Ethics & Morality · GS - IV

With the summer heat being exceptionally severe this year, the district has been facing severe water shortage. The District Collector has been mobilizing his subordinate officials to conserve the remaining water reserves for preventing the district from plunging into acute drinking water crisis. Along with an awareness campaign for conserving water, strict measures have been taken for stopping the over-exploitation of ground-water. Vigilance teams have been deployed to tour the villages and find the farmers who are drawing water from deep borewells or from the river reservoir for irrigation. The farmers are agitated by such action. A delegation of farmers meets the District Collector with their issues and complains that while they are not being allowed to irrigate their crops, big industries located near the river are drawing huge amounts of water through deep borewells for their industrial processes. The farmers allege that their administration is anti-farmer and corrupt, being bribed by the industry. The district needs to placate the farmers as they are threatening to go on a prolonged protest. At the same time, the District Collector has to deal with the water crisis. The industry cannot be closed as this would result in a large number of workers being unemployed.

(a) Discuss all options available to the District Collector as a District Magistrate.

(b) What suitable actions can be taken in view of

mutually compatible interests of the stakeholders?

(c) What are the potential administrative and ethical dilemmas for the District Collector?

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2024	GS - IV	Ethics & Morality

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
20	~250 words

Answer Hint

Water scarcity, equitable resource allocation, sustainable groundwater management, farmers' livelihood, industrial employment, transparency, stakeholder consultation, proportionality, public interest

Model Answer

Introduction

The situation involves competing claims over a **scarce public resource**. The District Collector must balance drinking-water security, farmers' livelihoods, industrial employment and ecological sustainability while ensuring transparency and fairness.

Body

(a) Options Available to the District Collector

The Collector can continue restrictions on groundwater extraction, prioritising drinking water and essential domestic needs. He can conduct an impartial audit of water extraction by both farmers and industries and verify the allegations of preferential treatment.

He can regulate industrial extraction through permits, extraction limits and water-use audits rather than abruptly shutting industries. For farmers, temporary irrigation restrictions, crop diversification and alternative water sources can be explored. Strict action can be taken against illegal borewells irrespective of the identity of the user.

(b) Suitable Actions for Compatible Interests

A **stakeholder-based water management plan** should be prepared. Industries should be directed towards water-efficient technologies, wastewater recycling and rainwater harvesting. Farmers can be supported through

micro-irrigation, drought-resistant crops and efficient irrigation practices.

The administration should publicly disclose groundwater-extraction norms and inspection findings to dispel allegations of corruption. A joint committee involving farmers, industries, technical experts and local administration can monitor compliance.

Drinking water should receive the highest priority, while lawful industrial activity and essential agricultural needs should be accommodated through equitable and scientifically determined allocations.

(c) Administrative and Ethical Dilemmas

The Collector faces a dilemma between **immediate economic needs and long-term sustainability**, and between farmers' livelihood and industrial employment. Excessive restrictions may harm agriculture, while unrestricted extraction may deepen the water crisis.

He must also balance **equality with equity**: treating every user identically may not be fair when their social and economic circumstances differ. Allegations of corruption create a further dilemma concerning institutional credibility and impartiality.

There is also a conflict between maintaining public order by placating protesting farmers and enforcing lawful restrictions in the larger public interest.

Conclusion

The Collector should follow **evidence-based, transparent and proportionate resource governance**. A balanced approach combining conservation, equitable allocation, technological efficiency, stakeholder participation and strict action against illegal extraction can protect water security without unnecessarily sacrificing livelihoods or employment.