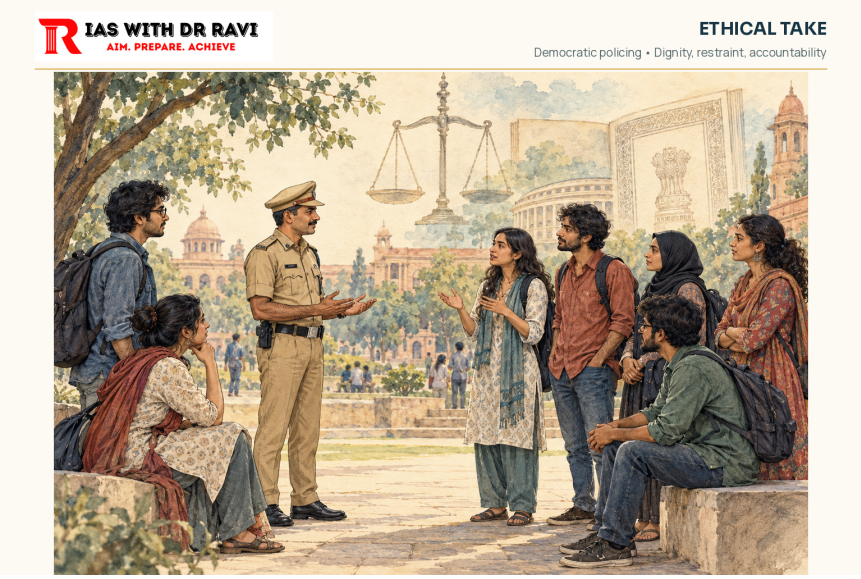
Police Brutality

Professional Detachment and Democratic Policing

UPSC General Studies IV • Source article: 5 September 2026

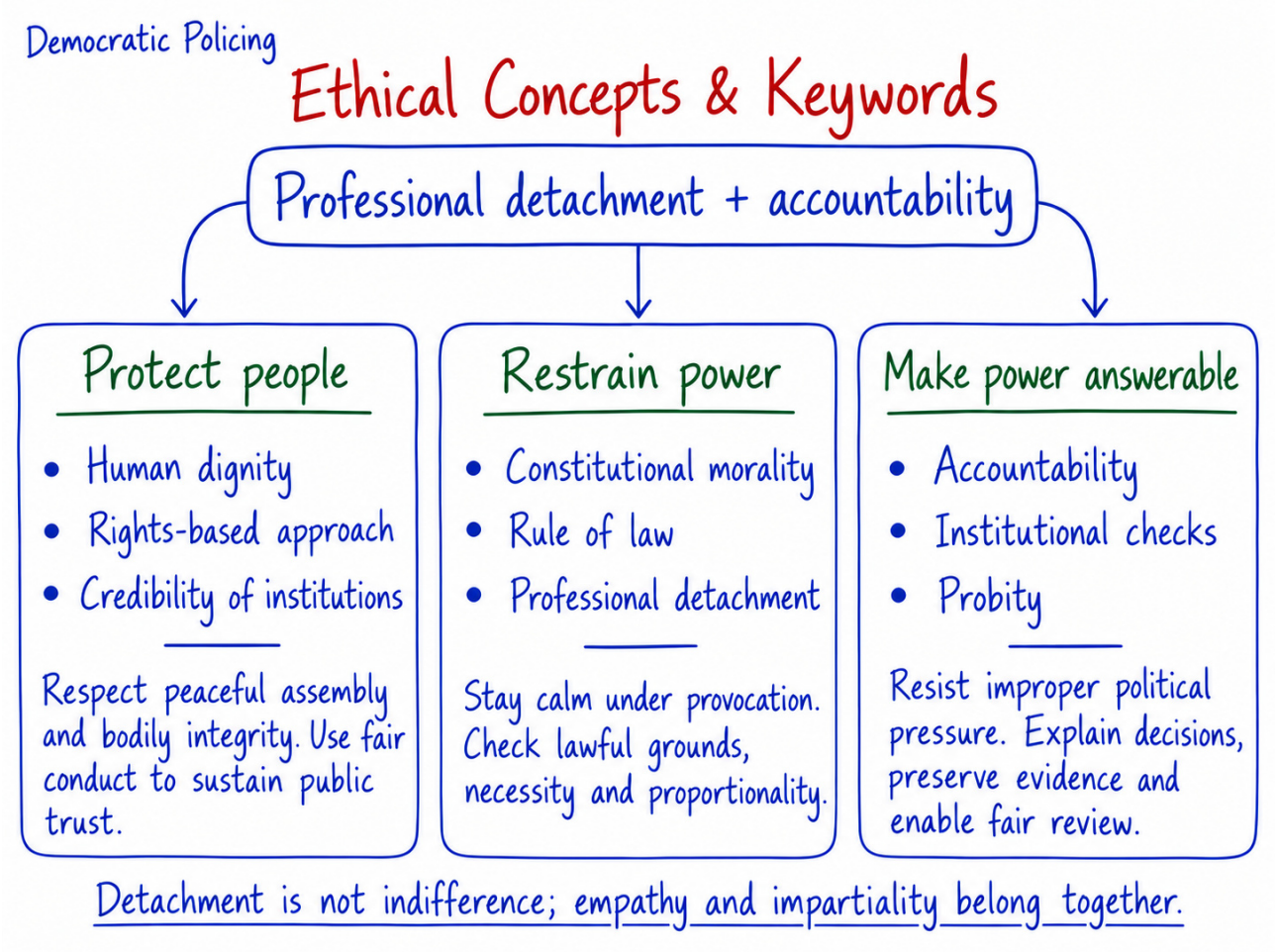


01 Gist of the Issue

At a book launch in New Delhi on 4 September 2026, Supreme Court Justice Ujjal Bhuyan expressed concern about the alleged police assault of NEET protesters at Jantar Mantar. News reports published on 5 September 2026 recorded his emphasis on professional detachment, constitutional fidelity and public trust. He also criticised fake encounters and the idea that police can punish outside the law. These were public remarks at a book launch, not a judicial finding that the alleged assault had been proved. The ethical issue is how a police service can maintain order while preserving impartiality, dignity and accountability.

