PROBITY - GS IV MAINS

Q. Probity is a crucial feature of governance which endows government to act ethically and perform its duty. Examine with examples (10 marks, 150 words)

News: *India's voters deserve a bond — of probity*

What's in the news?
- There are a few basic tenets of good laws and public policies - lack of ambiguity, enforceability, predictability, and accountability.
- All laws and policies are framed with the purpose of addressing a public issue with a view to improving the situation from when the problem was identified.

Key takeaways:
- Probity in Governance is a vital need for executing the governance system and socio-economic development.

Probity:
- Probity is defined as adherence to ethical and moral values like honesty. Integrity, rectitude, uprightness, etc.
- It is the presence of procedural integrity with high standards of ethical behaviour.

Importance of Probity:
- Probity implies strong morals, honesty and integrity and is an essential foundation for good governance and sustainable development.
- The absence of ethical conduct in public and private spheres fosters corruption and mistrust, leading to lop-sided growth. Thus, probity is an essential virtue for national progress.

Importance of Probity for Effective System of Governance:
1. Builds Public Trust:
- Probity fosters public trust essential for policy implementation.
- Example - Chanakya's emphasis on honesty for rulers to gain trust.

2. Enables Efficient Governance:
- Probity supports public interest, ensuring equitable services.
- Example - The eradication of the Licence-Permit Raj in India enhanced efficiency.

3. Ensures Optimal Resource Use:
- Probity in financial management reduces waste.
- Example - The UN highlights global illicit outflows costing billions due to lack of probity.

4. Promotes Innovation:
- A system rooted in probity encourages fair competition and innovation.
- Example - Corruption-induced favouritism stifles genuine innovation and enterprise.

Importance of Probity for Socio-economic Development:

1. Attracts Investment:
- Probity ensures a transparent environment appealing to investors.
- Example - Countries like Singapore attract global investments due to their strong probity standards.

2. Economic Growth:
- Probity eliminates barriers like corruption, boosting growth.
- Example - Corruption in India has historically deterred potential economic growth.

3. Reduces Transaction Costs:
- Probity diminishes uncertainty for businesses, aiding development.
- Example - High transaction costs due to corruption hinder business efficiency.

4. Fosters Knowledge Economy:
- With probity, there's an emphasis on meritocracy, driving a knowledge-based economy.
- Example - Nepotism in corrupt systems undermines the potential of a dynamic knowledge economy.

Challenges in Ensuring Probity:
- **Gaps in laws and policies** related to political funding, whistleblower protection, Lokpal etc. enable a lack of transparency and conflicts of interest.

- **Lack of effective audits,** disclosures and oversight mechanisms for higher officials and politicians. The powerful are able to circumvent regulations.

- **Poor public service delivery** and redressal systems that foster petty corruption and bribery.

- **Inadequate enforcement of existing rules** and laws due to capacity gaps, delays and pendency in the judicial system.

- **Limited use of technology** for transparency, accountability and grievance redressal.

- **Politicisation and erosion of autonomy** of investigative agencies hampering impartial enforcement.

- **Ineffective electoral and judicial reforms** to improve the accountability of political executives.

- **Limitations in public awareness**, activism and movements against corruption due to lack of information and reprisals.

WAY FORWARD:

1. Moral Education:
- To make an individual high on integrity, it is necessary to provide him with ethical training that will inspire him to improve governance.
- Example - training on the importance of avoiding bribes.

2. Accountability:
- Accountability reduces chances of malpractices in governance. When an individual is expected to give answers to higher authorities, he/she avoids performing acts that will reduce his/her position.
- Example - Social audits ensures accountability and thus lead to probity.

3. Information Sharing and Transparency in Governance:
- Sharing information and transparency are indispensable pillars of good governance that compel the state and civil society to focus on results, seek clear objectives, develop effective strategies, and monitor and report on performance.
- Examples:
  - Right to information Act
  - Ombudsman Office in the local/state level.
  - Accountability bill for disclosure of Income and Assets.
  - Records Management laws.

4. Grievance Redressal:
- Easy access of government officials to the public is important for grievance redressal. It can be ensured through
  - Availability of Contact numbers of senior servants to Public
  - Details in Departmental websites
  - Facilitation counters for citizens
  - Assessment and Monitoring

5. Code of conduct:
- Probity is maintained by formulating and employing model code of conduct for ministers, bureaucracy, judiciary, and civil society groups.

6. Institutional reforms:

- Introducing public delivery of service agreements by executive agencies for ensuring accountability, objectivity and transparency.
- Allowing stakeholders like citizen committees to participate in various decision making processes and encouraging and facilitating public participation through the following.
    - Public Hearings.
    - Citizen Advisory Boards.
    - Government Contract Committees.
    - Public Watchdog Groups.
    - Independent Anti-Corruption Agencies.
    - Capacity building of citizens and civil society groups.

Probity is a crucial feature of governance which endows government to act ethically and perform its duty as per the norms only. It is significant for the government to follow the rules and regulations as well as adopt policies of impartiality, to gain confidence from the public.