

# BAD PRECEDENT: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE EXPULSION OF TRINAMOOL CONGRESS MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT MAHUA MOITRA

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The [expulsion of Trinamool Congress Member of Parliament Mahua Moitra](#) from the Lok Sabha by a hurried voice vote on December 8, based on [a report of the Ethics Committee of the House](#), is bad in form and substance. It was not, however, surprising. By a 6:4 majority, including the vote of a suspended Congress MP, the committee recommended her expulsion, holding her guilty of 'unethical conduct,' 'breach of privilege' and 'contempt of the House.' These were charges raised by a Bharatiya Janata Party MP, who was in turn depending on the statement of Ms. Moitra's estranged partner. The committee cited in its report a precedent of the expulsion of 11 MPs in 2005 for a cash-for-query sting operation by a news platform. There was video evidence that established a strong case then, unlike the charges against Ms. Moitra. She shared her login credentials with businessman Darshan Hiranandani to upload Parliament questions, a fact she herself admitted. The committee conceded in its report that it had no proof of cash exchanges and its report called for "legal, intensive, institutional and time-bound investigation", into that aspect. Nevertheless, it was emphatic in calling for her expulsion, and even labelled the sharing of her login credentials a criminal act.

The links suggested between Ms. Moitra's Parliament questions and the business interests of the Hiranandani group are frivolous. For instance, a question on steel prices or India's trade relations with Bangladesh is of interest to numerous business groups and consumers. The committee said it acknowledged the fact that several MPs share their login credentials with others, but went on to make a laboured case that Ms. Moitra had endangered national security. The argument that MPs have access to documents on the Parliament portal that are not in the public domain is a stretched one. In fact, there is no good reason to keep draft Bills secret. Bill drafts are meant for public circulation and debate before being brought to Parliament for discussion and voting. That there is very little of that happening these days is a sad commentary on parliamentary democracy. The report of the Ethics Committee also faced the same fate. The 495 page report was tabled and voted on the same day, rejecting the appeal of Opposition MPs for a more detailed discussion once Members had the time to read it in detail. The precedent that the majority in Parliament can expel an Opposition member on a dubious charge is ominous for parliamentary democracy. The expulsion of Ms. Moitra is a case of justice hurried and buried.

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