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Q10

Case study. There is a disaster-prone State having frequent landslides, forest fires, cloudbursts, flash floods and earthquakes, etc. Some of these are seasonal and often unpredictable. The magnitude of the disaster is always unanticipated. During one of the seasons, a cloudburst caused devastating floods and landslides leading to high casualties. There was major damage to infrastructure like roads, bridges and power generating units. This led to more than 100000 pilgrims, tourists and other locals trapped across different routes and locations. The people trapped in your area of responsibility included senior citizens, patients in hospitals, women and children, hikers, tourists, ruling party's regional president along with his family, additional chief secretary of the neighbouring State and prisoners in jail. As a civil services officer of the State, what would be the order in which you would rescue these people and why? Give justifications.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2015 · GS IV · 20 marks · Ethics Case Studies

Case Studies on above issues.

Core demand of the question

- **Disaster-prone State:** cloudburst, floods, landslides; more than 100,000 trapped. In your charge: senior citizens, hospital patients, women and children, hikers, tourists, ruling party's regional president and family, neighbouring State's Additional Chief Secretary, and jail prisoners. As a civil services officer, give the rescue order and justify it

Revision summary

Rescue ranks by inability to self-save, not by political office.

Hospital patients go first; then children, frail seniors, pregnant women and persons with disability.

Prisoners come before able-bodied tourists because the State locked the gate.

The party president and Additional Chief Secretary wait with other adults unless they are themselves vulnerable.

A coordination excuse must not steal the first helicopter from a ward.

Introduction

A cloudburst does not read political office. Rescue is a medical and humanitarian ranking, not a VIP list. The State already holds extra duty for those it has locked in and those it has put in hospital beds.

Body

Stakeholders

- Hospital patients who cannot walk out.
- Children, women, pregnant persons and senior citizens in the open or in weak shelters.
- Prisoners in a jail that may flood or lose power.
- Locals, pilgrims, tourists and hikers, including able-bodied adults.
- The ruling party's regional president and family, and the neighbouring State's Additional Chief Secretary, as human beings in the same storm.
- You as the officer of the State under the **Disaster Management Act, 2005**, with limited helicopters, boats and hours.

Values

- Right to life (**Article 21**) equally, not according to rank.
- **Vulnerability and dependence:** those who cannot self-evacuate come first.
- Special State **duty to persons in custody** and to patients already in its hospitals.
- **No VIP culture:** office is not a fast pass.
- Transparency of the triage so that rumour does not become a second disaster.

Rescue order and why

- **First:** patients in hospitals. They are already the sickest, often immobile, on oxygen or post-surgery. A flooded ward is a mass casualty. Move them with medical teams to higher or safer facilities. This is not a political choice; it is clinical triage.
- **Second:** children, their essential caregivers, pregnant women, persons with disability, and senior citizens who are frail. They tire first, drown first, and cannot wait for a second sorties wave. Women in this band are here as vulnerability, not as a slogan; able-bodied men who are sole carers of infants travel with them.
- **Third:** remaining women and other medically vulnerable persons still stranded on roads and slopes, then other locals who know the ground but are trapped by a cut road.
- **Fourth:** prisoners. They cannot open the gate. The State locked them in; the State must not leave them to drown while cameras follow a politician. Move them under guard to a safe lock-up, with records, so that a flood does not become a lynching or a disappearance. Their crimes do not cancel **Article 21**.
- **Fifth:** able-bodied pilgrims, tourists and hikers. They have a claim, but they can usually walk, wait in a cluster, and follow instructions. Prioritise the injured among them as in any triage, not as a tourist class.
- **Sixth as office, never as a jump:** the regional president, family, and the Additional Chief Secretary. If they are elderly, injured, or with children, they already rose in the earlier bands. If they are able-bodied adults, they wait with other able-bodied adults. A courtesy briefing and one liaison officer can prevent panic in the neighbouring secretariat; a dedicated helicopter before the hospital is corruption of triage.
- **Throughout:** communicate the order on wireless and to the press in one sentence - sick and helpless first, no queue for rank - so that cadres do not invent a private VIP list.

Options I reject

- **Option:** president and ACS first "for coordination".
- **Merit:** one phone to a capital.
- **Demerit:** a coordination cell can work from a radio; a dying patient cannot. The optics train every future disaster to hunt a chopper.
- **Option:** prisoners last after every tourist.
- **Merit:** public anger is avoided.
- **Demerit:** they are helpless by our lock. Leaving them is a State crime wearing popular taste.
- **Option:** locals before all outsiders.
- **Merit:** political ease.
- **Demerit:** a child tourist and a child local have the same lungs. Origin is not a triage category; injury and age are.

How I would run it

- Incident command, National Disaster Response Force / State Disaster Response Force, **medical triage** tags, geotagged clusters.
- Do not strip hospital staff to pose with a politician.
- Record every VIP request on the log. If a minister orders a jump, ask for it in writing and still follow **medical triage** unless a lawful disaster directive reassigns a specific asset for a specific clinical reason.

Flow diagram

Cloudburst trap -> Vulnerability triage
 Vulnerability triage -> Hospital patients
 Vulnerability triage -> Children frail pregnant
 Vulnerability triage -> Prisoners in custody
 Vulnerability triage -> Able-bodied pilgrims tourists
 Office holders -> Same band as their vulnerability
 Office holders first -> Unequal Article 21

Conclusion

The order is hospital patients, then children and frail persons, then other vulnerable women and stranded locals, then prisoners in State custody, then able-bodied pilgrims and tourists. Political and official rank does not buy a rotor blade. That is equality under a landslide, not discourtesy.

Facts & figures

Disaster Management Act, 2005

Statutory frame for rescue and relief; it supports organised command, not a private VIP airlift.

Article 21, Constitution of India

Life is not graded by party post; triage must be equal for equal need.

Medical triage

Treat the most life-threatened who can be saved with the resources in hand; hospitals in a flood are the first such cluster.

Duty to persons in custody

Prisoners cannot evacuate themselves; leaving them is a failure of State care, whatever their sentence.

NDRF / SDRF

Specialist disaster forces whose sorties should follow incident-command triage, not a political phone call.

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