



Perspective: Need for Expansion

For Prelims: Indian Foreign Service (IFS), United Nations, G20 Presidency

For Mains: Issues Faced by the Ministry of External Affairs, Recommended Steps

Why in News?

Recently, **an annual report on the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) 2022 was presented in Parliament**. In accordance with this, the parliamentary committee has made several recommendations to make India an influential nation in the world.

What are the Issues Pointed Out?

- **Lacking in Personnel:** The country's diplomatic service is most short-staffed when compared to many other nations whose economy and stature were lower than that of India, with 1,011 **Indian Foreign Service (IFS)** officers accounting for only 22.5% of the foreign ministry's total strength.
- **Insufficient Officers to Present India:** The parliamentary committee has suggested that there are not enough "IFS A" officers to properly represent India's interests at international headquarters and foreign missions.
 - This is due to India's expanding involvement in international affairs and changes in foreign policy, **which demand a rise in the number of officers.**
- **Inadequate Budget Allocation:** The ministry had a 0.64% share of the government's total **budget** in 2019-20. Despite the committee's recommendation that the allocation **should be at least 1% of the overall budget in view of India holding the G20 presidency**, the allocation in 2023-24 **dropped by 0.04% from 0.44% in 2022-23.**
 - Despite the challenging mandate of making India a leading power and influential entity on the world stage, **the MEA remains one of the least funded central ministries.**
- **Need for Cadre Review:** There is a growing need for manpower in the diplomatic cadre to establish missions in all **UN member countries**. The ministry should conduct a **cadre review** promptly to build capabilities and enhance the capacity of its existing personnel to handle the expanded mandate effectively.
 - Such a review should be based on a **comparative analysis of the strength of the diplomatic corps** of major developing countries and countries in the neighbourhood.
- **A New Organisational Structure:** The panel urged the foreign ministry to frame a roadmap for enhancing its capacities and capabilities, including a structural change or a complete revamp of its organisational structure.
- **Aid Programmes:** The government needs to recognise the importance of aid programs and the role they play in advancing India's diplomatic objectives. Unlike other countries where aid programs and **foreign ministries have separate budgets, in India, they are often the same.**
 - This **makes it even more critical to allocate sufficient funds** to the foreign ministry to enable it to carry out its mandate effectively.
- **Lack of Flexibility in Democratic Structure:** The way the government is structured in the

United States, with the different branches and bureaucrats moving in and out of the private sector, works well there **as it creates a level of flexibility in the system** that allows for adaptation to changing circumstances.

- However, **in India, the government needs to be more flexible and adaptable to respond to the diverse needs of its people and foster economic growth.**

Indian Foreign Service (IFS)

▪ Origin:

- The Indian government **established the Indian Foreign Service for India's diplomatic**, consular and commercial representation overseas on 9th October 1946.
- With independence, there was a near-complete transition of the Foreign and Political Department **into what then became the new Ministry of External Affairs.**
- The origin of the Indian Foreign Service **can be traced back to British rule when the Foreign Department was created** to conduct business with the "Foreign European Powers".

▪ Offices under IFS:

- Ambassador, High Commissioner, Consul General, Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations and Foreign Secretary are some of the offices held by the members of the Indian Foreign Service.

What can be the Way Forward?

- **Capacity Building:** The foreign ministry needs to enhance its capacities and capabilities, including a structural change or a complete revamp of its organisational structure. This can be achieved through investment in training, technology, and infrastructure.
- **Recruitment:** The recruitment process for the IFS needs to be streamlined to attract the best candidates and to ensure that the diplomatic corps reflects the diversity of Indian society.
- **Collaboration:** The ministry should collaborate with other government departments, civil society, and the private sector to leverage resources and expertise to advance India's foreign policy objectives.
- **Connectivity:** Aid programs will become increasingly important in the future, and the Indian foreign ministry needs to focus on building connectivity and developing infrastructure in other countries.
- **Focus on Indian Diaspora:** The **Indian diaspora** is growing, and the foreign ministry needs to be involved in engaging with them to advance India's interests and promote its values.
 - Overall, the Indian foreign ministry **needs to be adequately resourced and equipped to advance India's interests on the world stage effectively.**
- **Bureaucratic System:** The British and European **bureaucratic systems** may offer valuable lessons on addressing the challenge of flexibility. However, it is crucial to strike a balance between a permanent democratic structure and the ability to adapt to changing circumstances.
 - The Indian government **needs to work out a system that allows for this flexibility while maintaining the integrity of the bureaucratic system.**
- **Lateral Entry:** The advantage of **lateral entry** is that it can bring in individuals with specialized knowledge, expertise, and experience in fields such as diplomacy, international relations, and strategic affairs. These individuals **can provide new perspectives and innovative ideas to the ministry**, which can help address complex foreign policy issues effectively.
 - Additionally, lateral entry **can help bridge the gap between academia, civil society, and the government**, which can enhance the ministry's outreach and engagement with external stakeholders.

