

WHERE THIS PAPER CAME FROM

Mains 2026 · General Studies IV

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

We are not saying that every question could be completely answered from old UPSC papers or from DAW and the Sherlocking Simulators. That is not possible, and we will not pretend it is.

What we are showing is this: most of this paper came from familiar ground. A student who had gone through past-year questions, read the basic books, and practised answer writing had already met most of what this paper asks, only in different words.

This is why we keep repeating the same four things:

- Past-year questions show you what UPSC likes to ask, and how it asks.
- Basic sources give you the material.
- Answer-writing practice, DAW and the Simulators, trains you to brainstorm and structure an answer within time.
- The last piece is mindset. Go in expecting new words on familiar ground. Do not let a new-looking question shake you.

Where a link is only partial, we have said so on that page. Where a topic was simply new, we have said that too. No link here has been stretched.

Every quoted question is word for word from the actual papers and booklets. Compiled on 23 August 2026.

HOW MUCH OF EACH ANSWER WAS WITHIN REACH

These numbers are rough estimates, not measurements. For each question we asked one thing: a student who studied past-year questions, read the basic sources, and practised with DAW and the Simulators, how much of a full answer could that student build? The rest is execution: turning what you know into a written answer, within time, in the exam hall. That too is a skill, and practice builds it.

We have kept every number conservative, and none goes above 80 percent, because even a familiar question still has to be written well in the exam hall.

For the case studies, the number means how much of the thinking frame was familiar. The case itself is always resolved fresh in the hall.

QUESTION	TOPIC	WITHIN REACH
Q1(a)	AI, accountability and integrity	about 70%
Q1(b)	Displacing a forest community	about 80%
Q2(a)	Untested remedy on a tribe	about 65%
Q2(b)	Security versus human rights	about 70%
Q3(a)	Ambedkar and civil disobedience	about 80%
Q3(b)	Gandhi's trusteeship	about 75%
Q3(c)	Shakespeare: arms and intent	about 80%
Q4(a)	Paternalism and beneficence	about 75%
Q4(b)	Efficiency versus effectiveness	about 70%
Q5(a)	School rules versus children's rights	about 80%
Q5(b)	Ethics in international relations	about 80%
Q6(a)	Empathy versus rules, and the PA	about 75%
Q6(b)	Duty versus charity	about 65%
Q7	The consent case (Dr. Mansi)	about 70%
Q8	AI predictive policing (Ravi)	about 75%
Q9	The tout network (Seema)	about 80%
Q10	Biometric gatekeeping (Vikas)	about 80%
Q11	The divided district (Rajan)	about 70%
Q12	The arms sale (Ajit)	about 70%

Q1(A) · 10 MARKS

Owing to paucity of time, a university professor generates a Ph.D. evaluation report using Artificial Intelligence and submits it with some modifications. Discuss this from the perspective of accountability and integrity.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT A professor lets AI do his judging work and signs it as his own. The question asks what this does to accountability, owning your work, and integrity, honesty in it.

IN SHORT The AI-and-ethics question was in our banks.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2024 *“The application of Artificial Intelligence as a dependable source of input for administrative rational decision-making is a debatable issue.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS AI as a helper in official judgement was asked directly, two years ago.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS4 · Set A · Q11 *“Critically analyse, in the present context of AI-assisted administration, the claim that where a citizen's benefit or liberty is at stake, an algorithm must never be the final authority.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question is this question's core rule: a machine may assist, but a human must own the judgement. The professor broke exactly that rule. The Ph.D. student's fate deserved his mind, not a machine's.

Simulator GS4 · Set B · Q1 *“In the age of synthetic media, a fabricated video is conceived by one person who creates it, amplified by a platform whose algorithm rewards reach, and spread by thousands of citizens...”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Who is responsible when a machine sits between a person and the outcome? Our question practised that chain of responsibility.

Q1(B) · 10 MARKS

A business house is working on a project that could displace a forest community from their habitat. As the administrative officer of that district, what ethical challenges are you likely to face?

