



## 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.

