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Mains Practice Questions

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Q. Examine the background and the objectives that were laid in the Cripps Mission Plan, 1942 and the reasons for its failure. (250 words)

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Approach

- Give a brief background and objectives of Cripps mission.
- Mention the main proposals of the mission.
- Explain the objections of Congress, Muslim League and other groups which led to failure of the mission.

Introduction

- In March 1942, a mission headed by Stafford Cripps was sent to India with constitutional proposals to seek Indian support for the World War II.
- Because of the reverses suffered by Britain in South-East Asia, the Japanese threat to invade India seemed real now and Indian support became crucial.
- There was pressure on Britain from the Allies (USA, USSR, and China) to seek Indian cooperation.
- Indian nationalists had agreed to support the Allied on a condition that substantial power was transferred immediately and complete independence would be given after the war.

Main proposals of the mission

- An Indian Union with a **dominion status** would be set up; it would be free to decide its relations with the Commonwealth and free to participate in the United Nations and other international bodies.
- After the end of the war, a **constituent assembly** would be convened to frame a new constitution. Members of this assembly would be **partly elected by the provincial assemblies** through proportional representation and **partly nominated by the princes**. Hence, all members would be Indians.
- The British government would accept the new constitution subject to two conditions: (i) any province not willing to join the Union could have a **separate constitution** and form a separate Union, and (ii) the new constitution-making body and the British government would negotiate a treaty to effect the transfer of power and to safeguard racial and religious minorities.
- In the meantime, **defence** of India would remain in **British hands** and the **Governor-General's powers would remain intact**.

Reasons of its Failure

The **Congress** objected to:

- The offer of dominion status instead of a provision for complete independence;
- Representation of the princely states by nominees and not by elected representatives;
- Right to provinces to secede as this went against the principle of national unity; and

- Absence of any plan for immediate transfer of power and absence of any real share in defence; the Governor-General's supremacy had been retained, and the demand that the Governor-General be only the constitutional head had not been accepted.

The Muslim League

- Criticised the idea of a single Indian Union;
- Did not like the machinery for the creation of a constituent assembly and the procedure to decide on the accession of provinces to the Union; and
- Stated that the proposals denied the Muslims the right to self-determination and the creation of Pakistan.

Other roadblocks for its acceptance were

- Other groups also objected to the **provinces' right to secede**. Further, the incapacity of Cripps to go beyond the Draft Declaration and the adoption of a rigid "take it or leave it" attitude added to the deadlock.
- The procedure of accession was not well-defined.
- It was not clear as to who would implement and interpret the treaty affecting the transfer of power.
- Talks broke down on the question of the viceroy's veto.

Conclusion

Stafford Cripps returned home leaving behind a frustrated and embittered Indian people, who, though still sympathising with the victims of Fascist aggression, felt that the existing situation in the country had become intolerable and that the time had come for a final assault on imperialism. The failure of the mission led to the nationwide launch of the Quit India Movement as Indians refused to support Britain in the war efforts.