Reading frame: Professional detachment means calm, impartial judgment under pressure. It does not mean indifference to suffering. Accountability means being able to explain and justify decisions, preserve evidence, accept independent scrutiny and provide an effective response when wrongdoing is established.

02 Ethical Concepts & Keywords



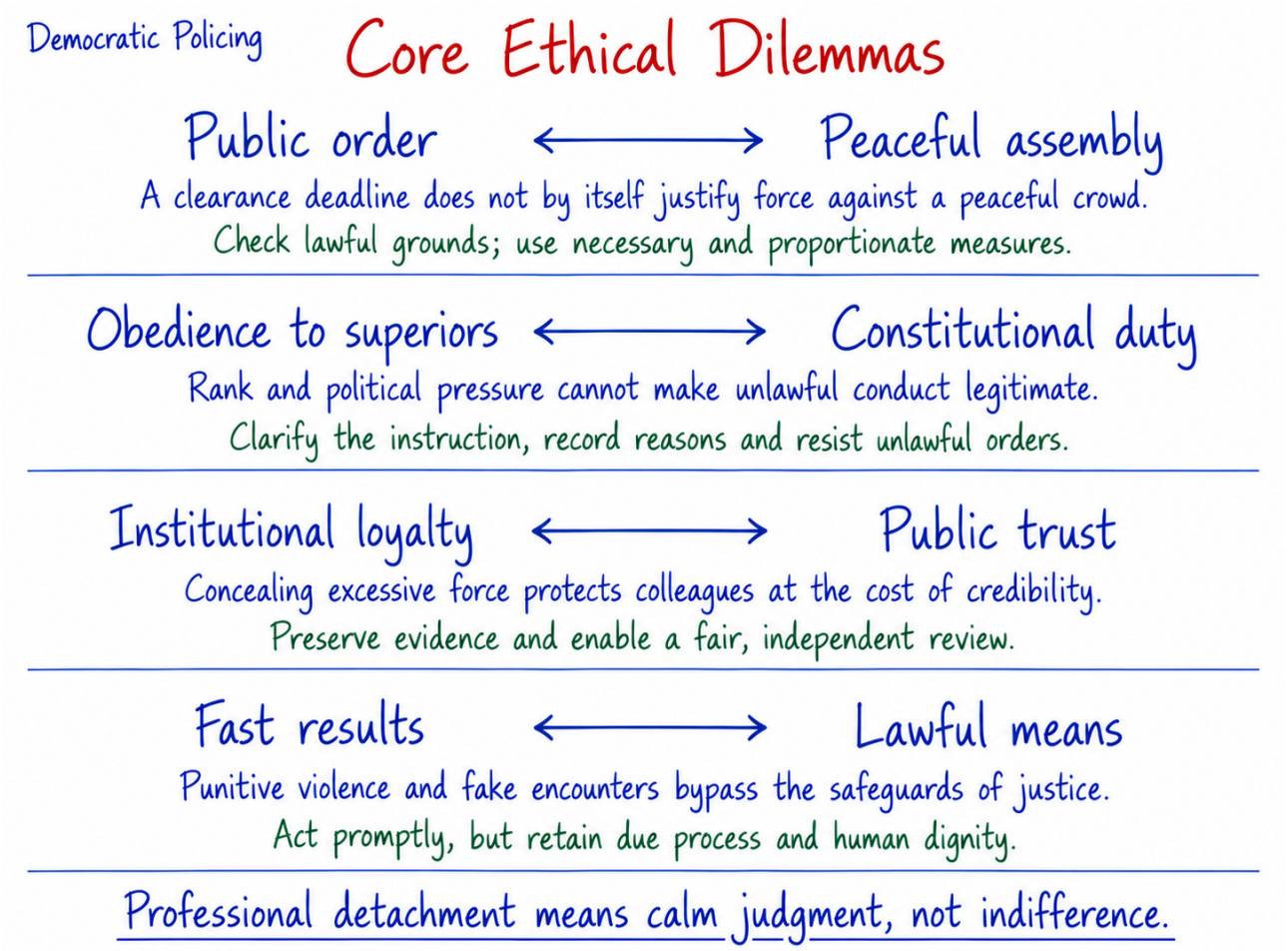
Ethical Concepts & Keywords • Handwritten revision aid

Value / Keyword	Relevance to This Case
Professional detachment	The anchor concept: police officers must not let personal aggression, political pressure, or crowd emotions override trained, rule-bound conduct
Constitutional morality	Police authority is bounded by constitutional rights and lawful public purposes; punitive or unjustified violence against peaceful protesters betrays that responsibility.
Rule of law	Fake encounters and punitive violence replace legal process with coercive shortcuts and undermine the rule of law.
Accountability	The second anchor concept: without accountability for excessive force, impunity breeds repeat violations
Credibility of institutions	Public faith in the police depends on its consistent, impartial behaviour

Value / Keyword	Relevance to This Case
Rights-based approach	Peaceful assembly and bodily integrity constrain police action; Article 19(1)(b) is subject to reasonable restrictions by law under Article 19(3).
Separation of powers	Independent judicial scrutiny protects legality and fair procedure; courts review police action rather than becoming the operational police command.
Political interference	Directing police against peaceful protesters for partisan ends corrupts policing as a public good
Probity in public life	Police officers are public servants; their power is a trust, not a weapon

Anchor concepts threaded through this sheet: professional detachment and accountability.