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Development on one side, a community's home on the other, and you in the middle. The question asks what ethical pulls you will feel.

IN SHORT UPSC asked this in 2018. Our case bank carried it too.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2018 *“Suppose the Government of India is thinking of constructing a dam in a mountain valley bound by forests and inhabited by ethnic communities.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same dilemma, in almost the same setting: a project, a forest, a community that lives there.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W6 Sat Q2 *“Ravindra Naik, a District Collector, is directed to acquire land for an irrigation reservoir that will benefit several drought-prone districts downstream. A part of the submergence zone falls in a Scheduled Area where tribal families have farmed and lived for generations, and the Gram Sabha has refused consent...”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our full case is this question with a name. The pulls are the same: the greater good against a community's consent, rehabilitation promises against their record of failure, duty to the state against duty to the weakest.

Q2(A) · 10 MARKS

An endangered tribe has developed a severe skeletal deformity. A university research has identified a mineral supplement as a possible remedy, though clinical trials are yet to be conducted. Should the District Magistrate (DM) use this research on the tribe? Discuss from the perspective of medical and administrative ethics.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT A possible cure exists, but it is untested. The people are vulnerable. The question asks whether an officer may use untested science on them.

IN SHORT The untested-remedy dilemma was in our case bank.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2024 *“Sneha is a Senior Manager working for a big reputed hospital chain in a mid-sized city.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Medical ethics entered the paper through a case, two years ago.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS4 · Set B · Q14 *“Kavya is the ethics officer of a fast-growing health-tech firm racing two rivals to launch a diagnostic AI tool. Days before launch, validation shows the model is markedly accurate for one demographic group but quietly under-performs for another...”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our case is the same dilemma in a lab coat: something unproven, pushed onto people before testing is complete. The rule both answers rest on: do not experiment on people without consent and trials.

Simulator GS4 · Set B · Q2 *“Examine the significance of privacy and informed consent as ethical values in a digital welfare state.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Informed consent, the heart of this answer, was our theory question.

Q2(B) · 10 MARKS

Discuss how national security can be balanced with concerns of human rights.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT The state must keep people safe, and it must not crush the people it protects. The question asks how to hold both.

IN SHORT The balance was practised through our border case.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2020 *“The will to power exists, but it can be tamed and be guided by rationality and principles of moral duty.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Power restrained by moral duty is this question's exact idea, asked in 2020.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS4 · Set B · Q19 *“Devika is the Divisional Commissioner of a border district. Across the border, in a strictly neighbouring country, fighting has driven civilians from their homes.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our case put security against humanity at a border fence: injured civilians pleading to cross, armed men mixed among them. Writing it is writing this answer with a story in hand.

DAW 2026 · W7 Fri Q1 *“India's anti-terror laws permit years of detention but secure a conviction in a small fraction of cases.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same balance in law: strong powers for safety, and what they cost the innocent. From our GS3 bank. Ethics travels across papers.

Q3(A) · 10 MARKS

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar had cautioned that employing civil disobedience within a constitutional democracy equates to endorsing 'anarchy'. How should modern democracies navigate the ethical dilemmas posed by civil disobedience movements that aim to promote social justice against policies that may raise genuine concerns?

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Ambedkar said that once we have a Constitution, protest must flow through it. But some protests fight for justice itself. The question asks how a democracy should treat them.

IN SHORT Our question quoted the very same 1949 speech.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2019 *"What is meant by the term 'constitutional morality'? How does one uphold constitutional morality?"*

HOW IT CONNECTS Constitutional morality, the idea this question stands on, asked directly.

2025 *"Constitutional morality is not a natural sentiment but a product of civil education and adherence of the rule of law."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Asked again just last year.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W5 Thu Q1 *"Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, in his final address to the Constituent Assembly on 25 November 1949, observed: "However good a Constitution may be, it is sure to turn out bad because those who are called to work it, happen to be a bad lot.""*

HOW IT CONNECTS The 'anarchy' caution in the exam comes from this same final address. Our question made you study that speech and what it demands of public life.

