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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

When Doing the Job Becomes Heroism: The Mundhe Crackdown and the Lowered Bar

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POLITY

SOCIAL ISSUES

GS2

GS4

CURATED & WRITTEN BY

**Bharat Choudhary**

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

 [linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"You are posted as a regulator and you enforce the law strictly. Public applause follows, and so does a transfer order. Was the enforcement worth it if the institution reverts the moment you leave, and what would you have done differently to make it stick?"

Source: [Original editorial](#)

The Indian Express

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THE LIFT LINE

A road gets relaid and an officer becomes a hero. An unsafe restaurant is shut and it becomes a spectacle. We have not raised our administrators. We have lowered what we ask of them, and then applauded the difference.

WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

This is among the best GS4 pieces of the year, and it is also a serious GS2 governance argument, which is a rare combination. It supplies a mechanism, not a sentiment: it explains *why* enforcement fails using the standard **deterrence** variables, and it locates the failure in tenure security rather than in individual character. That is exactly the register the ethics paper rewards, and it maps cleanly onto the Supreme Court's directions on civil service reform.

GS Paper 2: Role of civil services in a democracy; transparency and accountability; regulatory bodies; citizens' charters. **GS Paper 4:** Integrity and impartiality in public service; courage of conviction; ethical concerns in governance; institutional versus individual ethics.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The trigger is the enforcement drive led by the **Commissioner of the Maharashtra Food and Drug Administration, Tukaram Mundhe**, who has held the post **since 2026**, taking charge on **25 May**, and has conducted thousands of inspections, suspended licences and exposed expired stock, pest infestation, unsafe storage and adulteration across large chains, prominent clubs and neighbourhood eateries alike.

The regulatory architecture behind this is the **Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006**, which consolidated a scattered set of laws including the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act, 1954, and created the **Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)** as the **apex** regulator under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. Enforcement at the ground level is a **State subject in practice**: Food Safety Commissioners, Designated Officers and Food Safety Officers operate under the State FDA. The Act provides for licensing, penalties, and, for unsafe food causing death, imprisonment that may extend to life.

The editorial's argument sits in a long Indian tradition of reflection on the "honest officer" as both an inspiration and a symptom. The relevant institutional backdrop is the **Supreme Court's judgment in T.S.R. Subramanian v. Union of India (2013)**, which directed that civil servants be given a **minimum fixed tenure**, that **Civil Services Boards** be constituted to regulate postings and transfers, and that **oral instructions from political superiors be recorded in writing**. Implementation has been uneven across States, and the transfer power remains the principal informal instrument of control over the bureaucracy.

THE ANALYSIS

The editorial's opening move is to refuse the obvious reading. The crackdown is genuinely good and its results are genuinely real. The question it insists on asking is different: *why does this feel remarkable?* Inspecting food businesses and protecting consumers is the reason a food regulator exists. That its exercise produces, in the author's phrase, **the sensation that the state is present** tells us that the sensation had become unusual.

From this follows the central claim: the minimum standard of expected state performance has been revised downward. A road being relaid becomes an achievement. An **encroachment** being cleared becomes a crusade. An unsafe establishment being shut becomes a social media event. None of these is an achievement. Each is a baseline obligation, and treating baselines as achievements is how baselines fall.

The second contribution is a proper deterrence analysis, and it is the part that gives the piece analytical weight. The editorial states the standard condition precisely: **laws work when detection is credible and consequences are swift, certain and severe enough to change behaviour.** India's problem, it argues, is **the unpredictability of enforcement and the negotiability of consequences.** Three consequences follow, and each is quotable:

- **A law that is rarely enforced becomes a suggestion.**
- **A penalty that can be absorbed becomes a cost of doing business.**
- **A prosecution delayed for years becomes a calculated risk.**

This is the correct diagnostic frame, and it explains something a purely moral account cannot: why non-compliance persists among actors who are not especially wicked. If the probability of detection is low and the penalty is fixed in nominal rupees while turnover grows, the expected cost of violation falls every year without anyone deciding that it should.