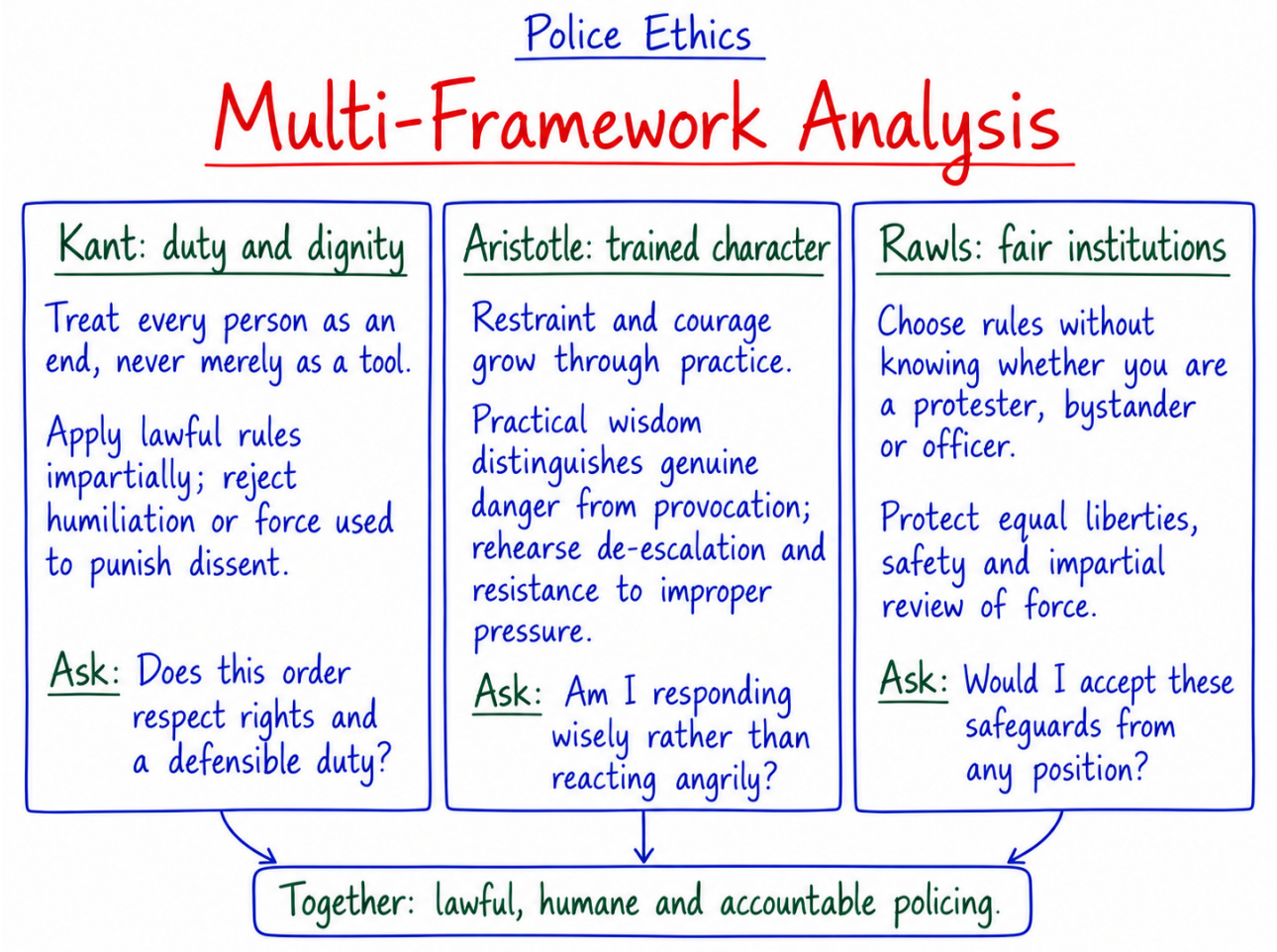
03 Core Ethical Dilemma(s)



Core Ethical Dilemmas • Handwritten revision aid

- Order vs. rights: Public order is a legitimate responsibility. Any restriction or use of force still needs a lawful basis and must satisfy necessity and proportionality. A noisy or inconvenient protest is not, by itself, a reason for punitive violence.
- Obedience vs. Conscience: A constable or officer ordered to disperse protesters must choose between following a superior's command and upholding constitutional limits - when these clash, which takes precedence?
- Ends-justify-means temptation: If "encounter philosophy" can seem to deliver fast results against crime, why is it still ethically impermissible? The dilemma reveals the tension between consequentialist shortcuts and deontological constraints.
- Institutional loyalty vs. public trust: Covering up excessive force protects colleagues but destroys the institution's credibility with the public it serves.

04 Multi-Framework Analysis



Multi-Framework Analysis • Handwritten revision aid

Deontology (Kant)

A Kantian approach asks whether the officer acts from a defensible duty and respects every person as an end. Beating people to punish dissent or secure an impressive clearance result treats them merely as instruments. Professional detachment supports principled action: apply a lawful rule impartially, examine the purpose of the order and refuse to reduce citizens to obstacles. This is an application of Kant's ethics to policing, not a quotation from Kant on Indian police procedure.