Simulator GS4 · Set B · Q4 *"Differentiate constitutional morality from social or majoritarian morality, and state which should guide a public servant when they clash."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The answer's frame: when the crowd and the Constitution disagree, the Constitution wins. Movements for justice must still walk its path.

Q3(B) · 10 MARKS

In what ways can an Indian Administrative Officer apply Gandhi's notion of 'trusteeship' to ensure fairness in governance?

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Gandhi's trusteeship: what you hold, you hold for others. For an officer, the office, its funds and its powers belong to the people. The question asks how to live this.

IN SHORT Trusteeship of public office was our direct question.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2016 *"Discuss Mahatma Gandhi's Concept of Seven Sins."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Gandhi's moral ideas, asked directly.

2013 *"The good of an individual is contained in the good of all.' What do you understand by this statement? How can this principle be implemented in public life?"*

HOW IT CONNECTS The idea inside trusteeship: what is yours is held for everyone.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W5 Fri Q1 *"A public office is held in trust for the people who are governed, and not as a personal entitlement of the one who occupies it."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question is Gandhi's trusteeship applied to the officer's chair, word for word the same idea. Fairness follows from it: funds, appointments and decisions used only for those they are held for.

Q3(C) · 10 MARKS

Shakespeare in Henry IV says, "The arms are fair when the intent of bearing them is just". What ethical implications does this have in governance?

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Shakespeare says a weapon is right only if the purpose behind it is right. In governance: power is judged by the intention and the cause it serves. The question asks what follows.

IN SHORT The means-ends-intention debate was asked in 2018 and practised in our bank.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2018 *"With regard to the morality of actions, one view is that means are of paramount importance, and the other view is that the ends justify the means."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same debate, asked directly: what makes an action right, the means or the end?

2014 *"Human beings should always be treated as 'ends' in themselves and never as merely 'means'. Explain the meaning and significance of this statement."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Kant's version of the same question.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W6 Tue Q1 *"An honest officer adopts a means that is entirely proper, a fair and open tender, yet the outcome harms the very poor she meant to serve, while a colleague who quietly bends a procedure secures a far better result for them."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question weighed intention, means and consequence against each other, which is exactly what the Shakespeare line asks of power. The answer's caution: just intent cannot bless unjust means for long.

Q4(A) · 10 MARKS

Citing the serious adverse effects of long-term medication, a doctor convinces the family of a female patient for surgery. This led the patient to reluctantly consent for the surgery, though her original choice was to opt for medication. Explain the concepts of paternalism and beneficence by analysing the doctor's action.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Paternalism: deciding for someone for their own good. Beneficence: acting to do good. The doctor meant well but overrode the patient's own choice. The question asks you to weigh the two.

IN SHORT The consent-versus-good-intention tension runs through our medical case too.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2024 “Sneha is a Senior Manager working for a big reputed hospital chain in a mid-sized city.”

HOW IT CONNECTS Medical ethics through a case, two years ago.

2018 “Dr X is a leading medical practitioner in a city. He has set up a charitable trust through which he plans to establish a super-speciality hospital...”

HOW IT CONNECTS A doctor's duties, asked through a case then too.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W6 Fri Q5 “Dr. Meera Iyer is the medical superintendent of a district government hospital during a severe seasonal outbreak of viral fever that has filled the wards.”

HOW IT CONNECTS Our medical case practised the same ground: a doctor's good intentions tested against fairness and the patient's own claim.

Simulator GS4 · Set B · Q3 “Discuss the ethical considerations when the state shapes citizens' pro-social attitudes. Where does legitimate persuasion end and manipulation begin?”

HOW IT CONNECTS Our theory question drew the exact line this answer needs: helping someone choose is fair, choosing for them is not.

Q4(B) · 10 MARKS

Efficiency is doing things right, while effectiveness is doing the right thing. How do you strike a balance between the two to enhance productivity?

