Ethics & Morality · GS - IV

You are a municipal commissioner of a large city, having the reputation of a very honest and upright officer. A huge multipurpose mall is under construction in your city in which a large number of daily wage earners are employed. One night, during monsoons, a big chunk of the roof collapsed causing instant death of four labourers including two minors. Many more were seriously injured requiring immediate medical attention. The mishap resulted in a big hue and cry, forcing the government to institute an enquiry.

Your preliminary enquiry has revealed a series of anomalies. The material used for the construction was of poor quality. Despite the approved building plans permitting only one basement, an additional basement has been constructed. This was overlooked during the periodic inspections by the building inspector of. The municipal corporation. In your enquiry, you noticed that the construction of the mall was given the green signal despite encroaching on areas earmarked for a green belt and a slip road in the Zonal Master Plan of the city. The permission to construct the mall was accorded by the previous Municipal Commissioner who is not only your senior and well known to you professionally, but also a good friend.

Prima facie, the case appears to be of a widespread nexus between officials of the Municipal Corporation and the builders. Your colleagues are putting pressure on you to go

slow in the enquiry. The builder, who is rich and influential, happens to be a close relative of a powerful minister in the state cabinet. The builder is persuading you to hush up the matter, promising you a fortune to do so. He also hinted that this matter is not resolved at the earliest in his favour there is somebody in his office who is waiting to file a case against you under the POSH Act.

Discuss the ethical issues involved in the case.

What are the options available to you in this situation? Explain your selected course of action.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2020	GS - IV	Ethics & Morality

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
20	~250 words

Answer Hint

Integrity, accountability, corruption, conflict of interest, public safety, rule of law, abuse of influence, professional friendship, whistle-blower protection, misuse of POSH provisions, impartial investigation, justice for victims

Model Answer

Introduction

The incident reveals serious failures of public safety, regulatory oversight and administrative integrity. As Municipal Commissioner, my foremost duty would be to protect human life, establish accountability and ensure an impartial investigation despite political and personal pressure.

1. Ethical issues involved

- **Public safety versus private profit:** Poor-quality materials and unauthorised construction prioritised commercial gains over human life.

- **Corruption and undue influence:** The builder's offer attempts to purchase an official decision.
- **Conflict of interest:** Friendship with the previous commissioner may compromise impartiality.
- **Dereliction of duty:** The building inspector's failure to detect violations indicates negligence or possible collusion.
- **Political interference:** Pressure from colleagues and influential individuals threatens the rule of law.
- **Justice for workers:** The deaths of labourers, including minors, raise concerns about occupational safety and child protection.
- **Misuse of legal safeguards:** A threatened POSH complaint must not be presumed false; it must be handled through a fair and independent process without influencing the construction inquiry.

2. Options available

1. Suppress or delay the enquiry under pressure, compromising integrity and public interest.
2. Conduct a limited internal investigation, though this may be inadequate if the municipal system itself is implicated.
3. Initiate a transparent, evidence-based investigation and refer suspected criminal conduct to competent agencies.
4. Seek independent oversight and legal protection against intimidation while ensuring due process for all parties.
5. Resign, which would avoid direct participation but surrender the opportunity to correct institutional failures.

3. Selected course of action

- Secure the site, arrange emergency assistance and order safety audits of similar structures.
- Preserve records, inspection reports, approvals, contracts and material samples.
- Suspend unsafe construction and initiate proceedings under applicable laws.
- Refer evidence of bribery, negligence and collusion to the appropriate vigilance, police or investigative authorities.
- Ensure compensation and support for victims and families.
- Record all pressure and report it through authorised channels.
- Cooperate with any POSH complaint through the prescribed independent mechanism, without retaliation or prejudgment.

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Conclusion

I would neither compromise the enquiry nor resign prematurely. Transparent investigation, impartial enforcement and protection of victims are essential to restore public trust and ensure that influence cannot override the law.

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