



## Mains Practice Question

### Case Study

A new and ambitious District Magistrate (DM) was recently appointed in a district plagued by severe water scarcity and recurring farmer suicides. During his initial field visits, he observed widespread illegal extraction of groundwater by industries, which exacerbated the crisis in rural areas. Despite a Supreme Court directive banning unregulated groundwater extraction, the industries continued to exploit resources, often bribing local officials to evade scrutiny.

One day, during a surprise inspection, the DM sealed a major industrial plant violating water extraction laws. Soon after, he began receiving veiled threats from influential industrialists and even faced indirect pressure from senior bureaucrats to revoke his action. The DM also discovered that the illegal activities were intertwined with the livelihoods of many low-income workers employed by these industries, creating a social and ethical conflict. As public protests against the plant's closure gained momentum, the DM was faced with a challenging decision: to uphold the law and protect long-term water security or to consider the immediate economic impact on local workers and their families.

- (a) Identify the ethical dilemmas faced by the DM.
- (b) What options are available to the DM in this situation?
- (c) Suggest the most appropriate course of action with justifications.

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### Introduction

A newly appointed District Magistrate (DM) in a water-scarce district faces a **moral and legal dilemma after discovering widespread illegal groundwater extraction by industries**, despite a Supreme Court ban. After sealing a major violator, the DM encounters threats from industrialists and pressure from senior officials to reverse his action. The situation becomes more complex as the illegal activities also support the livelihoods of low-income workers, leading to public protests.

### Body

#### (a) Ethical Dilemmas Faced by the DM:

- **Upholding the Law vs Addressing Economic Distress:** Enforcing the Supreme Court directive to curb illegal water extraction vs **considering the livelihoods of workers** employed in industries violating these laws.
- **Professional Integrity vs Political/Bureaucratic Pressure:** Maintaining impartiality and adhering to the law despite threats and pressure from influential industrialists and senior officials.
- **Environmental Sustainability vs Immediate Community Demands:** Protecting **long-term water security** for the district vs meeting the **short-term demands of protesting locals dependent on industrial jobs**.
- **Public Welfare vs Industrial Accountability:** Ensuring **social stability and economic support** for vulnerable workers vs **penalizing industries** exploiting public resources.

- **Personal Safety vs Public Responsibility:** Prioritizing **personal safety** amid threats vs staying committed to the ethical duty of safeguarding public interest.

### (b) Options Available to the DM:

- **Strict Enforcement of Laws:** Continue sealing **illegal industries, impose heavy penalties,** and initiate legal proceedings against violators.
  - **Pros:** Reinforces rule of law and deters future violations.
  - **Cons:** Increases protests, job losses, and political backlash.
- **Conditional Reopening Under Regulation:** Allow industries to resume operations only **if they install water-efficient technologies,** obtain legal permits, and adhere to groundwater extraction limits.
  - **Pros:** Balances environmental protection with economic interests.
  - **Cons:** Industries may resist compliance or delay adoption of measures.
- **Engage Stakeholders in Dialogue:** Mediate between **industrialists, workers, and local leaders** to find a mutually agreeable solution, emphasizing sustainable practices.
  - **Pros:** Reduces tension and ensures collaborative governance.
  - **Cons:** May slow down immediate enforcement of laws.
- **Provide Alternative Livelihoods:** Collaborate with state and central schemes like **MGNREGA,** skill development programs, and social security initiatives to support displaced workers.
  - **Pros:** Addresses workers' grievances and mitigates protests.
  - **Cons:** Requires time and administrative effort.
- **Seek Institutional and Judicial Support:** Report the situation to state authorities and seek judicial clarification or support for strict implementation of groundwater laws.
  - **Pros:** Shields the DM from external pressures and ensures accountability.
  - **Cons:** Prolongs resolution and may not address local protests immediately.
- **Public Awareness Campaigns:**
  - Conduct awareness drives about the water crisis and benefits of sustainable practices to gain public support.
  - **Pros:** Encourages community understanding and cooperation.
  - **Cons:** May not immediately resolve tensions.

### (c) Most Appropriate Course of Action with Justifications:

#### Step 1: Uphold the Law Firmly

- Maintain the **closure of illegal plants and take visible action against violators,** including legal proceedings and penalties.
  - Sends a strong message of **accountability and upholds the Supreme Court directive,** critical for long-term water security.

#### Step 2: Convene a Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue

- Bring together **industrialists, local leaders, workers, and environmental experts** to design a framework for sustainable operations, including conditional reopening of industries under strict compliance.
  - **Builds trust among stakeholders** and aligns economic and environmental goals.

#### Step 3: Implement Alternative Livelihood Programs

- Collaborate with state agencies to provide skill development programs, employment under MGNREGA, and financial support schemes for affected workers.
  - Mitigates the **immediate economic impact on vulnerable families,** reducing public protests.

#### Step 4: Enforce Regulations and Ensure Transparency

- Mandate industries to adopt water-saving technologies, set up transparent monitoring systems for groundwater usage, and encourage self-reporting mechanisms.

- Promotes **long-term compliance** and fosters sustainable practices.

### Step 5: Seek Support from Higher Authorities

- Escalate the issue to state and central levels, ensuring legal and administrative backing while neutralizing undue pressure from influential stakeholders.
  - **Strengthens the DM's position** and ensures consistent policy enforcement.

### Step 6: Launch a Public Awareness Campaign

- Educate the community about the water crisis and the benefits of sustainable resource management.
  - **Gains public support for tough decisions** and builds consensus for future water conservation efforts.

### Conclusion

**DM must uphold the law firmly** while adopting a balanced and pragmatic approach to address economic and social concerns. **Strict enforcement of groundwater regulations, coupled with stakeholder engagement**, conditional reopening of industries, and alternative livelihood support, can resolve the immediate crisis. This approach protects environmental resources while addressing community grievances. It exemplifies ethical governance rooted in justice and accountability.

PDF Reference URL: <https://www.drishtiias.com/mains-practice-question/question-8585/pnt>

