Money Bills, both the Houses of Parliament are at par with regard to making of laws for the country. This distinction has been made since the executive is accountable to the House of People in the Constitution. As I said a little while ago, Rajya Sabha, in fact, has some special powers in the matter of defending the federal scheme of things.

Given the separate provisions for election of members of the two Houses of Parliament and the changes in the political landscape of the country, the Governments of the day did not have majority in the Rajya Sabha for 39 of the last 69 years since Rajya Sabha came into existence in 1952. However, you should know that except on 3 occasions that required Joint Sitzings of both the Houses to sort out differences on law making, both the Houses functioned in a spirit of shared understanding and harmony all these years. This record has dispelled the fears expressed in the Constituent Assembly debates that the second chamber might prove obstructionist. This spirit of shared vision shall continue to guide the functioning of Parliament. So, you should not conduct yourself in an obstructionist manner in the House.

3. Knowledge of Rules and Conventions of the House

Without rules of social conduct, any society would be chaotic. It applies to legislatures as well. Accordingly, an elaborate scheme of Rules of Procedure for Conduct of Business in the Council of States has come into being over the years. You should know these Rules and in particular, those that are frequently resorted to.

These Rules provide for every possible contingency. During my 20 years in Rajya Sabha and three and half years as it's Chairman, I have never witnessed a situation when inadequacy of Rules was felt in addressing procedural matters in the House.

4. Healthy respect for Rules and Conventions of the House

Knowing the Rules and Conventions of the House is one thing and abiding by them is another. Problems arise in the House when the well established Rules and Conventions of the House

are either violated or sought to be twisted in their interpretation. So, it is advisable to adhere to the Rules and Conventions of the House.

The House frequently runs in to problems on account of repeated recourse to certain Rules to make a point by some parties and members. Rule 267 seeking suspension of Rules to take up a particular subject abandoning the listed business of the day is one such instrument causing most of the disruptions and forced adjournments of the House. Such rules are to be opted for in exceptional situations only instead of as a daily routine.

Similar is the case with raising 'Points of Order'. I have found this provision being resorted to increasingly even when there was no point. Better avoid raising such pointless points of order as it only highlights the inadequate understanding of the Rules of the House.

In effect, it is better to know the Rules and stand by them.

5. Law making process

The primary duty of Members of Parliament is making laws for the country. There are clear provisions in the Constitution regarding the processes to be followed in this regard. Every stage of passing a law offers unique opportunities either to oppose or support a Bill under consideration and should be made appropriate use of. This helps in better time management. Proper understanding of these nuances would be helpful to new members.

6. State of the Nation

For making effective contribution as a Member of Parliament, a thorough understanding of the State of the Nation is an essential pre-requisite for enabling it rapid transformation towards the chosen goals. A developing country like ours faces a set of complex challenges on the social, cultural, political, economic and external fronts. You need to have an informed and critical understanding of such issues and challenges for making effective interventions.

As our nation is emerging stronger, concerted efforts are being made to place hurdles in our collective march to apply breaks. These include creating disturbances along the boundaries, misplaced criticism of our country based on a few sporadic incidents, discrediting our democracy, economic restrictions, across the border sponsorship of terror etc.

As Members of Parliament, it is your solemn duty to defend the integrity and sovereignty of our country besides speaking for the emerging India in every forum. For this, you need to be alert all the time and thwart such insidious attempts.

It is also your duty to ensure and further strengthen the unity and inclusivity of our multi-cultural society by checkmating the attempts to create divisions based on caste, colour, region and religion. Each one of you must emerge as the spokesperson of the aspiring, emergent, capable, resilient and united India.

7. In-depth knowledge of issues

Political class is widely known as 'generalists' being able to speak on any issue but often without depth and required perspectives. In this era of rapid quest for development across the increasingly integrating world order, complex issues are coming to the fore in all domains including science, technology, trade etc. Discussing such issues with a degree of vagueness in the times of Artificial Intelligence does not help. You need to acquire in depth and analytical understanding of such issues to be an effective parliamentarian. For this you need to do adequate homework by way of extensive reading and preparation.

The Parliament Library, the largest in Delhi and the second largest in the country after the National Library, has a huge collection of about 14 lakh books on varied subjects, including hundreds of journals in all languages. I am told that the footfall of Members in this source of information and knowledge is not very encouraging. I earnestly encourage all Members of Parliament to make effective use of all the resources of Parliament Library for making a marked difference to the debates.

8. Focused interventions

The main challenge before the House and Presiding Officers is time management. Time is allocated to different parties based on respective strength and time decided for any debate or discussion. Accordingly, some parties and members often get **three or four minutes** to speak on an issue before the House.

But what really matters is not for how long one speaks in the House but what one speaks. I often find repetitions in the interventions of members. The best way is to broadly associate with the core of what the previous speakers spoke and bring out new information or perspectives that was not revealed by the preceding speakers. This is an art each one of you should cultivate for doing justice to the time you get. I found on occasions members speaking for a minute or two making more effective contributions to the debates than those who speak much longer.

Repetition kills media interest as well and your interventions get ignored by the media. So, you need to be smart in using the time you get.

9. Informed criticism not intentional obstruction

The opposition has the right to criticize the government of the day. In fact, it is their duty. But the criticism should be informed so that it looks credible. Opposing every move of the government for the sake of record dents its credibility. The quality of criticism should really sting the government of the day and catch the eye of the media and the people.

10. Privileges and Obligations

Members of Parliament are entitled to certain privileges and many of them flow from the privileges of the each House. These privileges are designed to enable unhindered functioning of the members. While it is in order to be aware of your privileges as Members of Rajya Sabha, it is even more important to be aware of your obligations towards effective functioning of the House and to the constituents you represent in the House.

11. Master the technology

Tectonic changes in the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is bringing the world into your palm. Vast reservoirs of information and knowledge can be accessed with the click of a button on the key board of a laptop or a smart phone. This helps in your preparation for participation in the proceedings of the House. If you are tech shy, better overcome it and become tech savvy. Rajya Sabha Secretariat has taken up extensive adoption of technology like e-Notices for the convenience of members. You need to make the most of the technology so that you are not left behind the tech friendly.

12. In the end, obey the Chair

Presiding Officer is the custodian of the rules, conventions and values of the House evolved over the years. While you have the right to seek your due in the House as per the Rules and Conventions of the House, it is in your interest and that of the House to abide by the decision of the Chair, whether it is Chairman, Deputy Chairman or Panel Vice-Chairman. You should

appreciate that disregarding the Chair amounts to disrespecting the House. I am sure you would not like to end up doing that.

Hon'ble Members !

You got an invaluable opportunity as Members of Rajya Sabha to contribute to the advancement of the cause of aspiring India which is seeking its due place in the comity of nations. For various reasons, we have lost some time and some opportunities due to which we lagged behind some countries that were placed at par with India or even behind us a few years back. It is time to catch up by making amends. I expect all of you to seize the opportunity you got. Always be reminded of what legacy would you be leaving at the end of your tenure. This will guide you on the right course both within and outside the House.

“Perform, Reform and Transform” is the motto given by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi for taking our country to new heights. This is achieved by syncing it with “Debate, Discuss and Decide” in the legislature instead of disruptions.

I wish you all success in your endeavours.

I appreciate the secretariat for organizing this well thought out orientation schedule for the benefit of all of you.

Thank you all!”