



Mains Practice Question

Case Study

Dr. Anjali, a dedicated and upright IAS officer, has recently been appointed as the Director of the State Health Department. Soon after assuming charge, she discovers large-scale irregularities in the **procurement of life-saving medical equipment** for government hospitals.

A particular contract for ventilators was awarded to a private company that **failed to meet safety and quality standards**. Several patients lost their lives due to malfunctions during a recent health crisis. Upon further investigation, Anjali finds that the **tendering process was manipulated** to favor this company. The procurement file was approved under questionable circumstances by her predecessor, who has since retired. Many junior officials in the department are aware of these malpractices but are unwilling to come forward, fearing professional repercussions.

Meanwhile, a **senior journalist approaches Anjali with leaked documents** proving corruption in the procurement deal. The journalist is willing to publish an exposé but warns that **powerful business and bureaucratic interests may suppress the story**. Additionally, an **activist group files a formal complaint** demanding immediate legal action.

As Anjali deliberates, she receives **subtle pressure from senior bureaucrats** to avoid revisiting past decisions due to risk of transfer under political influence and to focus on future governance. Some of her colleagues advise her that pursuing this issue aggressively could result in **an abrupt transfer or administrative sidelining**.

1. What are the ethical issues involved in the case?
2. Evaluate the options available to Anjali as a conscientious civil servant?
3. What systemic reforms are needed to prevent corruption in public procurement, ensure bureaucratic independence, and protect whistleblowers in government institutions?

28 Feb, 2025 GS Paper 4 Case Studies

Introduction

Dr. Anjali, a newly appointed **Director of the State Health Department**, uncovers large-scale corruption in the procurement of **life-saving medical equipment**, leading to patient deaths. The tendering process was manipulated under her predecessor, but junior officials fear speaking out, and powerful interests seek to suppress the issue.

- A journalist with evidence offers media exposure, while an activist group demands legal action, adding a layer of public pressure.

Body

1. Ethical Issues Involved in the Case:

- **Compromised Public Health and Safety:** The procurement of substandard ventilators has directly led to patient deaths, violating the fundamental duty of public institutions to ensure healthcare quality.
 - The **negligence in quality control** reflects a **failure of duty**, leading to loss of innocent lives.
- **Corruption and Abuse of Power:** The manipulation of the tendering process to favor a private company **indicates deep-rooted corruption**.
 - This undermines **transparency, fairness, and integrity in public administration**.
 - Senior bureaucratic and business interests attempting to suppress **accountability** further perpetuate unethical governance.
- **Fear and Lack of Whistleblower Protection:** The reluctance of junior officials to come forward highlights the **fear of retaliation**, indicating a **failure in institutional mechanisms to protect whistleblowers**.
 - An ethical administration must foster a culture where truth and accountability are encouraged.
- **Truth and Press Freedom:** Journalists have a moral obligation to expose corruption and inform the public.
 - However, powerful entities may attempt to suppress the truth, raising concerns about media independence, transparency, and the role of the press in upholding democratic values.
- **Justice and Accountability:** Ensuring that corrupt individuals face legal consequences is fundamental to maintaining justice and accountability in governance.
 - However, bureaucratic hurdles and institutional resistance may obstruct legal action, posing a challenge to the enforcement of the rule of law.

2. Options Available to Anjali as a Conscientious Civil Servant:

Option- 1. Launch an Internal Investigation and Strengthen Procurement Processes

- **Advantages:** Ensures **due process, prevents future irregularities**, and avoids immediate confrontation with powerful interests. Strengthening procurement policies can create long-term systemic reforms.
- **Issues:** May delay justice for victims, **does not immediately punish wrongdoers**, and could be perceived as bureaucratic inaction. Senior officials may try to dilute the investigation.

Option- 2. Forward the Case to Anti-Corruption Agencies (CBI/Vigilance/State Lokayukta)

- **Advantages:** Brings legal accountability, deters future corruption, and upholds institutional integrity. An independent probe prevents direct political pressure on Anjali.
- **Issues:** Powerful bureaucratic and business interests may attempt to influence or stall the investigation. It could also lead to political backlash and Anjali's transfer.

