'Parliamentarianism' of Somnath Chatterjee

What is the issue?

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- Somnath Chatterjee who formerly held the office of Speaker in 14th Lok Sabha passed away recently.
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- The contributions made by him to the parliamentary practices in Indian democracy are worth remembering.
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What are the noteworthy contributions?

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- **Telecast** - His tenure was replete with people-centric parliamentary innovations.
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- He wanted to extend the visitors' gallery of Parliament to every household in the country.
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- It began with the live telecast of the "zero hour" proceedings.
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- He personally monitored the evolution of the Lok Sabha television channel.
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- It is the world's first 24×7 TV channel to be owned and operated by Parliament.
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- Its purpose is to inform people of the goings-on in Parliament on a real time basis.
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- **Knowledge** - He opened up the rich Parliament Library to researchers and media persons.
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- A new museum and children's corner in the Parliament Library building was created.
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- A parliamentary fora on diverse subjects was set up and a lecture series was introduced.
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- This was to equip the members with knowledge on emerging trends.
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- The institution of parliamentary research fellowships, Hiren Mukherjee Memorial Lecture were some of the many initiatives under his leadership.
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- **Legislature** - The dearest to Chatterjee was the principle of accountability.
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- Also, the constitutionally-guaranteed supremacy of the legislature in its own sphere.
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- His noteworthy bold steps in parliament in this regard include -
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i. enhancing the number of Standing Committees for improved oversight
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ii. directions for the compulsory presentation of action taken on Standing Committee reports
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iii. admission of probably the highest number of calling attention notices
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iv. his insistence on short discussions and adjournment motions
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- **Parliamentary diplomacy** - This is another innovation that took shape under his leadership.
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- Visits by Indian parliamentary delegations abroad were encouraged.
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- This was done in alignment with the country's foreign policy orientation and significantly benefitted India.
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- E.g. India's election to the position of Chairman of the Executive Committee of Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.
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- **Judiciary** - He held the judiciary in the highest esteem.
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- He did question the constitutional validity of judicial orders regarding the conduct of the floor test in the hung Jharkhand legislature.

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- However, his advice to the people who mattered was to honour the order of the Supreme Court.
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- He emphasised the dignity of all institutions, including the judiciary.
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- **Decisions** - He has disposed of, a record number of Tenth Schedule (anti-defection) matters in the shortest possible time, in a fair and judicious manner.
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- Not one of his many quasi-judicial pronouncements was ever challenged.
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- The orders passed by him have set benchmarks in the adjudication of anti-defection matters.
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- The events and achievements, and the debates generated during his period shall guide leaders in all institutions.
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- It is undeniable that Somnath Chatterjee has been one of India's brightest and the most outstanding parliamentarians.
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Source: Indian Express

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