Q.1) "The success of e-governance in India hinges more on inclusion than on innovation." Discuss with reference to the digital divide and the challenges of last-mile delivery. (150 words, 10 marks)

Introduction

According to the **World Bank**, e-governance involves the **use of information technologies** to improve the delivery of government services, transparency, and participation. In India, its success now depends more on digital inclusion than mere technological innovation.

Body

Why the Success of E-Governance Hinges More on Inclusion than Innovation

1. **Large Digital Divide:** Only about **26% of rural women** use mobile internet, as per **GSMA (2022)**. Without bridging this gap, innovations reach only a fraction of the population.
2. **Low Digital Literacy:** Under PMGDISHA, about **6.39 crore** rural individuals have been trained by 2024. However, overall digital literacy remains limited, constraining the use of platforms like DigiLocker or UMANG.
3. **Infrastructure Gaps in Remote Areas:** Only around **30%** of India's 6.5 lakh villages have broadband connectivity under BharatNet as of 2025. This renders services like telemedicine or online education inaccessible to many.
4. **Exclusion of Marginalised Communities:** Aadhaar-based services often fail for the elderly, disabled, and tribal populations, resulting in denial of entitlements like pensions or subsidised food.
5. **Language and Accessibility Barriers:** Many platforms are English-centric and lack accessibility features, making it difficult for linguistic minorities and persons with disabilities to use them effectively.

Why Innovation Is Also Important

1. **Improved Efficiency and Transparency:** Platforms like **GEM and e-Courts** reduce corruption and streamline processes in procurement and judiciary.
2. **Real-Time Governance:** Innovations like the **JAM trinity** (Jan Dhan, Aadhaar, Mobile) have enabled real-time Direct Benefit Transfers, saving over ₹2 lakh crore in leakages.
3. **Scalable Solutions:** Modular platforms like **DigiLocker** allow large-scale service delivery across ministries and states efficiently.

Government Initiatives Promoting Inclusion in E-Governance

1. **PMGDISHA:** Aims to make 6 crore rural households digitally literate; over **6.39 crore individuals** trained by 2024.
2. **BharatNet:** Seeks to provide high-speed broadband to all gram panchayats; as of 2025, **only about 30% of villages** have functional connectivity.
3. **Common Service Centres (CSCs):** Over 5 lakh centres offer assisted digital services to bridge the last-mile service gap.
4. **Meri Pehchaan Portal:** A unified login platform launched in 2023 for simplified and inclusive access to multiple digital services.

5. **Digital Inclusion Fellowship Programme (2024):** Launched by MeitY to train digital ambassadors in remote and underserved regions.

Way Forward

1. **Localised, Multilingual Interfaces:** Ensure platforms are accessible in regional languages and designed to cater to all ability groups.
2. **Focus on Community-Based Training:** Strengthen digital literacy through panchayats, NGOs, and schools to foster grassroots participation.
3. **Offline Support for Online Services:** Provide hybrid service models (tele-assistance, CSCs) to ensure universal access.
4. **Monitor and Audit Inclusion Metrics:** Track digital inclusion outcomes alongside innovation KPIs in every e-governance initiative.

Conclusion

While innovation drives potential, inclusion ensures impact. As noted by the **2nd ARC**, inclusive e-governance empowers the poorest and strengthens democracy by making public services accessible, accountable, and equitable for all.

Q.2) "Civil services in India must evolve from a system of status and seniority to one of performance and public accountability." Critically examine the need for civil services reforms in this context and suggest a roadmap for systemic transformation. (150 words, 10 marks)

Introduction

Envisioned as the **steel frame of the nation**, India's civil services—under **Articles 309 to 311** of the Constitution—must now evolve to meet rising public expectations through reforms ensuring efficiency, accountability, and citizen-centric governance.