Option- 3. Collaborate with the Journalist for a Controlled Public Disclosure

- **Advantages:** Media exposure can generate public pressure, making it harder for political and bureaucratic forces to suppress the case. Strengthens democracy and transparency.
- **Issues:** Could lead to sensationalism, risking reputational damage to the department. May also result in political backlash or pressure tactics against Anjali.

Option- 4. Support the Activist Group's Demand for Legal Action

- **Advantages:** Civil society pressure can push authorities to act, ensuring that the case remains in the public eye. Strengthens participatory governance and accountability.
- **Issues:** May escalate into a political controversy, diverting attention from actual reforms. Powerful vested interests could counter the activism through legal and administrative means.

Option- 5. Take a Cautious Approach and Focus on Future Governance

- **Advantages:** Avoids direct confrontation, ensures job security, and allows Anjali to make incremental reforms within the system. Prevents political victimization.
- **Issues:** Ignores past corruption, denies justice to victims, and allows unethical practices to continue. Public trust in governance may further erode.

Most Appropriate and Pragmatic Approach:

Anjali should adopt a **balanced strategy** that combines elements of **Option 1 (Internal Investigation)** and **Option 2 (Involving Anti-Corruption Agencies)** while using **controlled media exposure (Option 3)** as a strategic tool.

- **Immediate Steps:** Initiate an internal inquiry to establish documentary evidence and improve procurement processes to prevent future corruption.
- **Accountability Mechanism:** Forward the case to the Vigilance Commission or Lokayukta to ensure legal proceedings while shielding herself from direct political fallout.
- **Strategic Public Engagement:** Work with the journalist to ensure responsible and fact-based reporting rather than sensationalism, strengthening public awareness without compromising procedural integrity.

3. Systemic Reforms to Prevent Corruption in Public Procurement, Ensure Bureaucratic Independence, and Protect Whistleblowers:

- **Strengthening Transparency and Accountability in Public Procurement**
 - Implement **e-procurement systems** with real-time tracking, automated audits, and blockchain-based record-keeping to minimize human discretion.
 - Mandate **reverse bidding** and **global tenders** for high-value contracts to ensure competitive pricing and prevent favoritism.
 - Strengthen **independent procurement audits** and make contract details publicly accessible under the **Right to Information (RTI) Act**.
- **Establishing Independent Anti-Corruption Oversight Mechanisms**
 - Strengthen institutions like **Lokpal, CVC (Central Vigilance Commission), and State Lokayuktas** by granting them **autonomous prosecutorial powers**.
 - Make **public procurement audits by CAG (Comptroller and Auditor General)** more stringent, ensuring immediate action on red flags.
- **Ensuring Bureaucratic Independence and Insulating Civil Servants from Political Pressure**
 - Implement **fixed tenure for key administrative positions** (e.g., health, finance, infrastructure) to prevent arbitrary transfers that discourage anti-corruption efforts.
 - Introduce a **structured appeals mechanism** for officers transferred under questionable circumstances due to ethical decision-making.
- **Strengthening Whistleblower Protection and Internal Complaint Mechanisms**
 - Implement **Whistleblower Protection Act, 2014** in full spirit by ensuring anonymity, immunity from retaliation, and independent investigation mechanisms.
 - Create a **secure digital whistleblowing platform** linked to Lokpal, allowing safe reporting of corruption without fear of exposure.
 - Mandate **internal ethics committees in all government departments** with independent oversight and periodic reporting of grievances.
- **Institutionalizing Ethical Governance and Training of Public Officials**
 - Make **ethics and integrity training** a mandatory part of bureaucratic education in **LBSNAA, state ATIs (Administrative Training Institutes), and government service inductions**.
 - Establish **integrity scorecards** for government departments based on independent audits, public feedback, and corruption case trends.
 - Introduce **performance-linked promotions and incentives** for officers who uphold transparency and integrity in public administration.

Conclusion

Dr. Anjali must balance **ethical integrity with pragmatic decision-making by ensuring accountability** through legal action while strengthening systemic reforms. A transparent investigation, institutional safeguards, and strategic public engagement will uphold justice without compromising governance stability. Her actions should set a precedent for ethical leadership, reinforcing public trust in the administration.

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