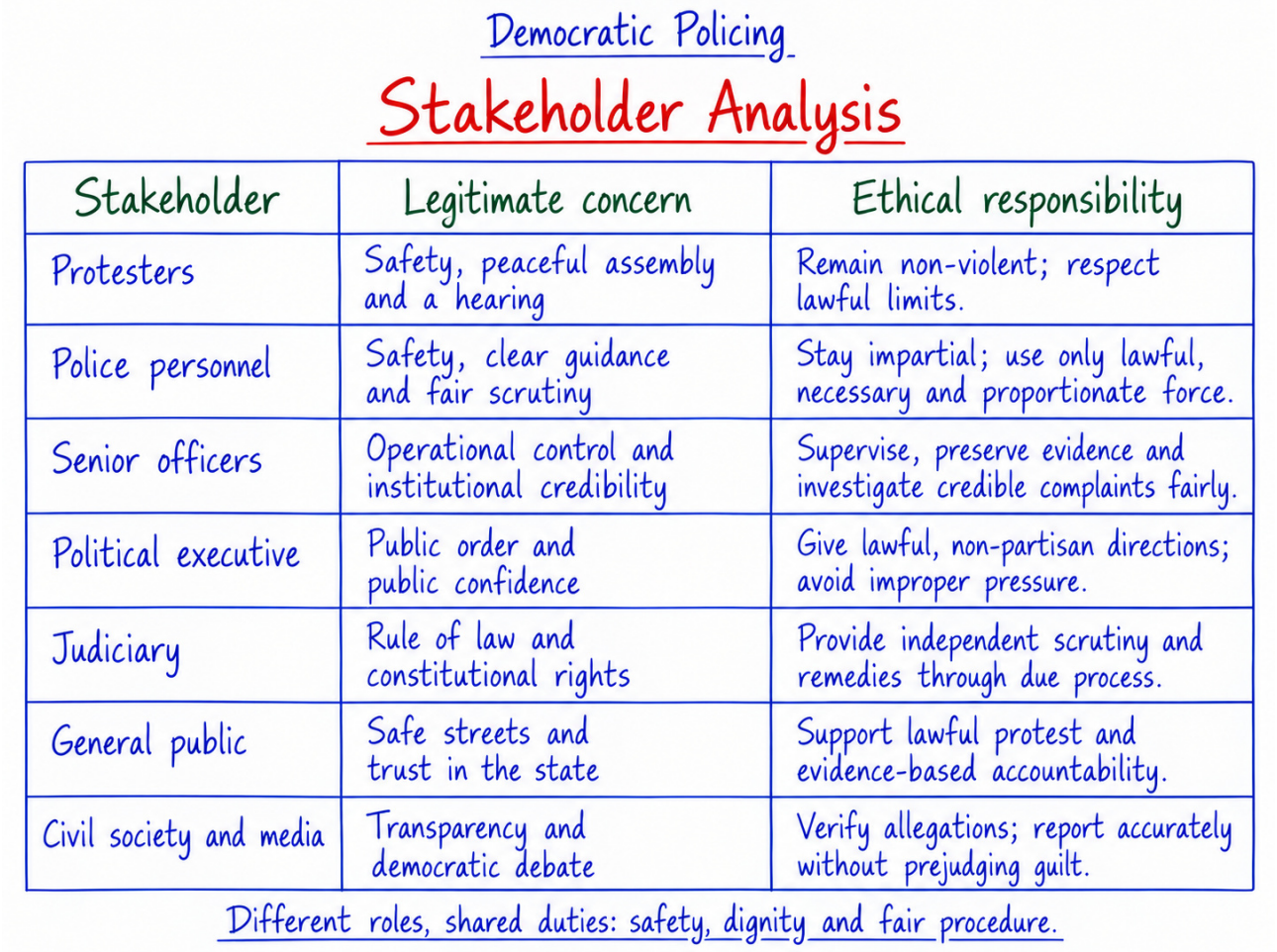
Virtue Ethics (Aristotle)

The virtuous police officer cultivates courage, temperance, justice and practical wisdom through repeated practice. Professional detachment can be understood through this lens as trained self-restraint in the use of coercive power. It is not exactly identical to Aristotle's concept of temperance. Courage includes resisting improper pressure; practical wisdom includes recognising genuine danger without reacting to mere provocation. Institutions should reward these habits as well as procedural competence.

Rights-Based (Rawls)

Rawls's original-position thought experiment invites us to assess institutions without knowing our own social position. Applied here, imagine being a protester, a bystander, a vulnerable citizen or an officer. This perspective supports fair rules, equal basic liberties and credible review of force, including protection for officers facing real danger. Accountability should be effective and impartial; the thought experiment does not prove that every decision-maker would choose one specific police policy or guarantee every outcome.