Body

Need for Civil Services Reforms

1. **Lack of Performance-Based Evaluation:** Promotions and postings often depend on seniority over competence, lowering motivation and efficiency.
   Example: The **2nd ARC** recommended replacing the Annual Confidential Report (ACR) with a more outcome-based and transparent performance appraisal system.
2. **Political Interference:** Frequent transfers and political pressure undermine independent decision-making and administrative neutrality.
   Example: The **2013 *T.S.R. Subramanian vs. Union of India*** case led the Supreme Court to direct fixed tenures for civil servants to curb arbitrary transfers.
3. **Generalist vs. Specialist Debate:** Excess reliance on generalists in technical fields hampers effective policy design and execution.
   Example: The **Hota Committee (2004)** emphasized the need for domain specialisation to improve service delivery in sectors like health and energy.

4. **Red Tape and Procedural Delays:** Bureaucratic hurdles stifle innovation, delay projects, and burden citizens and entrepreneurs.
   Example: India ranked **63rd** in the **World Bank's 2020 Ease of Doing Business report**, with delays in permits and approvals cited as key barriers.
5. **Poor Grievance Redressal and Citizen Engagement:** Limited accessibility of civil servants weakens accountability and public trust.
   Example: The **2nd ARC** advocated setting up **Sevottam-compliant citizen charters** and grievance redressal mechanisms to enhance public service delivery.

Recent Measures and Reforms Undertaken

1. **Mission Karmayogi:** Focuses on capacity building through competency-based training and performance-linked learning outcomes for civil servants.
2. **SPARROW (Smart Performance Appraisal Report Recording Online Window):** Digitised and time-bound system for appraisal of civil servants to improve transparency and accountability.
3. **360-Degree Evaluation System:** Feedback from peers, subordinates, and stakeholders to assess leadership and behavioural competencies in senior appointments.
4. **Tenure-Based Appointments:** Introduction of fixed tenure for key positions to reduce arbitrary transfers and enhance policy continuity.
5. Several expert committees, including the **Surendra Nath Committee and Hota Committee** have repeatedly emphasized the need for performance-linked promotions, fixed tenures, citizen charters, and ethical training to ensure accountability and efficiency.

Way Forward

1. **Performance-Based Incentives and Promotions:** Introduce measurable key performance indicators (KPIs) linked to outcomes and citizen satisfaction.
2. **Lateral Entry and Specialisation:** Promote entry of domain experts to infuse new ideas, skills, and competition in the bureaucracy.
3. **Protection from Arbitrary Transfers:** Enforce independent civil service boards as per Supreme Court guidelines in *T.S.R. Subramanian* **case (2013)**.
4. **Stronger Accountability Mechanisms:** Regular audits, social accountability tools, and public feedback loops can make the system more responsive.
5. **Ethical and Empathy-Based Training:** Strengthen values of public service through case-based learning and real-time exposure to grassroots challenges.

Conclusion

Civil service reform is vital for a responsive, efficient, and accountable state. As highlighted by the **2nd ARC**, neutrality must be complemented with measurable performance to serve the needs of a fast-changing and aspirational India.

Q.3) Do you think the autonomy of the Central Information Commission has been diluted in recent years, thereby weakening its role as a transparency watchdog? Substantiate your answer with reference to legislative and executive concerns. (150 words, 10 marks)

Introduction

The Central Information Commission **(CIC)**, established under the **RTI Act, 2005**, is central to India's transparency regime. However, recent legislative amendments and executive actions raise serious concerns about its institutional autonomy and effectiveness.

Body

Mandate and Role of CIC

1. **Final Appellate Authority:** It is the final authority to hear appeals related to RTI applications at the central level.
2. **Ensures Government Accountability:** By adjudicating on disclosure of information, it acts as a transparency watchdog.
3. **Quasi-Judicial Powers:** It has powers of a civil court for summoning records and witnesses.
4. **Promotes Awareness:** CIC promotes RTI awareness and capacity-building among public authorities and citizens.
5. **Annual Reporting:** Submits annual reports to Parliament on the implementation of the RTI Act.

However, several legislative and executive developments have raised concerns over dilution of the Commission's independence.

