

1. The Right to Information forms the philosophical core of transparent governance. Elucidate.

Introduction:

Right to Information (RTI) Act has played role in ensuring transparency and accountability in the administration, empowering people with information and increase their participation in the governance of the country.

Body

RTI, 2005 has brought a paradigm shift in the transparency and accountability in India. This is evident in form of an estimated 5-8 million RTI queries filed every year. Transparency as a general principle of probity refers to openness in the working of government.



The Right to Information forms the philosophical core of transparent governance:

- Right to Information is the most effective instrument to **check corruption** where the citizen has the right to take the initiatives to seek information from the state and thereby **promotes openness, transparency and accountability** in administration by making the government more open to public scrutiny.
- It also empowered the people to seek definite and direct answer from the officials of their works or lack of it thus facilitating and encouraging the **participation of common people** in the process of good governance.
- The Right to Information act is intended to promote accountability and transparency in government by making the process of government **decision making more open**. Though some departments of the Union government are exempted from this Act but the information can be sought if it is concerned with violation of human rights. Even the information from the private authority can be sought only through the controlling authority and

controlling authority will send the notice to the institution concerned under section 11 of the Act.

- The larger use of RTI has been seen in areas of women empowerment, youth development, democratic rights, rights and entitlements of the underprivileged, abuse of executive discretion and strengthening of participative and good governance.
- RTI Act democratized the information and decentralized the power. Power no more remains confined to select few, rather it was made available equally to all the citizens.
- RTI Act has lent voice to the aspirations of ordinary citizens in issues of governance. It gave the common people a defining power to shape the government schemes and policies.
- It empowered the people to **question, audit, review, examine, and assess government acts and decisions** to ensure that these are consistent with the principles of public interests, good governance and justice.
- Of the millions of applications for information, less than 5 per cent have been denied information under various exemption categories. So, accountability has invariably led to efficiency and a sense of responsibility among government officials.

Success stories of RTI

- **Adarsh Society Scam:** a six-storey building meant for the widows of Kargil war heroes, turned into a 31-storey high-rise called Adarsh Housing Society. The location became the abode of politicians, bureaucrats, and top military officers. The nexus was exposed by RTI activists Simpreet Singh and Yogacharya Anandji.
- **23,000 loan fraud cases in past 5 years:** Replying to an RTI, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had informed that 23,000 cases of fraud have been reported by various banks in the past five years, which involved Rs 1 lakh crore.

Conclusion

Thus, the impact of RTI in good governance is palpable with increase in participation of various stakeholders, improved transparency and accountability.

2. Would you support the idea of legally enforceable code of ethics for bureaucrats and politicians? Substantiate your views.

Introduction

Code of ethics represents certain values and norms that standardise one's behaviour in different aspects of life. It leads to morality in actions and thus ensures fairness and justice to all. It is often seen that civil servants and politicians do not adhere to required moral values.

Body

Need for Code of Ethics:

- There is opportunism and playing of games to fulfil their personal gains.
- Political promises, action agendas remain just statement of intent after coming to power. They remain among poor people only before elections, and forget their concerns later.
- Misuse of political, official positions and power is often seen. e.g. abusive behaviour by an MLA with civic officer or Senior officers making junior officials cleaning their shoes.
- Many corruption scandals unearthed such as in giving accreditation to educational institutes, coal-scam, conflict of interest, visit to foreign countries on public funds etc show a nexus between civil servants and politicians.
- Horse trading, defections often show lack of integrity and organizational ethics. Officials taking prejudiced decisions or favouring an ideology while discharging official duties.
- Internal democracy lacking in parties, Criminalization of politics, black money being used in elections, official being caught taking bribes and amassing huge properties.

Benefits of having legally enforced code of ethics:

- It helps one in situations of dilemma. One may follow the code and function ethically.
- Sets benchmark for appropriate behaviour. Provides a framework for reference in case discretionary powers are to be used.
- Would ensure increased accountability and transparency among politicians and bureaucrats.
- The relevance is more in present society where values and ethics are on decline either seemingly because of greater awareness or in reality
- Helps curb the politician-bureaucrat nexus which often lead to crony-capitalism, scams etc.
- This will have trickle-down effect on the society and would ensure Inclusive and sustainable growth.
- This would ensure public confidence, trust on government and will result in effective and efficient implementation of public policies.

However, there exist certain limitations:

- A code of ethics may be defined exhaustively but its implementation may not be that effective.
- Not everything can be defined by a code.