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Efficiency: follow the process well. Effectiveness: make sure the process serves its real purpose. The question asks how to hold both.

IN SHORT The efficiency-versus-purpose tension was our practice question.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2015 *“A mere compliance with law is not enough, the public servant also has to have a well-developed sensibility to ethical issues for effective discharge of duties.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same distinction in older words: following rules is not the same as serving the purpose.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS4 · Set B · Q13 *“In the drive to meet delivery targets, a welfare administration can quietly reduce the poorest to numbers on a dashboard rather than persons at a counter. Efficiency, pursued for its own sake, risks stripping the beneficiary of dignity.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question is this question with a face on it: efficiency chased for itself, and the right thing lost on the way. The balance both answers reach: efficiency must serve effectiveness, never replace it.

Q5(A) · 10 MARKS

Usually schools, working in remote areas, do not fully comply with government regulations. However, if the rules are enforced strictly, it would lead to most schools closing down. How should an administrator strike a balance between enforcement of rules and educational rights of children?

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Enforce the rules fully and children lose their schools. Ignore the rules and standards die. The question asks how an officer balances the two.

IN SHORT Compassionate rule-bending was our direct question.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2022 *“The Supreme Court has banned mining in the Aravalli Hills to stop forest degradation and maintain ecological balance. However, illegal stone mining is still rampant...”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same shape: a rule that is right, and a ground reality that resists it.

2020 *“Distinguish between laws and rules. Discuss the role of ethics in formulating them.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Rules and the ethics behind them, asked directly.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS4 · Set A · Q3 *“Is compassionate rule-bending ever ethically defensible, or does it inevitably corrode probity by setting a precedent? Discuss with suitable examples.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question is this question's engine: when may an officer soften a rule for a larger good? The answer's path: enforce in spirit, give time to comply, never let the child pay for the school's faults.

DAW 2026 · W6 Wed Q2 *“A municipal commissioner finds that the law clearly permits her to grant a building completion certificate to a developer who has met every written requirement, yet she k...”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same tension from the other side: the letter of the rule against what is actually right.

Q5(B) · 10 MARKS

In international relations, ethical considerations are often subjugated to the strategic interests of nation-states. Discuss this from an ethical perspective.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Countries preach values but act on interests. The question asks whether ethics has any real place between nations.

IN SHORT UPSC has asked this before.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2020 *"The will to power exists, but it can be tamed and be guided by rationality and principles of moral duty."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same question: can power between nations be tamed by ethics? Asked in 2020, in the same IR context.

2017 *"Strength, peace and security are considered to be the pillars of international relations. Elucidate."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Ethics in international relations, asked directly.

2023 *"International aid' is an accepted form of helping 'resource-challenged' nations. Comment on 'ethics in contemporary international aid'."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Asked again through aid.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS4 · Set A · Q1 *"A rising power is no longer merely a claimant in global governance but increasingly a maker of its rules. As its capacity grows, it begins to set the terms that weaker nations must live by..."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question asked what ethics demands of a nation as its power grows. The same debate, from the side of the strong.

Q6(A) · 10 MARKS

On the request of his Personal Assistant (PA), the District Magistrate (DM) stops the transfer of a schoolteacher who takes private tuition for his daughter diagnosed with learning disability. In this context, discuss the aspects of empathy versus compliance with rules.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT The DM's reason is kind, but the favour flows to his own staff. The question asks where empathy ends and misuse of office begins.

IN SHORT Empathy against rules was our direct question.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2022 *“Apart from intellectual competency and moral qualities, empathy and compassion are some of the other vital attributes...”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Empathy as an officer's quality, asked directly.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCKIAS

DAW 2026 · W5 Mon Q2 *“During a disaster relief drive a District Officer faces a grieving family that pleads, with great emotion, for a benefit for which they are clearly not eligible under the relief norms.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question is the same test: real sympathy, clear rules, and the officer in between. The added edge here: the beneficiary is his own PA, so a conflict of interest rides on top of the empathy.