Concerns Regarding Autonomy

1. **RTI Amendment Act, 2019:** Made **tenure and salary** of CIC members subject to executive rules, **removing parity** with Election Commissioners and eroding institutional independence.
2. **Executive Discretion in Appointments:** Lack of transparency in selection and delays in appointments has led to vacancies and pendency.
3. **Downgrading Status:** Reduction of CIC's stature from that of a Supreme Court judge to a bureaucrat-level post lowers its authority.
4. **Lack of Compliance Powers:** CIC cannot enforce its orders or penalize effectively, diminishing its oversight role.
5. **Pendency of Cases:** Over **20,000 appeals** pending with CIC indicates weakened capacity and public trust.

These concerns directly impact the effectiveness of CIC in ensuring transparency and public accountability.

Impact on Institutional Role

1. **Erosion of Public Trust:** Perceived loss of independence reduces confidence in the institution's impartiality.
2. **Chilling Effect on RTI Usage:** Weaker enforcement deters citizens from filing RTIs.

3. **Inconsistent Decision-Making:** Loss of status and weakened autonomy may encourage self-censorship among Commissioners.
4. **Undermines RTI Ecosystem:** The weakening of CIC sets a precedent that may dilute state information commissions too.

Restoring institutional credibility requires legal safeguards and procedural transparency.

Way Forward

1. **Revisit the RTI Amendments:** Reassess the **2019** changes to restore fixed tenure and parity in status, reinforcing autonomy.
2. **Ensure Transparent Appointments:** Establish a time-bound and open process for selection of Commissioners.
3. **Strengthen CIC's Powers:** Provide legal backing to ensure enforcement of its decisions.
4. **Digital and Citizen Engagement:** Promote proactive disclosure and reduce reliance on appeal by improving public access to information.

Conclusion

As the **2nd ARC** observed, strong information commissions are pillars of democratic accountability. **Safeguarding CIC's autonomy** is vital to ensuring transparency, empowering citizens, and upholding the constitutional promise of participative governance.

Q.4) "Social audits empower citizens to hold institutions accountable and rebuild trust in public service delivery." Examine their role in promoting transparency and participatory governance. What are the key challenges in implementation, and how can they be addressed? (250 words, 15 marks)

Introduction

Social audits are **assessment tools** that allow people to evaluate the government's performance in delivering public services. First institutionalised under **MGNREGA**, they help identify gaps in implementation. They aim to improve transparency and build public trust.

Body

Role of Social Audits in Transparency and Participatory Governance

1. **Promote accountability:** They expose irregularities in fund usage and service delivery, making officials answerable to people. Example: In **Andhra Pradesh**, MGNREGA social audits helped recover crores misused by local officials.
2. **Empower citizens:** By giving people a formal platform, they democratise information and decision-making processes.
3. **Ensure transparency:** They uncover misappropriation, delays, or corruption. Example: **Rajasthan's Jan Sunwai model** revealed fake job cards and ghost beneficiaries in PDS and pension schemes.

4. **Foster participatory governance:** Communities directly engage in evaluating programs. Example: In **Telangana**, **SHGs and village volunteers** are trained to conduct audits, ensuring local involvement.
5. **Build trust in institutions:** By encouraging redressal and responsiveness, they re-establish credibility of public systems among marginalized groups.

Despite their promise, social audits face several bottlenecks in practice, undermining their impact.

Challenges in Implementation

1. **Inadequate institutional support:** Many states lack independent social audit units or dilute their functioning by merging them with implementing agencies.
2. **Poor awareness:** Beneficiaries often remain unaware of their rights or audit procedures, limiting meaningful participation.
3. **Lack of follow-up:** Audit findings are often ignored, with weak grievance redressal and no punitive action against guilty officials.
4. **Political and administrative resistance:** Local elites and bureaucrats sometimes resist or intimidate social audit teams.
5. **Underfunding:** Insufficient resources and trained manpower hinder consistent and quality audits.

