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Q12

Case study. As a senior officer in the Ministry, you have access to important policy decisions and upcoming big announcements such as road construction 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. The 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's 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 have 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. (250 words).

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2018 · GS IV · 20 marks · Ethics Case Studies

Case Studies on above issues.

Core demand of the question

- You hold advance knowledge of a mega road project. The Minister wants the alignment shifted toward his farmhouse and offers a cheap plot in your wife's name, plus extra savings, claiming the purchase would be "legal". Realignment would take more farms, cost more, and cut many trees. What will you do? Examine conflicts of interest and your duties as a public servant

Revision summary

- **The Minister's request is an actual conflict:** public alignment bent to a farmhouse.

The plot in your wife's name is insider gain dressed as a legal sale.

Realigning "without the plot" still spends extra farms, money and trees on a private end.

Duty is to keep the engineered line, refuse the bargain in writing, and report the offer.

Conduct rules treat a spouse's holding as the officer's integrity problem, not a clever screen.

Introduction

The Minister wants a road to his farmhouse and a plot for your wife before the announcement. That is not a real-estate tip. It is a capture of a public alignment and of a public servant.

Body

Stakeholders

- Farmers who would lose extra land under the new line.
- The public exchequer that would pay extra compensation.
- Downstream ecology and the trees the original plan spared.
- Your spouse, who would hold a tainted plot.
- The Minister, the Ministry, and honest colleagues on the drawing.
- Future users of the road, who need a line designed for traffic and safety, not for a farmhouse gate.

Conflicts of interest

- **Actual conflict:** the Minister's land value will rise if the road kisses his farmhouse. He is using public power for a private estate.
- **Actual conflict offered to you:** a plot in your wife's name at today's price is insider dealing in all but name. You would gain from the announcement you help shape.
- The "I am buying legally" line is false ethics. Legality of a sale deed does not clean the use of unpublished official information, nor the abuse of alignment.
- **Potential conflict:** even if you refuse the plot, fear of transfer can start to bend the file. Name that fear so it does not drive the pen.
- **Familial conflict:** a spouse's name is not a curtain. Conduct rules treat family holdings as the officer's concern.
- **Loyalty conflict:** the Minister is the political executive; the Constitution and the road's public purpose outrank his farmhouse.

Options

- **Option 1:** Realign and buy the plot.
- **Merit:** career comfort and private gain.
- **Demerit:** corruption, extra displacement, extra trees down, and a file that will not survive a later inquiry. Rejected.
- **Option 2:** Realign but refuse the plot, to "save the job".
- **Merit:** you keep your hands off the land.
- **Demerit:** you still gift public money and farmers to a private house. Still rejected.
- **Option 3:** Informal oral refusal, no record.

- **Merit:** less scene.
- **Demerit:** the next meeting repeats the pressure; you have no protection and the alignment may still move through another hand.
- **Option 4:** Written refusal of realignment and of the plot; restore the engineered line; report the offer to the competent authority.
- **Merit:** integrity, environment, farmers, and a record.
- **Demerit:** transfer risk. That is the cost of the oath.

Duties and action

- **Duty of legality:** alignments follow the approved technical plan and acquisition law, not an oral farmhouse wish.
- Duty of integrity under the **Central Civil Services (Conduct) Rules, 1964** and, if you are AIS, the 1968 rules: no gift, no extra savings, no speculative land on insider knowledge.
- **Duty of environmental care already built into the original design:** you may not volunteer extra deforestation.
- **Duty to farmers:** minimise acquisition, as the planners did. Extra taking for a private convenience fails public purpose.
- **Duty of courage:** put the Minister's instruction on the file if it is insisted upon, and record your dissent. Ask for written orders.
- **Duty of reporting:** inform the Secretary / Chief Vigilance Officer / competent anti-corruption channel about the plot offer. Keep a contemporaneous note.
- Do not tip friends to buy land along the official corridor either. The information is still official.
- Recuse from any remaining decision if your family already bought land nearby, and still report.
- If victimised by transfer, use the lawful representation route; do not leak drawings as revenge.

Flow diagram

Minister farmhouse line -> Private gain on public road
 Plot in spouse name -> Insider conflict
 Private gain on public road -> Refuse on file
 Insider conflict -> Refuse on file
 Refuse on file -> Report to competent authority
 Refuse on file -> Keep original alignment

Conclusion

Refuse the realignment, refuse the plot, refuse the extra cash, and write it down. The Minister's farmhouse is a private interest. Your duty is a cheaper, greener, fairer public road and a clean name in your wife's records.

Facts & figures

Unpublished price-sensitive official information

Knowing a corridor before notification makes a cheap nearby plot a conflict and, in substance, a bet on a public secret.

Central Civil Services (Conduct) Rules, 1964

Restrict gifts, speculative investment and conduct unbecoming; a minister's topped-up savings and a spouse plot on a live project fail those rules.

Public purpose in land acquisition

Extra agricultural taking for a farmhouse approach is not the public purpose the original, land-sparing plan served.

Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988

Obtaining a valuable thing or pecuniary advantage by abusing official position is the criminal shadow of this supposedly legal sale.

Environmental minimisation

The stem already records that the official line cut fewer trees; volunteering a greener loss for a private house is a second ethical breach.

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