



Mains Practice Question

Priya Singh is an IAS officer serving as District Collector in a politically sensitive district. During a severe pandemic outbreak, her district receives a limited supply of life-saving vaccines. The official guidelines mandate prioritizing healthcare workers and elderly citizens for vaccination.

However, the local MLA, who belongs to the ruling party, demands that 40% of vaccines be diverted to his constituency for "priority distribution." He threatens to file false corruption charges against Priya if she doesn't comply. Additionally, Priya's spouse works as the MLA's personal secretary, placing her in a challenging personal situation as the MLA has been threatening her husband's job.

The dilemma intensifies when she discovers that the MLA plans to use these vaccines for political gain by distributing them only to his party workers and supporters, potentially denying access to more vulnerable citizens in other areas.

1. Identify the stakeholders involved.
2. Discuss the ethical issues involved in this case.
3. What options are available to Priya and how should she navigate the situation?

25 Oct, 2024 GS Paper 4 Case Studies

Introduction

Priya Singh, an IAS officer serving as District Collector, faces pressure from a local MLA to divert 40% of limited vaccines for his political supporters during a pandemic. He threatens her with **false corruption charges if she refuses**, complicating her situation as her spouse is the MLA's personal secretary. Priya discovers that the MLA's plan endangers vulnerable citizens in other areas, **creating a conflict between ethical governance and personal pressures**.

Body

- **Identify the stakeholders involved.**

Stakeholder	Role and Interest
Priya Singh, IAS Officer	District Collector responsible for ensuring fair vaccine distribution.
Healthcare Workers and Elderly Citizens	Priority recipients of the vaccine as per official guidelines.
Local MLA and His Constituency	Demands vaccine diversion for political advantage, potentially compromising equitable distribution.
Government and Health Authorities	Set guidelines and policies to ensure fair vaccine distribution across all vulnerable groups.

Priya's Spouse	MLA's personal secretary, adding a personal conflict to Priya's decision-making.
General Public in the District	Includes citizens who may be vulnerable but outside the MLA's constituency.

- **Ethical issues involved in this case.**
- **Abuse of Power V/s Ethical Governance:** The MLA's demand to divert vaccines for political gain exemplifies **an abuse of authority, undermining public welfare.**
 - In contrast, Priya's duty to uphold ethical governance requires her to prioritize the needs of the community over personal interests.
- **Personal Loyalty V/s Professional Duty:** Priya's connection to the MLA through her spouse creates **pressure to comply with his demands**, complicating her ethical stance.
 - However, **her professional duty as an IAS officer** necessitates impartiality and commitment to public service, even at personal risk.
- **Equitable Distribution V/s Political Gain:** The ethical imperative is to distribute vaccines based on need, ensuring vulnerable populations are prioritized.
 - Conversely, the MLA's intent to favor his supporters **threatens equitable access**, highlighting the conflict between political loyalty and public health.
- **Whistleblowing V/s Personal Safety:** Reporting the MLA's unethical demands aligns with **Priya's moral obligation** to protect public health and expose corruption.
 - However, this **choice poses significant risks to her career** and personal safety, creating a difficult ethical dilemma.
- **Moral Responsibility V/s Risk to Career:** Priya faces a moral responsibility to ensure that vaccines reach vulnerable populations during a crisis.
 - However, taking a stand against the MLA could **jeopardize her career**, emphasizing the challenge of prioritizing ethics in the face of personal consequences.
- What options are available to Priya and how should she navigate the situation?

Option 1: Comply with the MLA's Demand

- **Pros:** Avoids **potential personal and professional harm**, such as false allegations and impact on her spouse's employment.
- **Cons:** Compromises her **integrity and accountability**, violates official guidelines, and risks public health by prioritizing political interests over vulnerable populations.

Option 2: Firmly Uphold the Guidelines and Refuse MLA's Demand

- **Pros:** Demonstrates **adherence to duty, ethical integrity**, and ensures equitable vaccine distribution as per health priorities.
- **Cons:** Potential **backlash from the MLA**, including **false charges and possible pressure on her spouse**, which could create personal stress and professional obstacles.

Option 3: Report the Matter to Higher Authorities

- **Pros:** Involves superiors in addressing undue political pressure, **ensuring transparency and reducing the risk of direct confrontation with the MLA**. It could also shift accountability to a higher level.
- **Cons:** Risk of escalation if the MLA exerts further political influence; may strain relationships within the administration and with her spouse.

Option 4: Engage in Dialogue with the MLA to Reach a Compromise

- **Pros:** May **ease tension by potentially agreeing to a smaller vaccine allocation** for the MLA's constituency without deviating excessively from guidelines.
- **Cons:** **May still compromise public health goals and ethical standards**, and could establish

a precedent of yielding to political pressure.

Recommended Course of Action to Navigate the Situation:

- **Primary Action: Uphold Vaccine Distribution Guidelines (Option 2)**
Priya should strictly follow government guidelines for fair vaccine distribution, prioritizing the most vulnerable. This reinforces her role and integrity as a District Collector, ensuring impartiality and discouraging political interference.
- **Secondary Action: Notify Higher Authorities (Option 3)**
Documenting the MLA's demands and escalating the issue to senior officials ensures transparency, secures institutional backing, and addresses political pressures through formal channels.
- **Implement Transparent Monitoring for Vaccine Distribution**
Priya can establish public tracking of vaccine distribution to deter political manipulation and reinforce public trust in fair, need-based allocation.
- **Proactively Communicate with Key Stakeholders**
By engaging healthcare leaders and community influencers, Priya can strengthen support for ethical distribution, reducing the MLA's influence through community alignment.
- **Engage in Open Dialogue with Her Spouse**
Priya should communicate with her husband to balance her ethical duty with their personal circumstances, helping him understand the importance of her decision amidst political pressures.

Conclusion

By adopting this **pragmatic approach**, Priya can **navigate the political pressures while upholding ethical standards and ensuring public welfare**. This strategy allows for the accommodation of the MLA's political interests without compromising the integrity of vaccine distribution. Ultimately, it **fosters cooperation among stakeholders, enhances public trust, and reinforces the principles of good governance**, benefiting both the community and the political landscape.

PDF Reference URL: <https://www.drishtiias.com/mains-practice-question/question-8517/pnt>