Ethics & Morality · GS - IV

As a senior officer in the Ministry, you have access to important policy decisions and upcoming big announcements such as road constructions projects before they are notified in the public domain. The Ministry is about to announce a mega road project for which the drawings are already in place. Sufficient care was taken by the planners to make use of the government land with the minimum land acquisition from private parties. Compensation rate for private parties was also finalized as per government rules. Care was also taken to minimize deforestation. Once the project is announced, it is expected that there will be a huge spurt in real estate prices in and around that area.

Meanwhile, the Minister concerned insists that you realign the road in such a way that it comes closer to his 20 acres farmhouse. He also suggests that he would facilitate the purchase of a big plot of land in your wife name at the prevailing rate which is very nominal, in and around the proposed mega road project. He also tries to convince you by saying that there is no harm in it as he is buying the land legally. He even promises to supplement your savings in case you do not have sufficient funds to buy the land. However, by the act of realignment, a lot of agricultural lands has to be acquired, thereby causing a considerable financial burden on the government, and also the displacement of the farmers. As if this is not enough, it will

involve cutting down of a large number of trees denuding the area of its green cover.

Faced with this situation, what will you do? Critically examine various conflicts of interest and explain what your responsibilities are as a public servant.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2018	GS - IV	Ethics & Morality

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
20	~250 words

Answer Hint

Conflict of interest; ministerial pressure; integrity and impartiality; misuse of insider information; nepotism and undue favour; public interest; farmers' rights and displacement; environmental sustainability; transparency and accountability; ethical courage

Model Answer

Introduction

The case presents a conflict between public duty and private gain. The Minister's proposal raises concerns about corruption, misuse of privileged information, environmental damage, and the violation of administrative impartiality.

Conflicts of Interest

1. Personal versus Public Interest: Purchasing land in my wife's name before the announcement could generate private profits using confidential government information.

2. Political Pressure versus Integrity: The Minister's insistence tests my independence, honesty, and commitment to lawful administration.

3. Development versus Social Justice: Realignment would increase public expenditure, acquire agricultural land, and displace farmers.

4. Economic Gains versus Environmental Protection: Cutting numerous trees would damage biodiversity and ecological balance.

5. Legal Ownership versus Ethical Conduct: A legally executed purchase may still be unethical if it exploits privileged information or involves undue influence.

Responsibilities and Course of Action

1. Reject Personal Benefits: I would refuse the land purchase arrangement and any financial assistance, ensuring that my family does not benefit from confidential information.

2. Preserve the Original Plan: I would recommend retaining the technically approved alignment unless an objective, evidence-based public-interest assessment establishes compelling reasons for modification.

3. Assess Alternatives: Any proposed change should undergo independent technical, financial, social, and environmental evaluation.

4. Resist Improper Pressure: I would respectfully explain the adverse consequences to the Minister and document all relevant directions and communications.

5. Follow Due Process: If pressure persists, I would seek written instructions and report suspected misconduct through appropriate official channels.

6. Protect Public Resources: I would safeguard farmers' rights, minimise displacement and deforestation, and ensure transparent decision-making.

Conclusion

A public servant's primary loyalty is to the Constitution and public interest, not personal enrichment or political patronage. Integrity, impartiality, and accountability must prevail over private gain.

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