The third contribution is the most uncomfortable, and it is the one that separates this piece from ordinary commentary about heroic officers. A tough officer, the editorial argues, **can increase the cost of corruption for a sector without eliminating the corruption itself.** For businesses insulated by political relationships or administrative discretion, an enforcement drive may simply raise the price of purchasing protection while leaving the protection racket intact. Citizens observe a crackdown; they do not necessarily obtain a durable change in outcomes. This is a genuinely sophisticated point about why visible enforcement and structural reform are not the same thing.

The fourth is the vulnerability of the civil servant, which is where the diagnosis becomes institutional. Bureaucrats are required to be politically neutral, implement the elected government's policies and serve the public interest. But **postings and transfers can operate as instruments of reward and punishment.** The editorial's formulation of the resulting incentive is exact: **when putting one's neck out can shorten a tenure while keeping one's head down carries little professional cost, survival becomes rational.**

Note the word *rational*. The editorial is not accusing the average officer of cowardice. It is describing an incentive structure under which passivity is the dominant strategy, which is a system property rather than a character property.

The fifth is that responsibility is distributed, and the editorial distributes it without flinching. Politicians own the institutional consequences where administrative independence is subject to *patronage*. Bureaucrats cannot claim innocence either: officials who bend rules for convenience, cultivate patrons or stay silent under unlawful pressure sustain the machinery they may later criticise. The observation that **some discover the language of institutional integrity only after retirement** is sharp, and the follow-up is sharper: **a system in which public-interest courage becomes safest after retirement has a design flaw.**

The sixth is the cultural argument, which is unusually perceptive. The editorial invokes the **Singham archetype**: years of watching the fearless officer who ignores pressure and delivers instant justice have conditioned us to cast any real officer showing institutional courage in the same role. The irony is that the fictional hero exists precisely because the system does not work, and celebrating the real one reinforces the belief that a hero is what the situation requires. **A republic cannot depend on finding a Singham every time the system needs to function.**

Finally, the editorial insists on a limit that many enforcement enthusiasts skip: regulatory toughness must remain lawful. A strong regulator must be proportionate and accountable, and due process cannot be sacrificed. But nor can due process become a refuge for businesses knowingly endangering consumers. Holding both halves of that sentence is what distinguishes an ethical position from a populist one.

DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

The immediate case:

- **Tukaram Mundhe**, Commissioner, **Maharashtra Food and Drug Administration**, in charge since **2026**, from **25 May**
- Thousands of inspections, licence suspensions, and exposure of expired food, pest infestation, unsafe storage and adulteration across large chains, clubs and small eateries

Statutory framework:

- **Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006**: consolidated the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act, 1954 and other laws; created the **FSSAI** under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
- State-level enforcement machinery: **Food Safety Commissioner, Designated Officers, Food Safety Officers**
- Penalties range from monetary fines to imprisonment, extending to life for unsafe food resulting in death
- **Eat Right India** movement, the FSSAI's demand-side and behaviour-change complement to enforcement

Civil service accountability:

- **Article 311**: protection against dismissal, removal or reduction in rank without inquiry; note that it does **not** protect against transfer
- **Article 310**: doctrine of pleasure
- **Article 312**: All India Services
- **All India Services (Conduct) Rules, 1968; Central Civil Services (Conduct) Rules, 1964**
- **T.S.R. Subramanian v. Union of India (2013)**: Supreme Court directed **fixed minimum tenure**, constitution of **Civil Services Boards** for postings and transfers, and the **recording of oral instructions** in writing
- **Prakash Singh v. Union of India (2006)**: the parallel directions for police reform, including fixed tenure for the Director General of Police and a State Security Commission
- **Second Administrative Reforms Commission (2005-2009)**, chaired by **Veerappa Moily**; its 10th report, *Refurbishing of Personnel Administration*, addressed tenure security and accountability
- **Right to Information Act, 2005; Whistle Blowers Protection Act, 2014** (passed, but its operationalisation remains incomplete)
- **Citizens' charters** and the **Sevottam** framework for service delivery standards

Deterrence variables to cite:

- **Probability of detection, certainty of consequence, severity relative to gain**, and **celerity**, the speed with which the consequence follows the act

THE DEBATE

The strongest case against the editorial is that it undervalues demonstration effects.