05 Stakeholder Analysis

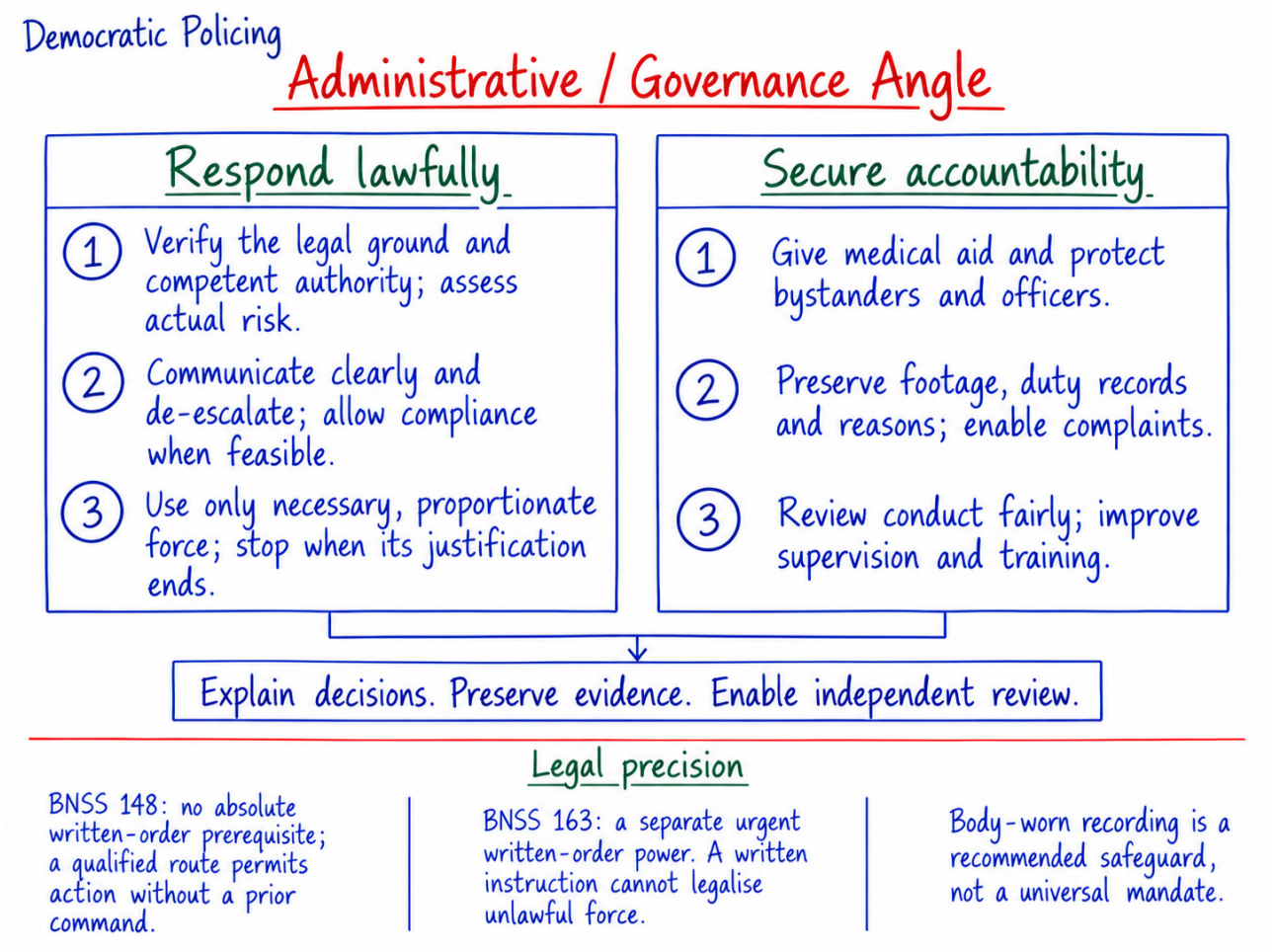


Stakeholder Analysis • Handwritten revision aid

Stakeholder	Interest / Concern	Ethical Obligation
NEET protesters	Physical safety, right to peaceful assembly, access to justice for their grievance	To protest non-violently and within lawful bounds
Police personnel	Safety during duty, career security, morale	To exercise only proportionate, lawful force; to maintain professional detachment
Senior police officers / IPS	Institutional reputation, operational control	To set constitutional rules of engagement, supervise responsibly and ensure fair investigation of credible complaints rather than presume guilt.

Stakeholder	Interest / Concern	Ethical Obligation
Political executive	Public order, political optics	To pursue public order through lawful, non-partisan directions and respect constitutional limits and independent review.
Supreme Court / Judiciary	Rule of law, constitutionalism	To scrutinise police conduct and ensure accountability through judicial oversight
General public	Safe streets, trust in the state	To demand and support reform; to distinguish lawful protest from disorder
Civil society / media	Transparency, democratic discourse	To document, report and advocate without sensationalism

06 Administrative / Governance Angle



Administrative / Governance Angle • Handwritten revision aid

- Rules of engagement: Standard operating procedures for crowd control must clearly prohibit unprovoked assault; these must be drilled, not merely printed.
- Police reforms: The Supreme Court's Prakash Singh directions of 22 September 2006 addressed insulation from improper pressure and institutional accountability. Relevant measures include State Security Commissions, Police Establishment Boards and Police Complaints Authorities, alongside tenure and investigation-related reforms. Assess implementation and actual independence state by state; this study does not claim a verified 2026 compliance status for every state.
- Independent oversight: Police Complaints Authorities are external complaint mechanisms, distinct from departmental inquiries. Each needs credible procedures, adequate capacity and protection against improper influence. Fair review should hear the complainant and the officer and follow the applicable legal framework.
- Body cameras and video logging: Consider systematic recording of public-order operations as a reform, with secure retention, privacy safeguards, access controls and independent preservation of relevant footage. Recording can support review, but equipment alone cannot ensure accountability. A universal legal duty to use body cameras in every Indian crowd-control operation is not asserted here.
- Constitutional and ethical training: Embed rights, lawful powers, emotional regulation, communication and supervision in basic training and periodic refreshers. Practical exercises should complement instruction and be evaluated against operational learning goals.
- Political interference: The chain of command must not transmit partisan orders to field officers; insulation from such pressure is a governance imperative.
- Judicial oversight: Credible allegations of unlawful killing or excessive force require serious, evidence-led scrutiny. The Supreme Court's PUCL v. State of Maharashtra judgment of 23 September 2014 set procedures for investigating police encounter deaths. Investigation is a route to determining facts, not a declaration that every encounter is fake.

