Ethics & Morality · GS - IV

Seema is a senior bureaucrat with a reputation of honesty and professional efficiency. She has recently been posted as the District Collector (DC) to Surinder Nagar, where a large industrial area is being established.

The new industrial area had caused many farmers to submit applications for change of land use (CLU) to convert their farmlands into residential areas. There is an unusually large backlog of these applications awaiting processing. Seema noticed that some applications had been approved selectively with no visible chronological pattern. The case files showed a few complaints of some approvals being subject to receipt of large bribes from the applicants.

On further fact-finding, Seema realized that a small group of touts was controlling this illegal activity through some subordinate officials in the Collectorate. This had created a fear in the other employees who were reluctant to process any application. The resultant backlog has been piling up thereby hindering local economic progress and causing public dissatisfaction.

Seema was faced with a major moral and administrative challenge of dismantling this corruption network without hampering daily administrative operations. An aggressive internal investigation would result in institutional resistance and, possibly, a backlash from labour unions. Conversely, ignoring this situation would encourage the wrongdoers and

unnecessarily continue this avoidable harassment to the populace.

(a) What are the ethical issues involved in this case?

(b) Discuss the options open to Seema. Identify the recommended option and justify it.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2026	GS - IV	Ethics & Morality

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
20	~250 words

Answer Hint

Integrity, corruption, abuse of office, bribery, impartiality, accountability, public trust, institutional resistance, whistleblowing, systemic reform

Model Answer

1. Ethical Issues

The case involves bribery, abuse of official authority, discrimination in processing applications and erosion of public trust. Selective approvals violate fairness and impartiality, while the backlog harms legitimate applicants and local economic development.

There is also an ethical dilemma between confronting corruption decisively and maintaining administrative continuity. Fear among honest employees indicates institutional capture by a corrupt network.

2. Options

Seema may ignore the matter, conduct an aggressive investigation immediately, or adopt a phased strategy combining enforcement with administrative reform. Ignoring it would normalise corruption, while an abrupt investigation could create resistance and disrupt functioning.

3. Recommended Course

Seema should discreetly secure documentary evidence, identify the network and initiate action through legally authorised vigilance and disciplinary mechanisms. Simultaneously, she should introduce transparent, time-bound and first-in-first-out processing of CLU applications.

Digitisation, application tracking, rotation of sensitive staff, grievance mechanisms and periodic audits can reduce opportunities for rent-seeking. Honest employees should receive institutional protection.

4. Ethical Justification

This approach combines integrity with prudence, accountability with administrative continuity, and firmness with fairness.

Conclusion

Seema should neither compromise with corruption nor allow institutional paralysis. Ethical leadership requires dismantling the network while simultaneously redesigning the system that enables corruption.

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