DAW 2026 · W6 Thu Q1 *“A senior official must decide on a regulatory clearance for a company in which he still holds a modest block of shares inherited some years ago.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The conflict-of-interest half: good intentions do not clean a decision that favours your own circle.

Q6(B) · 10 MARKS

Some moral philosophers argue that spending some of your resources, without significantly affecting your financial stability, to help other people who badly suffer is our moral duty and not merely a matter of charity. Justify this claim by explaining the distinction between duty and charity.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Charity is a choice we are praised for. Duty is what we owe. The claim: if helping costs us little and saves someone from real suffering, it is owed, not optional. The question asks you to justify this.

IN SHORT The duty-versus-charity line was practised through welfare rights.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2013 *"The good of an individual is contained in the good of all.' What do you understand by this statement? How can this principle be implemented in public life?"*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same moral root: others' suffering is our concern, not our generosity.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W8 Fri Q4 *"Most welfare in India is delivered as discretionary schemes a government can expand or withdraw at will, while only a few benefits are legal entitlements. To what extent should welfare in India be founded on justiciable rights?"*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same distinction at state level: is help a favour the giver controls, or a duty the sufferer can claim? Our question argued it for welfare. This one asks it of the individual.

Simulator GS4 · Set A · Q5 *"In the happiness of his subjects lies the king's happiness, in their welfare his welfare." (Kautilya). What does this quotation mean to you in the present context?"*

HOW IT CONNECTS Kautilya's version: the strong owe the weak their welfare as duty, not kindness.

Q7 · 20 MARKS

Lata, a mother of two, was admitted for acute abdominal pain. During a laparoscopy under general anesthesia, Dr. Mansi's team found a possibly malignant tumor in her uterus. Instead of a biopsy, Dr. Mansi removed the uterus with the written consent of Lata's sister-in-law Sujatha. Lata, informed the next day, felt betrayed and went to court. (a) Discuss the ethical issues involved. (b) Discuss the moral conduct of the doctor.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT The doctor meant well and may have saved a second surgery. But she removed an organ without the patient's own consent. The case asks whose body, whose choice.

IN SHORT Consent and good intention, the case's two poles, were both in our bank.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2024 *"Sneha is a Senior Manager working for a big reputed hospital chain in a mid-sized city."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The medical-ethics case lane, used two years ago.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCKIAS

Simulator GS4 · Set B · Q2 *"Examine the significance of privacy and informed consent as ethical values in a digital welfare state."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Informed consent as a value was our theory question. Its rule decides this case: consent belongs to the patient, and no relative's signature replaces it when the patient can be waited for.

DAW 2026 · W6 Fri Q5 *"Dr. Meera Iyer is the medical superintendent of a district government hospital during a severe seasonal outbreak of viral fever that has filled the wards."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our medical case trained the same judgement: a doctor's good intent measured against the patient's rights. Note for part (b): paternalism and beneficence, the theory asked at Q4(a) of this very paper, are the tools to grade Dr. Mansi.

Q8 · 20 MARKS

Ravi, an SP, installed AI-enabled predictive policing that captures biometric data from crowds. It flagged an immigrant, low-income neighbourhood; policing improved, but community leaders allege the system is biased, built on faulty historical data, and that surveillance without residents' knowledge has bred tension. (a) What are the ethical issues, including biases, in AI and data-driven policing? (b) In Ravi's role, discuss the alternatives and justify the action that best combines ethics and compliance.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT The machine works, order improved, and a whole community feels watched and pre-judged. The case asks whether policing by algorithm can be fair.

IN SHORT The algorithm-authority rule and the data-misuse case were both ours.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2024 *"The application of Artificial Intelligence as a dependable source of input for administrative rational decision-making is a debatable issue."*

HOW IT CONNECTS AI in official decisions, asked directly, two years ago.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCKIAS

Simulator GS4 · Set A · Q11 *"Critically analyse, in the present context of AI-assisted administration, the claim that where a citizen's benefit or liberty is at stake, an algorithm must never be the final authority."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question is the case's core rule: liberty is at stake in policing, so the algorithm may point but never decide. Old biased data producing biased policing is exactly why.