Legal distinction that changes the case answer

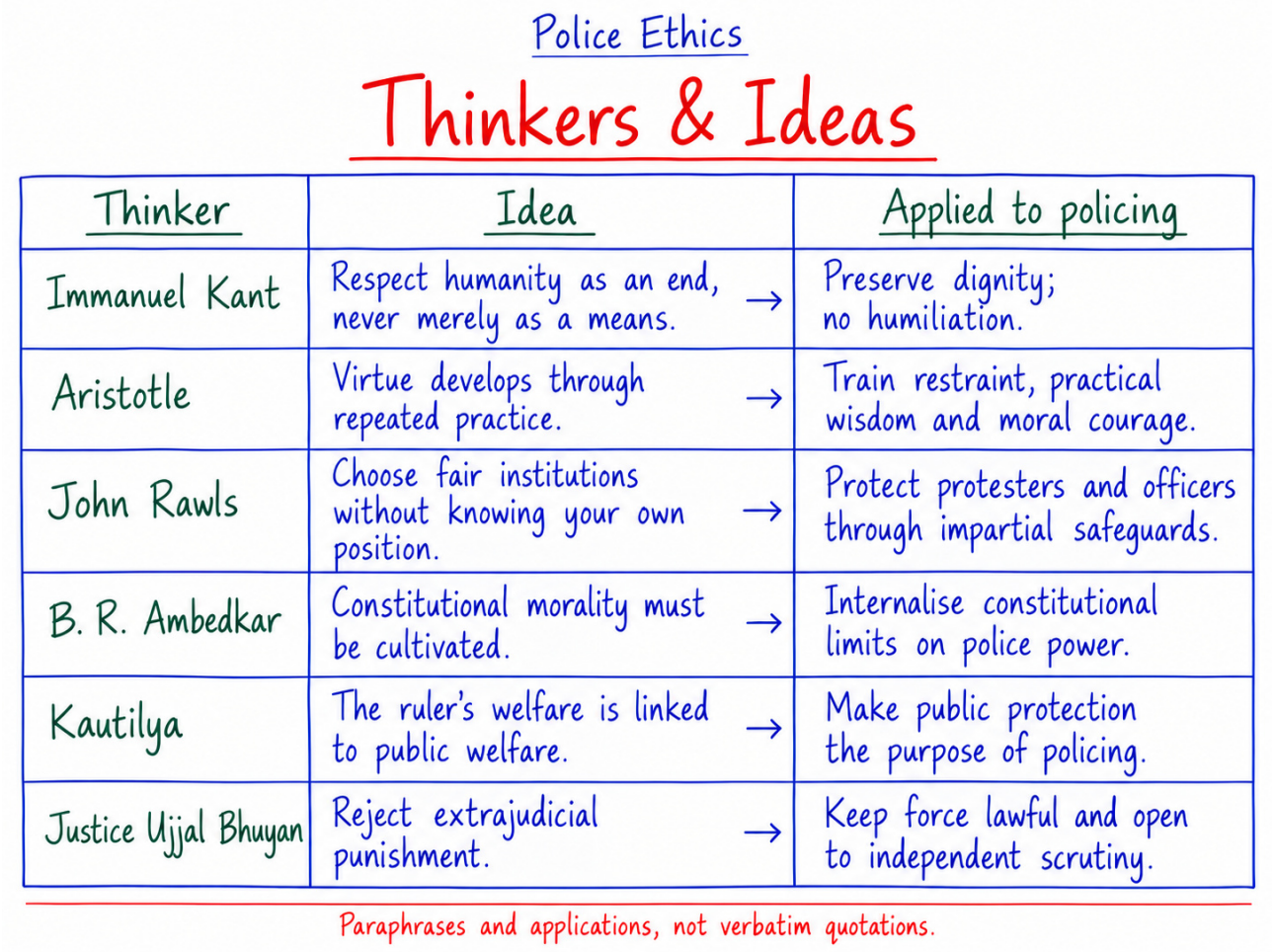
BNSS section 148 concerns dispersal of an unlawful assembly, or an assembly of five or more people likely to disturb public peace. Its specified authorities include an Executive Magistrate, the officer in charge of a police station and, in that officer's absence, a police officer not below sub-inspector. Rank or a crowd-management assignment alone should not be assumed to settle statutory competence.

Section 148 does not create an absolute written-order prerequisite. It ordinarily contemplates a dispersal command and also contains a qualified situation involving conduct showing a determination not to disperse even without that command. Section 163 is a different urgent-order power: the competent Magistrate's order must be written and state material facts. The two provisions must not be conflated.

Operational lesson: identify the actual power, competent authority, factual threshold and applicable procedure. Communicate clearly and de-escalate where feasible; any force must remain lawful, necessary and proportionate. A written instruction records a decision but

cannot legalise unlawful force or give automatic immunity. This is an exam-oriented analysis, not advice for directing a real operation.

07 Thinkers & Ideas



Thinkers & Ideas • Handwritten revision aid

Thinker	Idea / paraphrase	Application Here
Immanuel Kant	Duty and respect for humanity: persons must not be treated merely as means.	Test the purpose and principle of an order; do not use people merely to achieve a clearance target. Ethical scrutiny of intention is different from proof of a criminal offence.
Aristotle	Virtue is a stable disposition to act rightly; it must be cultivated through habituation	Professional detachment in police officers is a virtue to be trained, not improvised in the heat of a protest

Thinker	Idea / paraphrase	Application Here
John Rawls	The "veil of ignorance" - just institutions are those one would choose without knowing one's position in society	Assess police rules from the possible positions of citizen, protester, bystander and officer; support fair safeguards and credible review.
B. R. Ambedkar	Constitutional morality must be cultivated rather than assumed to arise naturally.	Police forces need sustained constitutional education to internalise limits on their power
Kautilya (Arthashastra)	The Arthashastra links the ruler's welfare to the welfare of the people (Book I, chapter 19).	Apply the public-welfare principle to protective policing, without presenting an ancient monarchy as identical to a modern constitutional democracy.
Justice Ujjal Bhuyan	"Encounter philosophy is a criminal philosophy. It cannot be a part of policing."	His reported book-launch remarks condemn extrajudicial punishment; they should not be presented as a judgment on the Jantar Mantar allegations.

Attribution note: All entries above are paraphrases or modern applications except the short quotation attributed to Justice Bhuyan. The Kant quotation in the archive source could not be reliably traced and has been replaced.

08 Adapted Case Study

Fictional scenario: Deputy Superintendent of Police Avinash Rao is in charge of crowd management during a large student demonstration at a city's central public square. The students allege irregularities in a national medical entrance examination. The gathering is peaceful, large and vocal. Late in the afternoon, the District Magistrate telephones with "instructions from above" to "clear the square before 6 p.m." No written instruction or explanation of the legal ground has been supplied, and no dispersal command has yet been communicated. Some agitated students then push against the police cordon. Junior officers await direction; several tired constables appear ready to use their lathis. Journalists and video cameras are present. Avinash must assess the actual threat, confirm the competent legal authority and relevant procedure, calm his team and respond immediately. He fears career pressure if he questions the deadline, but a superior's instruction does not relieve him of responsibility for lawful conduct. The absence of a written instruction alone does not decide whether force would be lawful.

(a) What are the options available with Avinash in the above situation?

(b) What are the ethical and legal dilemmas being faced by Avinash?

(c) Which of the options, do you think, would be most appropriate for Avinash to adopt and why?

(d) What type of training would you suggest for police officers posted to large-scale public-order duties where crowd management and political pressure frequently coincide?

09 Model Answer

Introduction

Avinash's responsibility is to protect public safety through lawful, impartial and humane action. The central test is the situation on the ground and the applicable legal power, not the political deadline or the presence of cameras. Professional detachment and accountability should govern both immediate decisions and later review.

(a) What are the options available with Avinash in the above situation?

