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Mains Practice Questions

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Q. Independence of public institutions in a democracy is a barometer of governance.
Comment. (150 words)

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Approach:

- Introduce by underlining elements of democracy and the role of institutions in it.
- Discuss how the independence of critical institutions will ensure better functioning of democracy and good governance.

Introduction

- Democracy as a concept is the interrelated set of ideas and democracy as a working model is the set of interconnected but independent institutions. In order to make democracy working for the “demos (people)”, the various institutions are created.
- To succeed in the development process, appropriate institutions based on democratic values need to be established which contribute to the development and improved governance.
- In addition to a country's constitution and its critical provisions—freedom of expression, freedom of association, and rule of law—governance-related institutions such as the civil service, the judiciary, and other local institutions need to be developed and made independent in their functioning to play a role in the development and maintenance of a democratic culture.

Body

- **Governance and good governance:** Governance is "the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented)".
- Good governance has to be built on the quality of organizations and public institution's independence so that development is based on this rather than simply relying only on political will, personal will of a strong leader and state power, which may not be sustainable over the longer term.
- **Elements of good governance:** Good governance is achieved through an on-going discourse that attempts to capture all of the considerations involved in assuring that stakeholder interests are addressed and reflected in policy initiatives, and independence of public institution is one of the most important principles of it. Besides this, some other elements are Rule of Law, Transparency, Responsiveness, Consensus-Oriented, Equity and Inclusiveness, Effectiveness and Efficiency, Accountability, Participation.

- **Public institutions and governance:** The highest among these institutions is the Parliament. Ideally, all the people must participate in the decision making, but it becomes impossible to do so in the existing limited developments in human institutions. And therefore there are many institutions that make democracy a working institution for its main stakeholders: the people. The institutions must be independent in their working areas as that is the only way they can have checks and balances on other institutions
- The **Judiciary must be independent** to check the “constitutionality” of the laws passed by the Parliament. Though the Parliament is entitled to pass laws, it cannot pass “any” law, the laws must pass the test of constitutionality. The independence of Judiciary is vital for the functioning of democracy.
- The **Election Commission (EC)**, to ensure a free and fair election and thereby improve governance must not be partisan to any political party and it should not serve the interest of any political party to safeguard the democracy. Hence, its independence becomes imperative.
- The Constitution of India is **Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG)** audits all the government expenses and looks into financial matters from the point of view audits. It has such a power to check the Government that it is one of the biggest check and balance mechanism on the other institutions, and this can only be ensured by sufficient independence in its working.
- **Local government promote decentralization:** Decentralization, a kind of autonomy local administration, is an effective tool for ensuring a greater match of the administrative agenda with expectations of the people.

Conclusion

- India’s public institutions need to transform themselves into institutions of good governance that will be result oriented and provide high quality and low-cost services to the citizens of India.
- Institutions need to become performance linked, in order to become revitalized. The push towards greater efficiency of institutions should be balanced by the elements of effectiveness and independence with respect to men, material, and appointments that would ensure inclusive growth and provision of services to all sections of society.