DAW 2026 · W6 Sat Q4 *"Imran Qureshi heads the technology unit of a state welfare department that holds a large database of beneficiaries, including their Aadhaar-linked details, collected to deliver a food subsidy."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our data case trained the other half: people's data used beyond what they knew or agreed to. Ravi's residents did not even know their data was taken.

Q9 · 20 MARKS

Seema, an honest senior bureaucrat, is DC of Surinder Nagar, where a tout network working through subordinate officials is selectively clearing land-use applications for bribes. Employees are scared, the backlog grows, the public suffers. She must break the network without halting daily administration. (a) What are the ethical issues? (b) Discuss her options, identify the recommended option and justify it.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Corruption has become a system, and fear keeps it running. The case asks how to clean an office without stopping its work.

IN SHORT The bribery-for-clearance case and the why-institutions-fail question were both ours.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2015 *“Today we find that in spite of various measures like prescribing codes of conduct, setting up vigilance cells/commissions, RTI, active media, and strengthening of legal mechanisms...”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Why corruption survives all the machinery, asked directly.

2022 *“Whistleblower, who reports corruption and illegal activities, wrongdoing, and misconduct to the concerned authorities, runs the risk of being exposed to grave danger, physical harm...”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The fear that keeps honest staff silent, asked directly.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W6 Sat Q5 *“Deepak Sharma, a section officer who clears building-plan approvals, has on his desk an application from a small businessman, Mahesh, whose papers are entirely in order and who is legally entitled to approval.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our case is the same racket seen from one desk: money to move lawful files. Seema sees it from the top, as a network.

Simulator GS4 · Set A · Q12 *“Examine why well-designed anti-corruption institutions often underdeliver in practice.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our theory question is her part (b): why a loud crackdown can fail, and why steady, protected, systemic cleaning works better. The recommended path: quiet evidence first, protect the honest, fix the process so touts have nothing to sell.

Q10 · 20 MARKS

Vikas, DC of remote Nainipura, runs the PDS for the poorest. Biometric checks meant to stop leakages keep failing for growing children, manual labourers and senior citizens, worse when WiFi is slow; distributors then decide by personal discretion. Strict rules ensure fiscal probity but hurt the poorest and may touch their Article 21 rights. (a) What options does Vikas have, and how should he balance fiscal probity with empathy? (b) Discuss the ethics of using technology as a gatekeeper for welfare schemes.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT The machine that was meant to stop theft is now turning away the very people the scheme feeds. The case asks what the officer owes first: the ledger or the hungry.

IN SHORT This case was in our banks, nearly line for line.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2022 *“Apart from intellectual competency and moral qualities, empathy and compassion are some of the other vital attributes...”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Empathy as the officer's needed quality, asked directly.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCKIAS

Simulator GS4 · Set A · Q18 *“You are the district officer in charge of a fully digitised welfare scheme in which eligibility for benefits is decided automatically by Aadhaar-linked software, with little human checking in between.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our case is this case: the software auto-rejecting the genuinely poor over small mismatches, and the officer deciding between the system and the person. Even the fix is shared: keep the technology, add a human door for those it fails.

Simulator GS4 · Set B · Q13 *“In the drive to meet delivery targets, a welfare administration can quietly reduce the poorest to numbers on a dashboard rather than persons at a counter.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Part (b) was our theory question: technology as gatekeeper, and the dignity it can cost. From our GS3 bank, the same pensioner logic: the fingerprints fail, the person is real.

Q11 · 20 MARKS

Rajan is the new DM of Rajapuram, a border district where ethnic conflict between the Jhara and Biru communities has killed many. The rivalry has seeped into the local administration and police; both communities distrust the government. A neighbouring country could exploit the unrest. Rajan favours a controlled approach: reopen the highway for food and medicines, consider CRPF support. (a) Discuss the ethical issues. (b) What are his options, and which protects his non-partisan image without compromising ethics?

