Rafale Questions

Why in news?

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Union government is reluctant to share data on the price of the Rafael aircraft.

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What is the recent instance of Government's reluctance?

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- Defence minister had conducted an official press conference on speculations over Rafael deal.
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- The conference concluded without a presentation based on facts and figures.
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- It is witnessed as a political performance by a spokesperson of the ruling party, where none of the questions raised by the opposition on the Rafale fighter jet deal were answered.
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- It is important to understand the context in which these answers are being demanded.
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What is Rafael deal all about?

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- **During UPA's tenure -**In August 2007, Indian Air Force (IAF) raised the requirement for procuring 126 Medium Multi Role Combat Aircraft (MMRCA).
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- Projected to cost $12 billion (Rs 42,000 crore), 18 of these aircraft were to come in a flyaway condition while there was to be a technology transfer (ToT) for 108 aircraft to be made in India by HAL, Bengaluru.
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- The IAF conducted extensive testing and evaluation and Rafale was

announced as the lowest bidder in 2012.
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- The process was hailed globally as “the world’s most professionally run fighter competition”.
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- **During NDA’s tenure -** In April 2015, PM in Paris said that India is going to purchase a mere 36 Rafale fighters from France in a government-to-government deal.
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- The MMRCA tender was withdrawn by July and in September 2016, the NDA government signed $8.7 billion (over Rs 56,000 crore) deal, with no transfer of technology to India.
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- No role was guaranteed for any Indian public sector company, including HAL, in such an important project.
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What are the areas Union government is reluctant to answer?

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- The price being paid per aircraft and its relevance to the price being offered to India under the UPA government is not known.
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- How these prices are renegotiated given that the government had to drop the technology transfer component for the 36-fighter deal.
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- The government didn’t made an elaborate official process before the announcement made by PM in Paris.
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- There are questions on approval of the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) before the announcement.
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- The other suspicious part is the absence of defence minister during a defence procurement deal in a nation abroad.
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- There is a clearly defined Defence Procurement Procedure which lays out the steps to be taken before any defence item is to be procured from abroad, even through a direct government-to-government route.
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- The selection of a private company for discharging offsets worth 50 per cent of the cost of the Rafale contract, with no technology transfer from France is another big question the government unwilling to answer.

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What are government’s justifications for these doubts?

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- Union government implies that there was a sharp and unexplained increase in the cost of manufacturing after the NDA came to power, which means it can only afford to buy 36 aircraft without the much-needed technology transfer.
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- The defence minister claims that her government has got the aircraft for much cheaper than the price earlier offered to the UPA government.
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- Yet, there is an uneasiness and unwillingness to share the data. Prices are not a matter of national security and these figures were made available to the public when the UPA held office.
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- India’s national security requirements are non-negotiable. There is no room for arbitrary and opaque decision-making, when there is so much at stake.
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Source: Indian Express

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