Way Forward

1. **Legal backing:** Implement the **2nd ARC** recommendation to give statutory status to social audits across schemes.
2. **Independent units:** Ensure financial and administrative autonomy of **State Social Audit Units**, as in Andhra Pradesh.
3. **Awareness campaigns:** Use local platforms like **Gram Sabhas and schools** to educate citizens on audit rights.
4. **Actionable outcomes:** Link audit findings to real-time grievance redressal, as seen in Odisha.
5. **Capacity building:** Train SHGs and local volunteers in audit processes, like the **Telangana model.**

Conclusion

Rooted in the spirit of grassroots democracy, social audits operationalise **Article 13 of the UN Convention Against Corruption and the 2nd ARC's vision** of citizen-centric governance, enabling communities to ensure accountable and responsive administration.

Q.5) "The Sevottam model is a blueprint for transforming public service delivery through citizen-centric governance." Critically analyse the key components of the Sevottam model. How far has it been successful in ensuring quality and accountability in government services? (250 words, 15 marks)

Introduced in **2006** by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances, the Sevottam model is a citizen-centric **quality management framework** aimed at improving public service delivery through transparency, accountability, and responsive governance mechanisms.

Body

Key Components of the Sevottam Model

1. **Citizen Charter:** Clearly outlines service delivery standards, timelines, and citizen entitlements to promote transparency and accountability.
2. **Public Grievance Redress Mechanism:** Sets up institutional processes to handle citizen grievances in a time-bound, efficient, and accessible manner.
3. **Service Delivery Enablers:** Focuses on internal capacity building, training, and process reforms to enhance the quality of public service.

Performance and Achievements

1. **Improved efficiency and citizen satisfaction:** Led to quicker, more reliable delivery of services.
   Example: The **Passport Seva Kendra** reduced turnaround time and improved satisfaction through online appointments and tracking.
2. **Enhanced grievance redressal mechanisms:** Strengthened the institutional handling of public complaints.
   Example: The Income Tax Department's **e-Nivaran system** resolved issues faster and tracked grievances transparently.
3. **Standardisation of services and timelines:** Encouraged departments to define and adhere to fixed timelines.
   Example: **Indian Railways** introduced timelines for refunds and bookings in citizen charters.
4. **Increased use of technology and monitoring tools:** Improved transparency and real-time performance tracking.
   Example: Integration with **CPGRAMS** allowed central ministries to respond quickly and monitor grievances.
5. **Encouraged replication of best practices:** Inspired sectoral reforms and adoption of similar models.
   Example: **Delhi Jal Board** introduced SMS alerts and online complaints inspired by Sevottam.

Challenges in Implementation

1. **Patchy Adoption Across States:** Despite its potential, the **2nd Administrative Reforms Commission** noted uneven implementation across states and departments.
2. **Lack of Awareness Among Citizens:** As per **DARPG's own assessments**, citizen awareness about charters and grievance mechanisms remains low.
3. **Weak Institutional Mechanisms:** Reports by **NITI Aayog** highlight that many departments lack dedicated cells or trained personnel for service delivery reforms.
4. **Inadequate Monitoring and Evaluation:** The **2nd ARC** underlined the absence of performance audits and independent reviews as a major limitation.
5. **Resistance to Reform:** The **2019 Performance Monitoring Evaluation Report** cited bureaucratic inertia and limited incentives as key barriers to reform.

Way Forward

1. **Mandatory Adoption Across All Levels:** Encourage adoption in municipalities and panchayats, with **DARPG** support.
2. **Capacity Building Programs:** Train staff regularly on service standards and grievance handling.
3. **Strengthen Evaluation Mechanisms:** Use **third-party audits** and dashboards to track compliance.
4. **Incentivise Performance:** Link funding or awards to Sevottam-compliant delivery and grievance metrics.
5. **Promote Best Practices:** Replicate successful cases like **Delhi Jal Board** across departments.

Conclusion

The Sevottam model reflects the **2nd ARC's vision of citizen-first governance**. With reforms and public participation, it can ensure responsive, efficient, and accountable public service delivery in India.