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Two communities at war, an administration seen as taking sides, and a border that makes every mistake dangerous. The case asks how an officer stays fair and is seen to be fair.

IN SHORT Neutrality under communal fire was practised across our banks.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2024 *“With the summer heat being exceptionally severe this year, the district has been facing severe water shortage.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The DM-under-crisis case lane, used recently.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS4 · Set A · Q9 *“Differentiate between impartiality and non-partisanship in public service, with suitable examples.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Part (b)'s exact vocabulary was our theory question: being fair, and being seen to belong to no side. Rajan's answer turns on both.

Simulator GS4 · Set B · Q19 *“Devika is the Divisional Commissioner of a border district. Across the border, in a strictly neighbouring country, fighting has driven civilians from their homes.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our border case trained the same nerves: humanity first, security always, and a hostile neighbour watching. Rajan's highway-first instinct, food and medicine before force, is the same order of steps.

Q12 · 20 MARKS

Ajit heads Weapon Sales in the Ministry of Defence Production. Production limits mean he can sell to only one of two developing countries: A, outside all alliances, needing arms against a troublesome neighbour, seeking a long-term loan; or B, alliance-backed, military-first at its people's cost, not an NPT signatory, supporter of guerrilla forces abroad, ready with advance payment. (a) Discuss his options and which he should choose and why. (b) How can he balance the nation's economic and strategic interests with ethical considerations?

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT One buyer needs protection. The other feeds conflict. The money argues one way, the conscience another. The case asks what a nation's sale says about the nation.

IN SHORT Ethics against strategic interest, this paper's own 5(b), turned into a case.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2020 *"The will to power exists, but it can be tamed and be guided by rationality and principles of moral duty."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The exact frame: power and profit tamed by moral duty, asked in the IR context.

2017 *"Strength, peace and security are considered to be the pillars of international relations. Elucidate."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Ethics among nations, asked directly.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS4 · Set A · Q1 *"A rising power is no longer merely a claimant in global governance but increasingly a maker of its rules. As its capacity grows, it begins to set the terms that weaker nations must live by..."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question asked what a powerful seller owes the weaker world. Ajit's desk is where that question becomes real: country A defends itself, country B arms conflict. The ethical sale is also the strategic one, a stable, grateful partner over quick money.

DAW 2026 · W7 Mon Q2 *"India presents itself as the voice of the Global South, yet as it grows richer its interests on carbon, trade and debt part ways with the poorest nations."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same test of what kind of power India wants to be. From our IR bank. The argument carries straight into part (b).

FOR THE ROAD AHEAD

Mains is never 'moderate' or 'tough' or 'easy'. Those words belong to next-day reviews, not to this exam.

Year after year, Mains is theme repetition. This year said it loudly. Even then, it is not simple. The marks go to those who have internalised the basic content, practised answer writing enough, and walked in with self-belief.

And remember one thing about the cutoff: it is decided by relative performance. Everyone in that hall faced the same paper you did. If it felt hard, it felt hard to everyone. Your preparation decides where you stand, not the paper's mood. So let no one frighten you about it. Whenever fear spreads, someone appears selling a shortcut. You do not need a shortcut. You need the basics, practice, and patience.

If these three lines settle in early, the road becomes calm:

PYQs are the key.

Answer writing is the art.

Relative performance decides the outcome.

We wish you the very best for your result, and for everything ahead.

FREE GUIDANCE

Every free resource is at unlockias.in.

Stuck somewhere, or need direction? Ask on our Telegram channel [UPSCneil](https://t.me/UPSCneil).

MODULE QUERIES

Ping us directly at [@helpdeskupsc](https://t.me/helpdeskupsc) on Telegram, or call or message [+91 91130 79224](tel:+919113079224).

With best wishes,

Team UnlockIAS