Ethics behind Sting operations

What is the issue?

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A Kerala minister’s exit after a sting operation spurs a debate on privacy v/s public interest.

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What is the operation about?

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- A Malayalam television channel had broadcasted an audio recording allegedly of the then Transport Minister of Kerala purportedly seeking sexual favours from a woman who had come to him for assistance.
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- The women side of the conversation was not put out.
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- Later it was found that the woman journalist with the channel had conducted the sting, suggesting this was in reality a kind of honey trap.
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- The CEO of the channel went on air to render an apology, presumably for misrepresenting matters.
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- The CEO and eight other employees from the channel have been booked under sections of the Information Technology Act and the Indian Penal Code.
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What is the ethics behind sting operation?

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- The ethics of sting operations is among the most fiercely debated issues in journalism.
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- Some generally agreed guidelines are -
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- Any such operation that uses false pretences, with its necessary violation of the interviewee’s trust and privacy, must serve a larger public interest that far outweighs such violation.
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- It also must be used as a last resort, when there is no other means of acquiring the information sought.
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- It must be the outcome of considerable editorial deliberation.
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- They should never be intended to entrap or induce people into committing wrongdoing or embarrassing them badly.
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- It is imperative that publications and broadcasters explain vital public interest for conducting them.
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- A sting cannot be an excuse to grab eyeballs with immodest and essentially private content, or a shortcut to make a point merely by shocking the reader or viewer.
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- Doing so risks eroding that goodwill and leaving journalists facing harsh charges.
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Source: The Hindu

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