

India signed a defence deal with another country for fighter aircraft. The opposition party has been accusing massive irregularities in the deal, alleging that the government is procuring each aircraft at a very high rate. It has also alleged that the government is involved in corruption and crony capitalism through the deal. Repeated demands for the information on the process of decision making in the deal and on the price of the aircraft, are made in Parliament and outside.

Per contra, the government has refused to disclose the price of the aircraft and share any details of the deal, citing a secrecy clause of a pact between the two countries and national security as the reason. The Supreme Court also refused to order an independent inquiry into the deal.

Hence, the three pillars of the democracy-the legislature, the executive and the judiciary have failed to provide any relevant information on an issue of great importance for the public interest. Now, the general public is eyeing on the 4th pillar of democracy that is the media to take the responsibility of providing relevant information regarding the deal.

Suppose you are the Chairman of one of the leading news publishing groups and the other news publishing groups are insisting you to lead the matter on their behalf in the public interest. Given the situation, the following are some of the options available to you-

1. Do not interfere in the matter considering national security.
2. Get access of the secret documents through investigative journalism and publish the documents in the newspaper.
3. Initiate a media campaign to gain public support for pressurizing the government to disclose the relevant information in the public domain.

Evaluate all of them and suggest the best course of action, giving reasons for it. Suggest any other possible option(s).

Approach:

- **Introduce with the theme of the case.**
- **Identify the stakeholders.**
- **Identify ethical issues and dilemmas involved in the case.**
- **Suggest any other one or two possible options if possible or else only evaluate the merits and demerits of the given options in terms of consequences and values.**
- **Choose your course of action and justify your stand with appropriate arguments.**

Answer: This case is based on the responsibilities of the media as the fourth pillar of democracy.

Stakeholders

- Government.
- Foreign country.

- Media.
- General public.

Ethical Issues

- Doubt of **crony capitalism and corruption**.
- **Lack of transparency** on the government side.
- **Effect on foreign relations** if any information is revealed.
- **National security** in Jeopardy.

Ethical Dilemmas

- Transparency, Dutifulness and public interest vs. National security and foreign relations.

Fourth Option -

- Access the documents through investigative journalism and file a fresh PIL in the Supreme Court without publishing the documents.

Evaluation

Option 1-

Merits

- National Security and foreign relations would not be hampered.

Demerits

- Truth couldn't be revealed.
- It will amount to a dereliction of my duty.

Option 2-

Merits

- Truth can be revealed in the public interest.
- Diligence towards duty is reflected.

Demerits

- It may jeopardize national security and effect foreign relations.
- It may amount to violation of the Official secret Act.

Option 3-

Merits

- Most appropriate and authentic channel for true information.
- Media will play its role of being a medium between the government and the citizen.

Demerits

- The government may still not disclose the information or may disclose manipulated information.

Option 4-**Merits**

- The secrecy of the documents can be maintained.
- The court can decide on involvement of any corruption.

Demerits

- It may amount to violation of the Official secret Act.
- It may have a chilling effect on Investigative journalism.

Course Of Action And Justification

Being a responsible leader, I will go for the mix and match of the available options as follows-

- Firstly, initiate a media campaign and pressurize the government for information disclosure.
- If failed, try to get access of the documents through investigative journalism.
- With the documents, file a fresh PIL in Supreme Court.
- Meanwhile, publish some selective information, which doesn't hamper national security and foreign relations.

I will take this course of action because-

- It is my duty to bring out the truth and pressurize government to be transparent.
- By publishing selective information, i won't hamper national security or foreign relations.
- Media is entitled with right to expression under Article 19 (1).
- Public trust in the media will strengthen and corrupt people will deter.