

Be Mains Ready

Q. Months ago the parliament passed a bill aimed at revolutionizing the Indian economy. This piece of legislation is hailed by many eminent economists as progressive and as one which will lead to higher economic growth in the coming years. Unfortunately, due to the political executive's failure in communicating the prospects of reforms to the would-be affected people and sidestepping a few parliamentary procedures, alarmed citizens started peaceful protests demanding rollback of the reforms. The scale of participation and commitment of protestors have garnered international attention. Recently, many celebrities and activists from western countries took to social media platforms to flag the issue. The coordinated manner in which social media posts emerged has led the government to suspect the involvement of inimical elements who are trying to spread misinformation and propaganda. In a combative move, the government officially denounced the posts, calling them 'motivated' and 'misinformed'. Interestingly, Social media posts also surfaced from the accounts of Indian celebrities, who affirmed that these protests are domestic issues and should be free from propaganda. Many have also pointed to the possibility that these posts were written at the behest of the government.

(a) Identify and discuss the ethical issues involved in the above case.

(b) Suggest alternative measures that could have been employed by the government to deal with the situation. (250 Words)

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Approach / Explanation / Answer

- Begin by broadly highlighting your understanding of the case study
- Bring out various ethical issues involved from the facts mentioned above
- Provide suggestions for ethically tackling the issue-by incorporating the ideals of democracy and ethical conduct in public life

Answer

Social media has become an excellent medium for connecting people from across the world and enabling us to express opinions even on matters which remotely affect us. It is due to this that people, especially from democratic countries, freely comment on happenings in other countries. For a country like India, its biggest strength i.e. democracy remains its biggest vulnerability.

There have been attempts by vested interest groups to undermine the democratic image and goodwill enjoyed by India. In such a scenario, suspicion of foul play by the government in the above case to some extent seems justified.

Considering all these factors, there are numerous ethical issues that involve all stakeholders

- **Dereliction of political and moral duty:** In their failure to communicate their intent and prospects of the bill to the apprehensive citizens, the political class has apparently failed in fulfilling its duty. Mahatma Gandhi long ago gave a talisman to the public servants- to think of the last man before initiating any action.

- **Violation of constitutional traditions and practices:** In the act of passing the bill the government has seemingly overlooked few parliamentary procedures. This compromises constitutional practices, and democratic obligations/ duties. Besides this, a law that hasn't been subject to the proper constitutional mechanism lacks legitimacy in fulfilling its objectives.
- **Compromise of personal integrity:** On the part of celebrities and activists, extending support to protests without acquainting themselves with the pros and cons of the said act, reflects a lack of personal integrity. People who command influence over the public should be cautious, not reckless in voicing their opinions. They should be emotionally intelligent and be aware of ethical conduct in public life.

Measures to deal with the issue in an effective way

- People's right to self-expression is not restricted by borders and in the age of the internet, opinions can not be restrained from domestic and foreign citizens on any matter.
- Rather than a combative approach, soft- measures relying on diplomacy, use of media and influence of diaspora could be used in the above situation. Like when the constitutional status of J&K was altered, the government used such tools for presenting a clear picture of the world.
- The involvement of Indian public influencers created doubts in the above case. Instead, political executives should have taken the lead as this would have twin benefits- firstly, it would target unfavourable opinion at the international level. Secondly, it would fill the communication gap between people and politicians which is one of the reasons responsible for protests.
- The suspicion of foul play should be investigated with the help of foreign countries' law enforcement agencies and conjectures should be kept away from public space, till conclusive evidence emerges as this may create false perception amongst people and may even create a picture that people who are protesting democratically are in someway instigated by inimical powers. This will lead to polarization, political acrimony, name-calling and hatred towards groups involved in protests.

Governance and policies in a democracy are inextricably linked to ethical considerations, and in case of discontent or conflict, the resolution to the issue also lies in ethical conduct by all stakeholders. The existence of such conditions strengthens the trust of citizens in government and constitutional means.

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