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Q9

Case study. Subash is Secretary, PWD in the State Government. He is a senior officer, known for his competence, integrity and dedication to work. He enjoys the trust and confidence of Minister Incharge of PWD and Programme Implementation. As a part of his job profile, he is responsible for policy formulation, execution of projects relating to infrastructure initiatives in the State. Besides, he oversees the technical and administrative aspects relating to planning, designing and construction etc. Subash's Minister is an important Minister in the state and significant growth in urban infrastructure development and road network has been registered during his tenure. He is very keen for launching of ambitious road construction project in the near future. Subash is in regular touch with the Minister and is working various modalities of road construction project. Regular meetings, interactions and presentations are made by him to the Minister before a formal public announcement of the project is made by the Minister. Subash's only son Vikas is in real estate business. His son from his own sources is aware that a mega road project is on the anvil and announcement in this regard is expected anytime. He is very keen to know from his father the exact location of the upcoming project. He knows that there would be quantum jump in the prices of land at the proposed location. Buying land at this stage at cheaper prices would pay him rich dividends. He is pleading with him (his father) day in and day out to share him location of the proposed project. He assured him that he would handle the matter discreetly as it would not attract any adverse notice as he in the normal course, keeps on buying land as a part of his business. He feels pressurised because of constant pleadings by his son. Another significant aspect of the matter pertained to the extra/undue interest in the above project by the Minister PWD. His nephew was also having big infrastructure project company. In fact, the Minister has also introduced his nephew to him and indicated to him to take care of his nephew's business interest in the

forthcoming project. The Minister encouraged him to act fast in the matter as early announcement and execution of mega road project would enhance his status in the party and public life. In the above backdrop, Subash is in a fix as to the future course of action. (a) Discuss the ethical issues involved in the case. (b) Critically examine the options available to Subash in the above situation. (c) Which of the above would be most appropriate and why?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · GS IV · 20 marks · Ethics Case Studies

Case Studies on above issues.

Core demand of the question

- **Subash:** conflict of interest, insider information, minister's nephew
- Options; pick refuse-and-record with integrity

Revision summary

The ethical issues are conflict of interest, insider land information and a minister's plea for a nephew.

Leaking the alignment would let the son steal a public price jump.

Favouring the nephew would be cronyism.

Subash should refuse both, warn his son, recuse from related tenders, and record the minister's request to the Chief Secretary.

Discretion that hides a family trade is not professionalism.

Introduction

Subash is a **trusted PWD Secretary**. His **son wants the secret alignment** of a coming road so that he can **buy land cheap**. The **Minister** wants **care** for a **nephew's infrastructure firm**. This is a textbook of **conflict of interest, insider information**, and **political pressure**. Competence without **probity** is how a good officer becomes a **family broker**.

Body

(a) Ethical issues

- **Conflict of interest:** Subash's private family wealth is tied to a public secret. **Misuse of official information** (a **Conduct Rules** and, at the extreme, a criminal line) if he speaks the alignment. **Fairness:** other citizens cannot buy that land. **Independence:** the Minister's nephew is a **second conflict - crony access**. **Integrity versus loyalty:** loyalty to a minister is **constitutional**, not **personal**. **Emotional pressure** from a son is still **not a defence**. **Appearance of bias** even if he later "does it discreetly" - justice must be **seen**.

(b) Options

He can **leak to the son** and **favour the nephew**. He can leak to the son and **resist the nephew**. He can **tell neither** and **record** the minister's request in a confidential file to the Chief Secretary. He can **recuse** from the alignment decision and from tender committees. He can **ask for a transfer**. He can **warn the son in writing** that any bid using inside knowledge will be **reported**. He can **become a whistle** if a tender is already being **tailored**.

(c) Most appropriate

• **The right bundle is: do not share the location with the son; tell the son, once, firmly, that the request is unethical and possibly illegal; treat the nephew as any other bidder under transparency of DPR and tender; reduce to writing the minister's "take care" remark and seek written orders if the minister insists on a name; recuse from evaluation if the nephew bids; inform the Chief Secretary so the State, not Subash's memory, holds the risk. If the minister punishes him, that is the cost of integrity, which Vivekananda would still call strength.**

Kautilya listed **temptations of office**. The son's plea is the **softest and worst**, because love launders a crime. The most appropriate option is **silence on the map, sunlight on the tender, and a file that can go to a court**.

Flow diagram

Son wants map -> No insider

Nephew firm -> Equal tender

Minister pressure -> Note to CS

Conclusion

Subash must not feed his son the alignment and must not tailor the project for the minister's nephew. He should recuse where family or the nephew appears, record pressure, and keep the tender open. Love and loyalty are not licences to loot a road.

Facts & figures

Conflict of interest

A situation where private family gain can pull an official decision off the public interest.

Insider information

Unpublished official knowledge, such as a road alignment, that can be used to buy land before the public announcement.

Conduct Rules

Service rules that bar using official position and unpublished information for private advantage, including for family.

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