Good Governance in India

What is the issue?

- Usually, good governance means cliches and platitudes such as “corruption is bad for good governance”, “we should cut red-tape in the country”, and “we should use more e-governance in India”.
- But it has been observed that this trend is now a thing of the past.

What are the things that shows that there are improvements in good governance?

- **Repealing of obsolete Acts -** The Central government (thanks to the work of economist Bibek Debroy) has repealed an estimated 2,000 Acts, statuettes and subordinate legislation which include
  - Dozens of Appropriation acts,
  - The Excise Act 1863,
  - Foreign Recruiting Act 1874, etc.
- There is a long way to go, especially for State governments, where such obsolete laws are often tools for rent seeking.
- **Changes to the Prevention of Corruption Act** - For 30 years from 1998, any monetary benefit to any private parties, without public interest was construed as criminal misconduct by a public servant.
- This happens generally, regardless of whether there was an intent to a public servant to cause such gains or not.
- Therefore, even honest officers had to face this cruel law.
- The current government finally scrapped this provision of the Prevention of Corruption Act, thereby enabling good governance, by allowing officers to act without fear.
- **Enterprise DigiLocker -** Another possible small step towards good governance is the DigiLocker (an integral part of the India stack).
- Likewise, the Union and State governments can set up enterprise DigiLockers to store all documents that any small or large business is expected to possess Pan card, GSTN number, Aadhaar card, etc.
- Multiple departments which seek the same information over and again can just download these at the click of a button.
- **Compliance portal -** No Central or the State governments has any common portal, through which businesses get to know fully the extent of the compliance burden spread across many departments and agencies.
- The simplest thing to do would be to create a common portal where all the compliances for a particular industry are listed as well as an update of periodic changes to government orders or any court judgment.
- This will ensure that an entrepreneur or a businessman does not have to search for information across 40 to 50 different websites.
- The Reserve Bank of India has the concept of a “master circular” which should be

adopted by governments too.

How is technology used to engender good governance?

- The use of technology is critical in engendering good governance. Some examples abound in Government already, and many more are possible.
- There are startups such as Avantari and Rephrase.ai which use artificial intelligence and machine learning (AI/ML) to create "mass personalization" in advertising and communication.

What is the issue of who pays?

- Everyone aspires for a better standard of living and life. However, India's tax to GDP ratio hovers around 11%-12% as against 45% in the U.S.
- One is not aware of a single Budget meeting where any industry association or leader would say tax us more in national interest and use the funds to improve primary health care in the country.
- Everyone says, leave me alone, but tax my neighbour.
- So, there is a need for the Indian government to find resources for providing U.S.-like health care with India-like taxes.
- Good governance is also the responsibility of enlightened citizens who should give some thought to complex trade-offs like these and not just only demand good governance but also contribute to it.

What is the conclusion?

> *"So, the government go on in strange paradox, decided only to be undecided, resolved to be irresolute, adamant for drift, solid for fluidity, all-powerful for impotency," said Sir Winston Churchill on governance.*

- India has made a lot of progress on good governance, but it is an endless journey; not a one-off destination to be reached.
- As India enters its good governance week (December 19-25, 2022), we can be satisfied that we will soon prove Churchill wrong.

Reference

The Hindu | Good governance beyond motherhood and apple pie

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