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Q9

Case study. A building permitted for three floors, while being extended illegally to 6 floors by a builder, collapses. As a consequence, a number of innocent labourers including women and children died. These labourers are migrants of different places. The government immediately announced cash relief to the aggrieved families and arrested the builder. Give reasons for such incidents taking place across the country. Suggest measures to prevent their occurrence.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2017 · GS IV · 20 marks · Ethics Case Studies

Case Studies on above issues.

Core demand of the question

- A building permitted for three floors is illegally extended to six by a builder and collapses. Innocent migrant labourers, including women and children, die. The government announces cash relief and arrests the builder. Give reasons such incidents occur across the country and suggest measures to prevent them

Revision summary

Illegal extra floors, sleeping inspectors, collusion and informal migrant labour explain repeated collapses.

Cash relief and arresting the builder treat the symptom after death.

Prevention needs digitised sanctions, real inspections, prosecution of officials and signing engineers, and BOCW protections including no children on site.

Regularising illegal height with a fee trains the next crime.

Dignity for migrants includes identified dead, wages on record, and welfare cess that actually pays.

Introduction

The collapse is not a surprise that fell from the sky. It is a three-floor permission wearing six floors of greed, and a workforce that was cheap enough to be unnamed until they died.

Body**Stakeholders**

- Dead and injured workers, including women and children on or near the site, and families in source States who now have no wage and no body that is easy to claim.
- Other residents and passers-by who might have been under the slab.
- The builder, engineers, architects and contractors in the chain.

- Municipal and development-authority staff who permitted three floors and then did not stop six.
- The State government that pays relief and makes an arrest after the fact.
- You as a public observer or officer asked for reasons and prevention, not for a television quote.

Ethical issues and values

- Right to life (**Article 21**) of workers who had no say in the illegal floors.
- **Justice:** cash after death is not the same as a building that was never allowed to kill.
- Integrity in the permit and inspection chain; a file that sleeps is a partner.
- **Dignity of migrant labour:** they are not disposable inputs.
- Accountability that reaches the official who looked away, not only the builder who is already in the news.

Reasons such incidents occur across the country

- Illegal extra floors are profitable. Each extra slab is rent. The risk is shifted onto workers and later buyers.
- Building by-laws exist; enforcement is episodic, often after a complaint from a rival, not as a routine.
- **Collusion and conflict of interest:** a site inspector who can be paid to unsee a column, or a local notable who is a silent partner.
- **Weak professional ethics:** a structural engineer who signs a drawing that the soil and steel cannot carry, or who never visits.
- Migrant labour is informal, often without written contracts, helmets, or the Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1996 protections in practice.
- Children on sites show that housing, creche and labour inspection have already failed before the slab failed.
- **Fragmented responsibility:** municipality, fire, environment, electricity and police each hold a piece; the collapse holds all of them.
- Cheap materials, rushed curing, and night work to beat a stop-work notice are technical cousins of the same greed.
- After a disaster, arrest-plus-ex-gratia is politically quick. It does not change the next plot if the permit software still has no teeth.

Options

- **Option 1:** Only cash relief and one arrest.
- **Merit:** immediate help and a villain.
- **Demerit:** the inspection system that allowed six floors stays in place.
- **Option 2:** Demolish all extra floors everywhere at once without due process.
- **Merit:** fear.
- **Demerit:** new deaths, selective targeting, and courts that will stay a vendetta.
- **Option 3:** Treat this as a safety-and-governance failure: prosecute the chain, compensate with dignity, and rebuild inspection so that the next extra floor is stopped at the first beam.

Measures to prevent occurrence

- **Map and digitise permissions:** what was sanctioned must be visible on a public portal with floor count and a photograph, so that six floors cannot be a neighbourhood secret.

- Risk-based inspections with body-worn cameras or time-stamped photos, rotation of inspectors, and a third-party structural audit for buildings that add load.
- Prosecute the company, the signing engineer and the negligent public servant, not only the face of the builder. The **Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988** applies where a public servant sold a blind eye.
- Enforce BOCW registration, cess, helmets, and a ban on children on sites; link labour camps to the Building and Other Construction Workers' welfare boards for immediate relief that does not wait for a cabinet decision.
- Independent collapse inquiry with published findings, like a small National Building Code post-mortem, so that "poor soil" is not a magic phrase.
- Fast, fair demolition of illegal storeys with notice, alternative shelter where families live in the same building, and no VIP exceptions.
- Professional bodies should suspend licences of engineers and architects who signed the lie.
- **Migrant support:** portable identity, wages in accounts, and a district protocol to identify the dead and send bodies home without a tout.
- Fire and structural safety should be conditions of electricity and occupancy, not a separate optional NOC that is photocopied.
- **Political message:** an illegal floor is not regularisable by a later fee if it was always a death trap. Regularisation culture is how three becomes six.

Flow diagram

Three-floor permit -> Six floors
 Six floors -> Collapse
 Collapse -> Cash and arrest
 Cash and arrest -> Next site unchanged
 Six floors -> Public map audits prosecute BOCW
 Public map audits prosecute BOCW -> Stop the next slab

Conclusion

These deaths happen because extra floors pay, inspections sleep, and migrants are cheap. Arrest and cash are the minimum. Prevention is a public map of permissions, a prosecuted chain, licensed professionals who fear a ban, and labour law that treats a construction worker as a person.

Facts & figures

Building and Other Construction Workers Act, 1996

The principal labour statute for construction workers, with registration, cess and welfare boards that are often weakly implemented.

National Building Code of India

The technical bible of structural and fire safety; a collapse inquiry should test the building against it, not only against a local rumour.

Article 21, Constitution of India

Right to life; a permitted-then-ignored illegal structure that kills workers is a rights failure, not only a civic nuisance.

Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988

Applies when a public servant's omission or collusion is purchased so that illegal floors can rise.

Child labour on construction sites

Children at a site signal a prior failure of labour inspection and of housing for migrant families, before any slab falls.

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