Four options are available, but their merits depend on the factual and legal threshold:

Option	Merits	Demerits
Use force immediately merely to satisfy the telephone deadline	Rapidly meets the demanded clearance target and may avoid immediate friction	An unexplained deadline is not a sufficient legal ground. Unnecessary or disproportionate force risks injury, loss of trust and legal proceedings.
Seek clarification and a written record; verify lawful grounds, competent authority and applicable dispersal procedure	Makes reasons and responsibility traceable while testing legality	Paperwork cannot replace judgment, authorise unlawful force or delay urgent lawful protection against actual danger.
Engage student representatives, explain the position and seek a peaceful resolution or voluntary movement	Supports dignity, communication and de-escalation; may reduce risk to everyone	May take time or fail; requires a realistic contingency and continued threat assessment.
Continue facilitating and monitoring the assembly when no lawful ground for restriction is established	Protects peaceful assembly and avoids punishment for dissent	Passive neglect of a genuine developing danger is unacceptable; continued facilitation still requires active safety management.

(b) What are the ethical and legal dilemmas being faced by Avinash?

The following tensions overlap:

- Obedience vs. constitutional duty: Respect the chain of command while checking the purpose and legality of the direction. Ask for clarification and record the call; do not assume either that an oral instruction is automatically unlawful or that a written instruction is automatically lawful.
- Professional detachment vs. peer pressure: His constables are emotionally charged. Maintaining professional detachment under this internal pressure requires the kind of character-based self-discipline that Aristotle identified as a trained virtue, not a spontaneous response.
- Career security vs. public trust: Raising lawful objections may expose an officer to pressure. Calm reporting, reasons and supervisory support are more defensible than either reflexive compliance or theatrical defiance.
- Speed vs. rights: The 6 p.m. deadline frames the situation as urgent, but urgency cannot suspend constitutional protections.
- Safety and legal exposure: Pushing at the cordon must be assessed as an actual risk without treating the entire crowd as violent. Unlawful force may lead to disciplinary or criminal proceedings according to evidence and law; liability is not automatically proved by an allegation or by an ethically troubling thought.

(c) Which of the options, do you think, would be most appropriate for Avinash to adopt and why?

Combine the corrected Options 2 and 3: verify the lawful basis and responsible authority while immediately engaging the students. If there is no lawful ground to restrict the assembly, continue facilitating it with proportionate safety arrangements. If a genuine danger emerges, respond under the applicable law rather than wait mechanically for paperwork.

Immediate course of action

- Stabilise the scene: instruct constables not to act out of anger, rotate exhausted personnel where feasible, preserve safe access and exit routes and call suitable supervisory or medical support.
- Clarify and record: note the time and substance of the District Magistrate's call, seek reasons and written confirmation, contact the SP and establish which authorised officer or Magistrate will exercise the relevant power.
- Communicate: speak to student representatives, distinguish dissent from harmful conduct, explain any lawful requirement clearly and provide a realistic opportunity to comply where feasible. Use trained mediators and avoid humiliating language.
- Act proportionately: do not disperse the crowd simply to satisfy an arbitrary clock. If intervention becomes legally justified, use the least harmful effective lawful measures suited to the threat, protect bystanders and stop force once its justification ends.

- Account afterwards: arrange medical assistance, preserve footage and duty records, record the reasons and force used, report injuries and enable a fair complaint or inquiry process. Do not conceal misconduct by colleagues.

Why this is preferable

First, it joins constitutional duty with practical judgment: a lawful purpose cannot excuse unlawful means. Second, it creates a truthful record without treating a written order as immunity. Third, it protects public trust and officer safety while allowing necessary lawful intervention. Courts and inquiries may examine both the use of force and failures of supervision; outcomes depend on facts and due process.

(d) What type of training would you suggest for police officers posted to large-scale public-order duties where crowd management and political pressure frequently coincide?

Training for public-order policing must go beyond lathi drills. Concretely:

- Constitutional sensitisation: teach Articles 14, 19 and 21 alongside the actual limits and procedures of BNSS sections 148 and 163. Use judgments and supervised exercises to connect rights with operational decisions.
- Emotional regulation and self-awareness: rehearse provocation, fatigue and uncertainty; practise calm commands, bias awareness and recovery after stress. Use role-play as a complement to instruction rather than assert that one method is always superior.
- Ethics of command: practise identifying and reporting unlawful or ambiguous directions, seeking legal clarification and explaining reasons. A superior's order does not automatically remove the officer's own responsibility; applicable protections and liability must be assessed under law.
- Non-violent techniques: strengthen negotiation, mediation, crowd communication and de-escalation for personnel at all relevant ranks, including supervisors. Competence should be demonstrated before high-pressure deployment.
- Simulation of political pressure: Scenarios where a "senior officer calls" with an ambiguous order should be included, with debrief discussions on the lawful response.
- Peer review after operations: Post-deployment reviews, with footage analysis, reinforce correct behaviour and identify failure points before they become habits.

Conclusion

A democratic police service earns legitimacy by protecting people and explaining its exercise of power. Avinash should neither use force to punish dissent nor ignore a real threat. Calm judgment, lawful authority, proportionate action and honest review put professional detachment and accountability into practice.

Value addition for answer writing

- Constitutional anchor: Article 19(1)(b) protects peaceful, unarmed assembly; Article 19(3) permits specified reasonable restrictions by law. Read this with equality under Article 14 and life and dignity under Article 21.

- Legal distinction: BNSS 148 is the assembly-dispersal provision; BNSS 163 is a separate urgent written-order power. Never turn a sensible request for written confirmation into a universal legal precondition.
- Institutional anchor: use Prakash Singh for structural police reform and PUCL v. State of Maharashtra for investigation safeguards in encounter deaths. Do not present either as proof of the facts in this fictional case.
- Ethical synthesis: Kant supplies duty and dignity; Aristotle supplies trained self-restraint and practical wisdom; Rawls helps test fairness across possible social positions; Ambedkar supports sustained cultivation of constitutional morality.

10 Practice Questions

Question 1: Professional detachment

What do you understand by the term "professional detachment" in public service? Why is it considered essential for a civil servant to maintain it, especially when carrying out duties involving force or coercion?