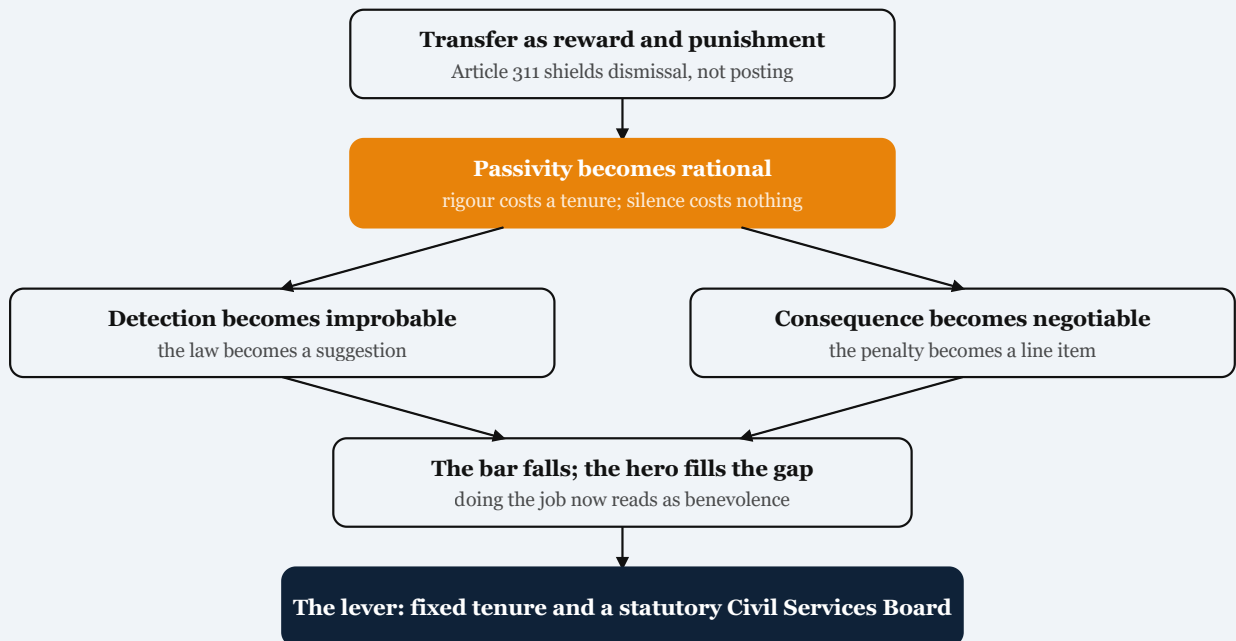
Institutional reform rarely arrives before a public constituency demands it, and public constituencies are usually created by visible examples. An officer who shows that enforcement is possible changes what citizens believe they may ask for. Treating such an officer as evidence of decay, rather than as the first move in a sequence, risks a counsel of despair that discourages the very people whose example builds the political demand for durable reform.

A second objection is that the editorial's implied standard is unattainable. No regulatory system anywhere achieves uniform enforcement. Selective, publicised enforcement is a recognised and rational strategy under resource constraints: it generates general deterrence at a fraction of the cost of universal inspection. On this view the Maharashtra drive is not a symptom of failure but an efficient use of scarce inspection capacity.

The reply to both is the editorial's own test, which is the right one: what happens when the cameras leave? Selective enforcement generates deterrence only if violators cannot predict that it is temporary. If every regulated business knows that intensity tracks the tenure of one officer, the rational response is to wait rather than to comply, and the deterrent value collapses. The four questions the editorial poses are the operational form of this test: **Will enforcement survive the officer? Will repeat offenders face consequences that change their economics? Will citizens be able to complain without retaliation? Will the next commissioner inherit an institution that functions with the same rigour?**

The most difficult tension is between rigour and due process. Public enthusiasm for a crackdown is enthusiasm for outcomes, and it can easily become impatience with procedure. A regulator who cuts procedural corners produces short-term compliance and long-term litigation, and hands the regulated industry a legitimate grievance. The editorial's insistence that toughness remain lawful is not a hedge; it is the condition under which enforcement is sustainable at all.

DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS



The chain starts at tenure, not at character. Because the transfer power sits outside Article 311's protection, rigour is personally costly and passivity is free, and every downstream failure of deterrence follows from that single asymmetry. Fix the tenure and the heroism becomes unnecessary, which is the point.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS

Three frames, and the first is the one to carry into the ethics paper.

First, distinguish individual ethics from institutional ethics. Individual ethics asks what a good officer should do. Institutional ethics asks what arrangement makes good conduct sustainable for an ordinary officer. A system that requires exceptional courage in order to function normally has already failed, because exceptional courage is by definition not reliably available. **The measure of an institution is what it produces from average people, not what it produces from its best.** This is the single most useful move available in a GS4 answer, and this editorial is the cleanest illustration of it you will find.

Second, the incentive-compatibility test. Whenever you are asked to evaluate an administrative reform, ask whether it makes the right behaviour the *individually* rational behaviour. Codes of conduct, oaths and training address motivation. Tenure security, transparent transfer processes, published performance data and protected complaint channels address incentive. Only the second class survives changes of personnel. Apply this to police reform, to regulatory independence, to audit and to the judiciary.

Third, the normalisation-of-deficiency frame. Standards do not collapse in a single decision. They erode when each small deviation is accepted without consequence until the deviation becomes the baseline. The editorial's diagnosis of citizens who have been "beaten into accepting" unsafe food, encroachments and broken roads as the price of everyday life is a description of exactly this process operating on public expectation rather than on official behaviour. The transferable insight is that **public tolerance is itself an input into administrative quality**, which is why the editorial ends by locating the indictment in *We, the People*.

For an interview, the most honest answer to the celebration question is that applause is not the problem; **dependence** on the applauded individual is. Praise the officer, and then ask what would have to be true for the next one to have no need of praise.

WAY FORWARD

Stop searching for the honest officer and build institutions that make integrity cheap. The operational content of that phrase is tenure. Implement the **T.S.R. Subramanian** directions fully: a statutory **minimum fixed tenure**, a **Civil Services Board** with published reasons for premature transfers, and mandatory recording of oral instructions.

Calibrate penalties to turnover, not to fixed rupee amounts. A penalty denominated in nominal terms depreciates automatically. A penalty proportionate to revenue cannot be absorbed as a routine cost, which is the only condition under which severity actually deters.

Publish enforcement data as a matter of course. Inspections conducted, violations found, licences suspended, prosecutions launched and their outcomes, reported by district and by month. Published data makes administrative failure visible without requiring a crusading officer, and it makes a successor's slackening measurable.

Protect the complainant, not merely the whistle-blower inside government. Citizens will not report an encroachment or an unsafe kitchen if reporting means confronting a local network. Anonymous, trackable complaint channels with mandated response timelines are the demand-side complement to inspection.

Make regulatory conduct proportionate and appealable. Toughness that is lawful survives **judicial review** and outlives its author. Toughness that cuts procedural corners supplies the regulated industry with the grievance that eventually reverses it.

Judge the reform by succession. The honest test of the Maharashtra drive is not what happens this year. It is whether the next Commissioner inherits an institution that behaves the same way, and that is a question about systems, not about people.

PYQ LINKAGE AND PRACTICE

Connects to standing UPSC themes on **the role of civil services in a democracy, transparency and accountability, regulatory bodies**, and, in GS4, **integrity, impartiality, courage of conviction and institutional versus individual ethics**. Pairs naturally with the police reform directions in *Prakash Singh* and the Second ARC's personnel administration report.

Practice question: *“An institution that requires exceptional courage in order to function normally has already failed. Critically examine this proposition with reference to regulatory enforcement and civil service tenure in India.”* (250 words)

Sources: *The Indian Express, FSSAI, Department of Personnel and Training*

Source: When Doing the Job Becomes Heroism: The Mundhe Crackdown and the Lowered Bar — Ujiyari.com |
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KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

Writing in the Indian Express, a corporate advisor argues that the public excitement around the Maharashtra Food and Drug Administration Commissioner's crackdown on unsafe food establishments is a symptom rather than a success, because it reveals how far the expected minimum standard of state performance has fallen: when doing one's job becomes worthy of celebration, the indictment is not of the officer but of the system and ultimately of the citizenry.



