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Q9

Case study. An elevated corridor is being constructed to reduce traffic congestion in the capital of a particular state. You have been selected as project manager of this prestigious project on your professional competence and experience. The deadline is to complete the project in next two years by 20 June, 2021, since this project is to be inaugurated by the Chief Minister before the elections are announced in the second week of July 2021. While carrying out the surprise inspection by inspecting team, a minor crack was noticed in one of the piers of the elevated corridor possibly due to poor material used. You immediately informed the chief engineer and stopped further work. It was assessed by you that minimum three piers of the elevated corridor have to be demolished and reconstructed. But this process will delay the project minimum by four to six months. But the chief engineer overruled the observation of inspecting team on the ground that it was a minor crack which will not in any way impact the strength and durability of the bridge. He ordered you to overlook the observation of inspecting team and continue working with same speed and tempo. He informed you that the minister does not want any delay as he wants the chief Minister to inaugurate the elevated corridor before the elections are declared. Also informed you that the contractor is far relative of the minister and he wants him to finish the project. He also gave you hint that your further promotion as additional chief engineer is under consideration with the ministry. However, you strongly felt that the minor crack in the pier of the elevated corridor will adversely affect the health and life of the bridge and therefore it will be very dangerous not to repair the elevated corridor. - Under the given conditions, what are the options available to you as a project manager? - What are the ethical dilemmas being faced by the project manager? - What are the professional challenges likely to be faced by the project manager and his response to overcome such challenges? - What can be the consequences of overlooking the observation raised by the inspecting team?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · GS IV · 20 marks · Ethics Case Studies

Case Studies on above issues.

Core demand of the question

- You are project manager of an elevated corridor to be inaugurated by the Chief Minister before elections. A surprise inspection finds a minor crack in a pier, likely poor material. You stop work; at least three piers must be demolished and rebuilt, delaying four to six months. The Chief Engineer overrules, cites the minister, the contractor as a minister's relative, and your possible promotion as Additional Chief Engineer. You believe the crack endangers the bridge
- (a) Options as project manager
- (b) Ethical dilemmas
- (c) Professional challenges and how to overcome them
- (d) Consequences of overlooking the inspection. Do not overlook the crack for a CM inauguration

Revision summary

A pier crack from poor material requires demolition of at least three piers and a delay past the CM's election-eve inauguration.

Obedying the Chief Engineer, silent resignation, a leak without papers, or cosmetic watching all fail.

Dilemmas are safety versus hierarchy, promotion and the contractor's kinship.

Professional answer is written stoppage, independent audit, and disaster-authority notice if overruled.

Overlooking risks a Kolkata-style collapse, prosecutions and a ribbon on a future grave.

Introduction

A ribbon before July is not a load-bearing member. A crack in a pier is. Overlooking it so the Chief Minister can inaugurate before elections is not an option. The 2016 Kolkata **Vivekananda** Road flyover collapse is the warning this file already contains. Lives outrank an election photograph.

Body

Stakeholders

- Future users of the corridor, including buses of schoolchildren.
- Construction workers who will stand under the deck.
- You as project manager, the inspecting team, and the Chief Engineer.
- The contractor related to the minister, the minister, and the Chief Minister's inauguration calendar.
- The public exchequer that will pay twice if the pier fails, or pay in funerals if it is not rebuilt.

(a) Options

- **Option 1:** Obey the Chief Engineer, restart with the same material, and chase the 20 June 2021 date.
- **Option 2:** Resign the same evening without a written trail.
- **Option 3:** Quietly tell a journalist a half-story without the inspection report.

- **Option 4:** Keep work going on uncracked spans only, and "watch" the pier - a delay disguised as caution without demolition.
- **Option 5:** Keep the stop, refuse in writing, demand a **third-party structural audit**, inform government and the disaster authority if overruled, and accept that the CM may inaugurate a finished safe bridge later or not at all.
- Adopt Option 5. Option 1 is rejected. A minor crack that you assess as systemic poor material is not a cosmetic plaster job.

(b) Ethical dilemmas

- Duty of care to unknown commuters versus loyalty to the Chief Engineer's order.
- Professional integrity versus a promotion as Additional Chief Engineer.
- Speed for an election calendar versus time for demolition and rebuild.
- Kinship of the contractor versus equal enforcement of specifications.
- Team harmony versus the inspecting team's observation you already endorsed.
- The dilemma is not "development versus safety". An unsafe corridor is not development. The dilemma is whether a photograph can buy a future collapse.

(c) Professional challenges and response

- **Hierarchy:** a junior project manager contradicting a Chief Engineer. Response: a speaking note, copies to the Secretary of the department, and a request for an independent IIT or agency audit - not a corridor argument.
- **Political time:** elections in the second week of July 2021. Response: a lawful inauguration of a safe stretch if any is truly independent; never a false "complete" certificate.
- **Contractor pressure:** Response: measurements, cube tests, and stop-work under the contract; no private meeting with the relative.
- **Career threat:** Response: recuse from treating promotion as a factor; the **Whistle Blowers Protection Act, 2014** logic even if the exact statute's door is imperfect - put victimisation on record.
- **Technical uncertainty:** "minor" versus "will kill". Response: you already judged three piers. Do not self-downgrade under pressure. Let a third party confirm or rebut in writing.
- **If still overruled:** written dissent, alert the State disaster management authority and, where fit, a court or the National Green Tribunal is less apt than a structural-safety and criminal-negligence path; do not stay silent.

(d) Consequences of overlooking the observation

- Collapse under load, in rain, or at inauguration crowd density - the Kolkata flyover of 31 March 2016 killed people on a live urban work; that is the relevant Indian warning.
- Mass casualty, not a departmental embarrassment.
- Criminal negligence and possible culpable homicide inquiries against signatories; the minister's relative will not be in the dock alone.
- **Fiscal:** demolition after failure costs more than demolition now.
- **Professional:** inspectors learn that reports are theatre; the next crack is hidden.
- **Political:** a CM cutting a ribbon on a doomed pier is not a win when the video of the fall arrives.
- **Personal:** the promotion will not survive the first funeral, and neither will sleep.

Flow diagram

Pier crack poor material -> Stop and dissent
Stop and dissent -> Third-party structural audit
Stop and dissent -> Demolish three piers
Overlook for CM photo -> Collapse Kolkata warning
Promotion hint -> Conflict of interest

Conclusion

Stop the work. Write the dissent. Get a third-party audit. Whistle to disaster and government channels if the Chief Engineer still orders speed. The CM can wait. The dead cannot be inaugurated back. Kolkata 2016 is the cost of a 'minor crack' story.

Facts & figures

Kolkata Vivekananda Road flyover collapse, 2016

An under-construction flyover fell in a dense city, killing and injuring people; the national warning against ignoring structural doubt for speed.

Duty of care in public works

A project manager's first professional duty is a standing structure, not a date on an invitation card.

Conflict of interest

The contractor as a minister's relative, the CM's election calendar, and a hinted promotion are stacked private stakes against a pier.

Third-party structural audit

An IIT or accredited agency can confirm whether a 'minor crack' is cosmetic or a three-pier failure; the Chief Engineer cannot be the sole reviewer of his own override.

Disaster Management Act, 2005

A collapsing urban corridor is a disaster risk; notifying the competent authority is a professional channel when internal hierarchy is captured.

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