

## 1. Understanding Parliamentary Questions in Lok Sabha

### Introduction

The recent 'cash for query' allegations against MP Mahua Moitra has brought into question the way Members of Parliament (MPs) ask questions in Lok Sabha.

A political storm has erupted after BJP MP Nishikant Dubey accused Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader Mahua Moitra of "asking questions in Parliament in exchange for cash and gifts" from a businessman. Dubey demanded immediate suspension of Moitra from the House and urged Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla to constitute an "inquiry committee" to look into the charges against her.

Moitra hit back at Dubey, saying she "welcomed any move against her after the Lok Sabha Speaker is finished dealing with pending charges against him (Dubey)". She said the charges against her were "defamatory, false, baseless and not supported by even a shred of evidence".

### Procedure for Raising Questions

MPs follow a specific procedure governed by parliamentary rules to ask questions. This process involves notice submission and adherence to various regulations.

**Notice Submission:** MPs must provide notice to the house's Secretary-General, including the question's text, the Minister's designation to whom the question is directed, the desired answer date, and order of preference if multiple questions are tabled for the same day.

**Limit on Notices:** MPs can submit up to five notices of questions, both for oral and written answers, for a specific day. Any additional notices received are considered for subsequent days within that session.

**Notice Period:** Typically, the notice period for a question is not less than 15 days.

**Ways to Submit Notices:** MPs can submit notices online through the 'Member's Portal' or using printed forms available in the Parliamentary Notice Office.

**Speaker's Admissibility Review:** The Speaker of Lok Sabha assesses the question notices based on established rules to determine their admissibility.

### Conditions for Admissibility of Questions

Several rules govern whether a question is admissible, including limitations on word count, prohibition of arguments, defamation, or references to individuals' character, and restrictions on raising broad policy issues.

Additionally, questions are not admissible if they pertain to matters under judgment in court, before any tribunal, or being considered by a Parliamentary Committee. Questions that may jeopardize the country's unity and integrity are also prohibited.

### **Types of Questions**

There are four types of questions that MPs can ask: starred, unstarred, short-notice questions, and questions addressed to private Members.

**Starred Questions:** MPs ask starred questions. These questions require oral answers from the Minister-in-charge. These questions need to be submitted at least 15 days in advance (so that the Minister-in-charge has the time to prepare the answers), and only 20 questions can be listed for oral answers each day. As Starred questions require oral answers, supplementary questions are can be asked thereon.

**Unstarred Questions:** Unstarred questions receive written replies from the Ministry. Similar to starred questions, they need to be submitted at least 15 days in advance, with a maximum of 230 questions each day. Unstarred questions do not permit follow-up or supplementary questions.

**Short Notice Questions:** These questions concern urgent public matters and can be asked with less than 10 days' notice, with reasons provided. They receive oral answers and allow for supplementary questions.

**Questions to Private Members:** An MP can ask question to even a private MP when the subject relates to a Bill, Resolution, or any matter connected to the House's business for which that MP is responsible.

### **Importance of Raising Questions**

Asking questions is a fundamental parliamentary right for MPs and serves as a crucial mechanism for legislative control over executive actions. The significance of raising questions includes:

- Acquiring information on administrative and government activities.
- Criticizing government policies and schemes.
- Highlighting government shortcomings.
- Encouraging ministers to take constructive actions for the public good.
- Simultaneously, questions enable the government to gauge public reactions to its policies and actions, potentially leading to the establishment of a parliamentary commission, a court of inquiry, or the enactment of legislation.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance  
Source: The Indian Express

## 2. The Rafah Crossing and its Significance

### The Rafah crossing between the Gaza Strip and Egypt

Egypt is the only country apart from Israel to share a border with the Gaza Strip, which is home to 2.3 million people. The Rafah crossing between Egypt and Gaza is the sole route for aid to enter Gaza from outside Israel and the only non-Israeli exit.



### Why is Rafah Important to Gaza?

The Rafah Crossing is vital to the Gaza Strip because it provides one of the few land routes for civilians to enter and leave Gaza, and it is not controlled by Israel. Both Israel and Egypt have imposed restrictions on the movement of people and goods to and from Gaza, which has significantly affected the living conditions of Palestinians in the region. Entry into Gaza from either side has often been conditional on obtaining permits from the respective governments. In 2022, the Rafah gate was open on 245 days, allowing thousands of people to enter and exit.