SUPPORTING

- Thousands of inspections, licence suspensions and the exposure of expired food, pest infestation and adulteration across large chains, prominent clubs and neighbourhood eateries produced something rare in public life, the sensation that the state is present, which is precisely the problem, because inspecting food businesses is exactly what a food regulator exists to do.
- The deterrence failure is analytical rather than moral: laws work when detection is credible and consequences are swift, certain and severe, whereas in India enforcement is unpredictable and consequences negotiable, so a rarely enforced law becomes a suggestion, an absorbable penalty becomes a cost of doing business, and a prosecution delayed for years becomes a calculated risk.
- A tough officer can raise the price of corruption in a sector without dismantling it, because for businesses protected by political patronage or administrative discretion, stricter enforcement may simply increase the cost of purchasing protection while leaving the arrangement intact.
- The structural vulnerability lies in the civil servant's tenure: where postings and transfers operate as instruments of reward and punishment, putting one's neck out can shorten a tenure while keeping one's head down carries almost no professional cost, which makes silence the rational choice and integrity an act of personal sacrifice.



COUNTER

Individual initiative is not the enemy of institutional reform but often its only available precursor, since demonstration effects change public expectations and create political demand for enforcement that did not previously exist; dismissing a genuine crackdown as

theatre risks discouraging the very officers whose example builds the constituency that later sustains institutional change.

**WAY FORWARD**

Stop searching for the honest officer and build institutions that make integrity easy: fixed minimum tenures with a statutory Civil Services Board governing transfers as directed in T.S.R. Subramanian, published enforcement data that makes administrative failure visible, penalties calibrated to turnover rather than fixed sums so they cannot be absorbed as a cost, protected and anonymous citizen complaint channels, and proportionate, accountable regulatory conduct so that toughness remains lawful.


MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK
QUESTION

The celebration of individual officers for routine enforcement is evidence of institutional decay rather than administrative excellence. Critically examine this proposition with reference to regulatory enforcement in India, and suggest reforms that would make professional integrity structurally sustainable rather than personally heroic. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

The public response to strict enforcement by a food safety regulator in Maharashtra has been enthusiastic, and the enthusiasm is itself the subject worth analysing. Inspecting food businesses, suspending licences and acting against adulteration is the defining statutory function of a food regulator, not a discretionary act of courage, and a society that treats it as heroism has revised downward what it expects the state to deliver.

BODY

The mechanism of decay is well understood in regulatory theory. Deterrence depends on three variables: the probability of detection, the certainty of consequence, and the severity of that consequence relative to the gain.

India's enforcement fails on the first two rather than the third. Where inspection is episodic, a law becomes advisory; where penalties are fixed in nominal terms, they become an operating cost; and where prosecution stretches over years, non-compliance becomes a manageable risk with a calculable expected value.

Individual enforcement disturbs this equilibrium temporarily without resetting it, and may even leave the underlying arrangement intact by raising the price of protection rather than removing it. Underneath sits the tenure problem.

Article 311 protects a civil servant against dismissal but not against transfer, and where postings function as reward and punishment, the cost asymmetry is stark: rigour risks a truncated tenure while passivity is professionally costless. The Supreme Court addressed precisely this in *T.S.R. Subramanian v. Union of India* (2013), directing fixed minimum tenures, a Civil Services Board to regulate transfers and the recording of oral instructions, and implementation across States has been partial at best.

CONCLUSION

The remedy is structural rather than personal. A republic cannot depend on locating an exceptional officer each time a system is required to function.

Fixed tenures with statutory transfer oversight, turnover-linked penalties, published enforcement data and protected complaint channels would make ordinary integrity ordinary, which is the only condition under which enforcement survives the officer who began it.

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CURATED & WRITTEN BY

Bharat Choudhary

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

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