Source course mapping: 3.4 Dedication to public service

Introduction

Professional detachment is the capacity to make calm, impartial, role-based decisions without allowing anger, personal loyalties or external pressure to take control. It coexists with empathy: a public servant should understand suffering while judging fairly.

Answer

In coercive work, detachment prevents humiliation from becoming retaliation and political urgency from becoming an excuse for unlawful shortcuts. It supports equal treatment, attention to evidence, proportionate action and honest recording. An officer should listen to protesters, assess an actual danger, explain decisions and keep subordinates from acting out of frustration. Detachment also protects the officer: it encourages situational awareness rather than reckless confrontation.

Conclusion

The ideal is humane composure, not emotional numbness. Citizens are more likely to trust authority when restraint and responsiveness are visible together.

Value addition

Use a three-part test: Is my purpose lawful? Is my judgment impartial? Can I explain and review my action? Connect professional detachment with emotional intelligence and constitutional responsibility.

Question 2: Five traits for democratic policing

Identify five ethical traits on which one can plot the performance of a police officer in a democratic society, and justify their inclusion.

Source course mapping: 6.1 Status and problems of public service values

Introduction

A democratic police officer should be assessed on ethical quality as well as operational output. Arrest totals or speed alone cannot show whether public power has been used well.

Answer

1. Integrity: refuse fabricated evidence, concealment and private gain. 2. Impartiality: apply the same standards across political, social and economic identities. 3. Empathy: listen respectfully and recognise the position of victims, bystanders and vulnerable people. 4. Courage with self-restraint: face genuine danger, resist improper pressure and avoid retaliatory force. 5. Accountability: record reasons, preserve evidence, accept fair scrutiny and correct failures. These traits reinforce one another: courage without restraint can become aggression, while empathy without integrity can become favouritism.

Conclusion

Ethical performance combines effective protection with lawful means. Review should use evidence of decisions and conduct, not public popularity or a simplistic league table.

Value addition

Illustrative indicators include accurate incident records, reasoned decisions, respectful communication and compliance with independent review. Complaint counts alone are ambiguous: accessible reporting may increase complaints even while accountability improves.

Question 3: Family, school and civic values

The family and school together shape a young person's attitude toward authority, dissent and civic life. Suggest concrete measures these institutions can take to build a citizenry that both respects the law and questions its misuse.

Source course mapping: 1.5 Role of family, society and educational institutions in inculcating values

Introduction

Respect for law and the capacity to question its misuse are complementary democratic habits. Families and schools can develop both by making fairness part of daily experience.

Answer

Families should explain household rules, apply them consistently, listen to disagreement and model non-violent conflict resolution. They can discuss news without stereotyping whole communities and distinguish criticism of a decision from contempt for people. Schools can use student councils, reasoned classroom debate, peer mediation, service activities and age-appropriate constitutional learning. Teachers should welcome respectful questions, use fair disciplinary procedures and help students check sources before sharing allegations. Visits or discussions with civic institutions can show how lawful petitions and complaints work.

Conclusion

Young people learn civic responsibility when authority itself is fair and answerable. The aim is neither blind obedience nor reflexive defiance, but informed, respectful and courageous participation.

Value addition

Link three levels: example at home, practice at school and participation in the community. Ambedkar's emphasis on cultivating constitutional morality supports sustained habits rather than one ceremonial lesson.

Question 4: Accountability with empathy

Accountability without empathy can become mechanical punishment, while empathy without accountability can become impunity. How should a civil servant balance these two values in day-to-day governance?

Source course mapping: 4.2 Application of emotional intelligence in administration and governance

Introduction

Accountability asks whether a decision can be justified and corrected; empathy helps an administrator understand its human consequences. Good governance needs both within a fair legal process.

Answer

First, listen and establish facts before assigning blame. Distinguish deliberate abuse, negligence, resource constraints and an honest mistake without excusing harm. Apply clear standards consistently, hear affected people and give reasons. Provide support and remedies to those harmed while selecting proportionate corrective measures for established misconduct. For example, a delay caused by a genuine accessibility barrier calls for assistance and system correction, whereas deliberate diversion of a benefit requires investigation and appropriate action. Protect confidentiality and use review or appeal channels.

Conclusion

Empathy should shape how authority is exercised, while accountability preserves fairness and trust. Compassion cannot become favouritism, and discipline should not become unthinking punishment.

Value addition

Use the sequence: listen, verify, explain, decide proportionately, remedy and review. Emotional intelligence improves communication; due process limits arbitrary judgment.

Course-mapping note: The numerical syllabus labels above are retained from the archive teaching sheet; they are not represented as official UPSC paragraph numbering. The model answers are illustrative and can be adapted to the question asked.

11 Sources & Reading Notes

News context and date: PTI report carried by NDTV, 5 September 2026; reports remarks made at the book launch on 4 September. Read allegations as allegations.
https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/cjp-protest-delhi-police-very-distressing-to-see-top-court-judge-slams-police-crackdown-at-jantar-mantar-12004755

Constitution: Government text: Articles 14, 19 and 21. Article 19(3) qualifies the right of peaceful assembly.
https://www.legislative.gov.in/static/uploads/2025/08/7af1daa22d65f9d04c00ae9b9aa5a799.pdf

Current criminal procedure: Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023: sections 148 and 163; official Ministry of Home Affairs text.
https://www.mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/250884_2_english_01042024.pdf

Police reform directions: MHA Annual Report 2011-12, section 12.4.3, records the 22 September 2006 Prakash Singh directions. This historical account is not a current all-state implementation audit.
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International assembly benchmark: UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment 37 on peaceful assembly, especially paragraphs 77-78. An international standard does not replace the relevant Indian statutory power.
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Prepared from the complete supplied archive DOCX and reviewed on 9 October 2026. The cover date has been corrected from 2024 to 2026. The real news context, fictional case, philosophical applications and proposed administrative reforms are separately identified. No finding of criminal guilt or later adjudicative outcome is claimed.

Professional reading note: These materials teach ethics and answer writing. Real public-order decisions require the applicable current law, valid local orders, service rules, operational guidance and competent legal advice.