- Code of ethics may not be updated as per the needs of the present society.
- A code of ethics can tackle corrupt mind but not corrupt heart.
- The one who has to ensure that the code isn't violated, may be corrupt or unethical.
- Violating the code of ethics may burden the judiciary.

Considering the current issues in politics and governance, Code of Ethics seems to be right choice and time has come for its implementation. Still there are certain other things that needs to done like, right ethical training, value based education at school and college levels, inducting righteous people in the system.

Conclusion

Though legal enforcement has potential to resolve the crisis but fear of law is not a sustainable solution. The values should be inculcated in the persons to have a long term effect.

3.What is a citizen charter? Does it really add any value to the organisational work culture? Critically examine.

Introduction:

The citizen's charter is a written, voluntary declaration by service providers that outlines the commitment of the organization towards standard, quality and timeframe of service delivery along with grievance redress mechanism. This also includes expectations of the Organization from the Citizen/Client for fulfilling the commitment of the Organization.

Body:

An ideal citizen's charter must contain:

- Vision and mission statement of the organization.
- Information about the nature and quality of service delivery.
- The time frame within which the service must be delivered.
- Expectations from the client.
- Grievance redressal infrastructure in case of noncompliance.

Importance of citizen's charter for organizational work culture:

The Citizens' Charter is an instrument which seeks to make an organization transparent, accountable and citizen-friendly.

- It enhances accountability by providing citizens with a clear understanding of service delivery standards, including timetables, user fees for services, and options for grievance redress.

- It promotes good governance. It increases organizational effectiveness and performance by making a public commitment to adhere to measurable service delivery standards.
- It creates a way for both internal and external actors to objectively monitor service delivery performance. It ensures better service quality and grievance redressal.
- It creates a more professional and client-responsive environment for service delivery as it is citizen-centric in nature, keeping in mind the needs of citizens.
- It fosters improvements in staff morale.
- It ushers in a regime of transparency and openness through Rules, Procedure, Schemes, and Grievances. It decreases opportunities for corruption and graft by increasing transparency and educating citizens about their rights.
- It increases government revenues by ensuring that the money citizens pay for services goes into the government's coffers (and not into employees' pockets).
- Purpose of the Citizens' Charter is to empower the citizen in relation to public service delivery.

The Citizen charter, not an effective instrument in adding value to the organization because:

- **Just a formality:** The general perception of organisations which formulated Citizens' Charters was that the exercise was to be carried out because there was a direction from the top. It thus became one of the routine activities of the organisation and had no focus. They are nothing but pious statements of intention which do not contain any objective goals.
- **Overburden Organization:** Departments are already overburdened. Charter leads to diversion of department time from works of public importance.
- **Lack of trained staff:** Staff doesn't have proper training and orientation and are unaware of the spirit and content of the Charter.
- **Lack of awareness:** It remains unreached to the public due to the lack of awareness. Awareness campaigns to educate clients about the Charter were not conducted systematically.
- **Unrealistic Charter:** In some cases, the standards/time norms of services mentioned in Citizens' Charter were either too lax or too tight and were, therefore, unrealistic and created an unfavourable impression on the clients of the Charter.
- **No legal backing:** The Citizen's Charter is not legally enforceable and, therefore, is non-justifiable. This had made them toothless tool to the citizens.

- **Unilateral drafting:** Further they are drafted unilaterally by the organisation without the involvement of stakeholders which is defeating the purpose of citizen charters.

Way forward:

- Involving the citizens in the making of the charter.
- Awareness campaigns to educate clients about the Charter to be conducted systematically.
- Employees need to be trained, sensitized and deviant behaviour should be punished.
- Statutory backing should be provided to citizen charter.

Conclusion:

Governance still needs to be improved as the aspirations of people have gone up and the government cannot run away from its responsibility. Therefore, with effective implementation strategy, simplified meticulous design and deployment of enthusiastic staff and with adequate awareness campaigns, possible external audits we can go a long way in making Citizen Charter a tool for better governance.

4. The government, through the Motor Vehicle Amendment Act, has substantially increased the penalty for traffic rule violations. What is your opinion of this step? We lack basic facilities including good roads and related services. Is it not unethical on part of the government to have done this? Comment.

Introduction:

The Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act 2019 has come into force today, and with its roll-out come higher penalties for traffic offenses. These rules play an important part seeing that some of the most unsafe roads when it comes to driving are witnessed in India.