Goods such as diesel, cooking gas, and construction materials usually pass through the nearby Salah a-Din gate, which started operating in 2018. Before that, household goods were mostly smuggled through underground tunnels.

### **How Has Rafah Been Affected by the War?**

The Rafah Crossing has been impacted by the conflict in the region. Israel's retaliatory airstrikes against Hamas, the group that controls Gaza, have damaged the crossing. Multiple strikes near the crossing have been verified through videos and satellite imagery. Foreign passport holders waiting at the border for it to open reported being evacuated after the crossing was struck.

### **What Is the Situation Now?**

Currently, hundreds of people have gathered at the gates on the Gaza side, hoping that foreign and dual citizens might be allowed to leave. Efforts by the United States and others to broker a deal with Israel and Egypt to facilitate humanitarian aid and foreign citizens' departure have not yet succeeded, and the border remains closed. Many American citizens in Gaza have faced difficulties, including limited communication due to power shortages and challenges in obtaining essential supplies.

Truckloads of aid from various countries have been waiting at the Egypt-Gaza border, but the delays in crossing have persisted, resulting in frustration and logistical challenges.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Relations

Source: The Indian Express and The Hindu

## **3. Visa Shopping**

### **Why in news?**

The practice of 'visa shopping' has been gaining popularity in several Indian states, including Punjab, where travel companies often facilitate this setup for travellers. But what exactly is 'visa shopping,' and why are people engaging in it? What are its legal implications?

### **What is visa shopping?**

Visa shopping refers to obtaining visas for countries that individuals may or may not visit during the granted visa period. This is because such visas can provide a gateway for people to enter their preferred countries, particularly in Europe, even if they have obtained a visa for another European nation.

Additionally, people who have no immediate plans to visit a specific country are also purchasing visas for such nations. This is to increase the chances of obtaining visas for countries of their choice in the future, given how the application process often takes a

long time or has chances of rejection. Also, visas usually remain valid for a few years after being issued.

### **How can a visa holder from one country in Europe enter another without obtaining a visa for that country?**

One popular example of this is the 'Schengen Visa', which provides a 'golden opportunity' for travellers by allowing them to explore many European countries without the need for separate visas.

Through an agreement between European countries, the Schengen system was established in 1985. Under it, member countries form the Schengen area and people can travel freely between them without going through border controls. Once within the Schengen Area, travellers can move freely across more than 24 countries. The visa allows travellers to enter the region for short stays.

Many opt to apply for a Schengen Visa from a country with an easier application process. Once it is granted, travellers can traverse the Schengen region and reach their intended destination.

### **Are there legal issues involved in visa shopping?**

This practice is not illegal if the traveller adheres to the norms and guidelines of the visa process and gets valid permission to stay in that country. Legal concerns arise if a person seeks a visa for a particular country but stays in another, or shows that his/her intentions were not to stay in that country but to only use it as an entry point.

If any person repeatedly engages in visa shopping, officials may become suspicious. Sometimes, countries raise an objection at the airport if a person's visa is of another European nation and entry is to another.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Relations

Source: The Indian Express

## **4. Successful Test Flight for Gaganyaan Crew Escape System**

### **Introduction**

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) achieved a significant milestone by successfully conducting the first test flight of the crew escape system for the Gaganyaan mission, a mission aimed at sending humans into space.

### **Crew Escape System**

The Crew Escape System is a critical component of the Gaganyaan spacecraft, and it is responsible for safely ejecting astronauts away from the vehicle in case of an emergency.



Figure 1 Crew Module

### **Achieving Objectives**

The test vehicle's successful lift-off and execution of predefined tasks confirmed the effectiveness of the crew escape system. The Indian Navy retrieved the crew module from the Bay of Bengal and transported it to the Chennai port, where it was handed over to ISRO.

### **Future Missions**

Following this successful test, ISRO announced that the first unmanned Gaganyaan vehicle mission is scheduled for early 2024. The Chairman of ISRO highlighted the achievements and the successful demonstration of the Crew Escape System during the test flight.

The test flight's success is a significant step forward in India's mission to send humans into space.

Relevance: Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

Source: The Hindu