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Why slogans and placards, asks Speaker

Advises members to abide by House rules, tells MPs to 'stop talking' during introduction of talaq Bill

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Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Friday questioned the practice of MPs trooping into the Well of the House with placards.

"Why should 'zindabad-murdabad' slogans be raised (in) the Well or placard be brought in the Well? Those interested in doing so have the freedom to do so outside," he said.

In his first press conference after assuming office, Mr. Birla said elections in India have always been a "transparent and accountable exercise" and referred to the Opposition forming the government after the 1975 Emergency. "If this was not the case, after 1975 the Opposition would never have been able to form the government," Mr. Birla told reporters

Though he didn't make any reference to electronic voting machines (EVMs), his remarks are significant in the backdrop of several Opposition leaders expressing



Listing his priorities: LS Speaker Om Birla at a press conference at Parliament on Friday •PTI

doubts over the integrity of EVMs.

The Speaker noted that the 17th Lok Sabha had as many as 256 first-time members, including 46 first-time women MPs. In all, the Lok Sabha has 78 women MPs, including the youngest MP from Odisha who is just 25.

Mr. Birla mooted the idea of developing an app that can educate first-timers on the various rules and procedures.

The Speaker, who represents the Lok Sabha constituency of Kota - considered a coaching hub for students appearing in IITs and other competitive exams - spoke of developing the Parliament library into a digital facility that can benefit students and researchers.

Be precise, MPs told
Talking about his priorities, he said he would work to enhance the House's dignity

and advised members to abide by rules and regulations.

On the first day of presiding over routine Parliamentary proceedings on Friday, Mr. Birla asked members to be brief and precise while asking questions. During Question Hour, when BJP MP Kaushal Kishore first praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi before asking the first question, Mr. Birla asked him to come to the point.

Then when some members were talking even when Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad was introducing the triple talaq Bill, Mr. Birla warned he would name them. Then he named Congress member Shashi Tharoor and asked Congress leader in the Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury to stop talking.

Some members, however, didn't appreciate the firmness and could be heard stating that "the Lower House was not a school and they were elected members".

The Speaker, however, maintained that even though he seemed to have been harsh, he was simply following the suggestions of members who wanted the House to function smoothly.

"Every member represents his constituency and I want his or her voice to be heard," Mr. Birla said, pointing out that he allowed division of votes as demanded by Opposition members on the introduction of the triple talaq Bill.