Body:

- The new Act brings with it a number of stringent norms and high penalties for violations like driving without license, over speeding, drunken driving, speeding, riding without helmets etc. These forms of irresponsible road sense, negligence of safety measures cause a lot of accidents. Thus, now with higher fines, citizens will be more responsible and careful.
- It includes a provision that mandates automated fitness testing for vehicles. This proposal would help reduce corruption in the transport department and improve road worthiness of the vehicle.
- Reports say that more than 1.50 lakh people die and 5 lakh people injured annually in road accidents. Stricter rules will definitely result in a much lesser cause for road accidents.

However, in the backdrop of government lacking in provision of good roads and related amenities, these steps seem to exert all road safety responsibilities on citizens. Though not unethical to implement these penalties, there are severe shortcomings by governing authorities which include:

- In the tussle between who will bear the cost of electronic monitoring of roads and highways to improve safety, more than often ends up in a delay to implement the same.
- There is an urgent need for improving the road design through engineering design corrections. For example: Several road accidents have been caused due to faulty roads and poorly maintained potholes.
- Use of inferior materials and corrupt constructions which result in road damages and accelerated destruction of pavements, dividers etc inculcate a sense of wrong usage of taxpayers' money.

Thus, though the act has a number of forward-looking ideas, which was due for so long, it requires both sides of the problem to responsibly undertake the measures- Government authorities need to ensure safer roads construction, provision of additional measures related to it and citizens need to be careful and avoid being negligent on their part.

Conclusion:

India requires a hefty penalty to make people deter from breaking the law, as seen in most cases. However, precautions must be taken from the government too on their part, to ensure better roads, higher construction and maintenance standards, and timely precautionary measures to avoid increasing the difficulties for citizens' road behaviour.

5. Can technology alone address the problems related to utilisation of public funds in India? Critically examine.

Introduction

The expenditure of the central government has increased from Rs 3.3 lakh crore in 2000-01 to Rs 24.4 lakh crore in 2018-19. This translates to an expenditure of about Rs 20,000 per person. With the objective of improving the quality of life of citizens, these public funds are spent across various sectors such as defence, security, agriculture, health, social welfare, education, and infrastructure.

Body

Role of technology in governance:

- **Information:** Making available to the public with objective and reliable information on the activities of public authorities, which strengthens the credibility of the state and its politics.

- **Interaction:** Interaction and ongoing dialogue with the citizens of the state and public institutions, as well as the necessary level of public control over activities of state bodies and organizations;
- **Services:** Integration of information resources and services of state and local governments to strengthen national information space;
- **Optimizing resources:** Improving public administration, optimizing the structure of the state apparatus, reducing the financial and material costs for its maintenance, a gradual transfer of government services that have value in a system of government online services that meets the real needs of citizens and organizations;
- **Financial support:** Effectively support the economic activities of public entities that are engaged in economic activities, allowing them to effectively integrate into a national and global economic space.

Measures to address the problems related to utilisation of public funds in India:

- **Economic justice:** The allocation of funds in welfare schemes like poverty alleviation, subsidies and efficient targeting of the beneficiaries to direct these funds brings income equality. Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Scheme for instance provides LPG subsidies under Direct Benefit Transfer avoiding leakages and fraudulent resulted in economic independence to women.
- **Social Justice:** public money can be well spent on upliftment of weaker sections specially SC, ST, women and old age. Example Sukanya Smridhi yojana, Start up India.
- **Equity:** More focus should be given on equity compared to equality; equity justifies the problems and solutions.
- **Members of Parliament:** MPs have a core role in examining how this money is being raised, how it is planned to be spent, and whether such spending would lead to desired outcomes.
- **MPs hold the government accountable for use of public funds in two stages:** Firstly, before the beginning of each year, they scrutinise and approve the Union Budget which contains the expenditure priorities, taxation proposals, and borrowing requirements for the upcoming financial year. Second, they examine the audit reports on the approved spending to see whether the allocation was used effectively and appropriately.
- **Financial Committees:** They will scrutinise and exercise parliamentary control over government expenditure and table reports in Parliament.
- **Accountability:** Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office
- **Targeted approach:** For the sake of funds being availed only by the beneficiary, it is important to have a targeted approach so that no leaks occur in between.
- **Transparency and openness:** Interaction and cooperation with government authorities in other countries and international organizations.

- **Objectivity:** In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

Conclusion

Taxpayer's money should be use for public development works not for a private and personal dispute because defamation/slander, making wrong statements, maligning anybody is totally a personal offence or a personal civil case.

