Mains Practice Question

Q. "Integrity is doing the right thing, even when no one is watching." - C.S. Lewis. Discuss in the context of ethical conduct in public administration and its impact on public trust. (150 words)

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Approach

- Introduce the essence of the quote briefly and define integrity.
- Elaborate on the role of Integrity in the context of ethical conduct in public administration.
- Discuss the impact of integrity on developing public trust.
- Conclude Suitably.

Introduction

Integrity can be defined as being consistent and following one's own values, principles, and beliefs. C.S. Lewis's profound statement, "Integrity is doing the right thing, even when no one is watching," captures the essence of ethical conduct in public administration. In this domain, integrity goes beyond following rules; it's about upholding moral principles and making ethical choices even in the face of temptations or pressures. Here's how unwavering integrity shapes public administration and fosters public trust:

Body

Role of Integrity in the Context of Ethical Conduct in Public Administration:

- **Honesty and Transparency:**
    - Public servants embody integrity through honesty in their actions and transparency in their decision-making processes. This includes declaring conflicts of interest and ensuring open communication with the public.
        - **Example:** IAS officer K.K. Pathak resigned from the Indian Civil Service in protest against political interference. This act of unwavering honesty set a high standard for ethical conduct in public service.
- **Accountability:**
    - Taking responsibility for one's actions and decisions is an important element of integrity. Ethical public servants are willing to be held accountable for their performance and readily acknowledge any mistakes.
        - **Example:** Kiran Bedi, a former IPS officer who later joined the IAS, is known for her people-centric approach and strong work ethic. She faced public scrutiny during her tenure but maintained accountability and transparency, upholding her commitment to ethical service.
- **Impartiality and Fairness:**
    - Ethical conduct necessitates treating all citizens equally, without bias or favouritism. Public servants with integrity resist temptations of nepotism or undue influence and uphold the principles of meritocracy.
        - **Example**: T. N. Seshan, former Chief Election Commissioner of India, is remembered for his integrity and impartiality in conducting free and fair elections, ensuring that every citizen's vote counted regardless of their background or

affiliations.

Impact of Integrity on Public Trust:

- **Legitimacy:**
    - Integrity in public servants reinforces the legitimacy of public institutions and fosters a sense of respect for the rule of law. Citizens are more likely to comply with regulations and participate in governance processes when they believe the system is fair and just.
        - **Example**: The exemplary work of IAS officers like Ashok Khemka, known for his fight against corruption in land deals, restores public trust in the administrative machinery and deters corrupt practices.
- **Cooperation:**
    - When citizens trust public servants, they are more likely to cooperate with government initiatives, such as vaccination drives or environmental conservation programs. This fosters a sense of collective responsibility and societal progress.
        - **Example:** Dr. Harsh Vardhan, former Union Minister of Health, played a crucial role in leading vaccination drives, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. His transparent communication and leadership helped in gaining citizens' trust and cooperation in the vaccination efforts.

Conclusion:

C.S. Lewis's words remind us that integrity is not a situational virtue but a core principle for effective public administration. Staying consistent and following one's own values, principles, and beliefs helps a public servant in being ethical in public administration and gaining public trust in the long term.