

UPSC Civil Services Examination

Modern Indian History

Topic: Cripps Mission

The Cripps Mission was sent by the British government to India in March 1942 to obtain Indian cooperation for the British war efforts in the 2nd World War. It was headed by Sir Richard Stafford Cripps, a labour minister in Winston Churchill's coalition government in Britain. Important for IAS Exam, Cripps Mission is an important topic under Modern Indian History.

This article will provide details about Cripps Mission from the UPSC Prelims and Mains perspectives.

Cripps Mission - Background

- Japan was advancing outside the eastern borders of India and the fall of Burma was a jolt to the British in the war. The threat of a Japanese invasion on India was looming and Indian support was essential for Britain's war efforts.
- When the 2nd World War broke out in 1939, the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow declared India a party to the war as part of the British Empire. This was done without consultation with Indians and this led to massive protests from the Congress Party. The party leaders, who were heading 7 provincial governments resigned from their posts. The Muslim League celebrated it as 'Deliverance Day'.
- Britain was facing pressure from the US and other allied leaders over its own imperial policies in India and also to secure Indian cooperation for the Allied war effort. This also led the British government to send Cripps to India.

Members of Cripps Mission

1. Stafford Cripps - Left-wing Labourite, the Leader of the House of Commons and a member of the British War Cabinet
2. Lord Pethick-Lawrence - Secretary of State for India
3. A. V. Alexander - First Lord of the Admiralty

The Purpose of Cripps Mission

Following the World War-II, the Cripps Mission had several reasons to come to India. The reasons are given below:

1. Britain suffered many losses in Southeast Asia and Japan's threat to invade India seemed real for them. Hence, Britain wanted India's support.
2. Britain was pressurised by the allies (USA, USSR & China) to seek India's cooperation.
3. Indian nationalists had agreed to support the Allied as they hoped for immediate transfer of substantial power and complete independence after the war.

Proposals of Cripps Mission

- Setting up of an **Indian dominion**. This dominion would have the freedom to remain with the British Commonwealth or to secede from it. It would also be at liberty to take part in international organisations.
- A Constituent Assembly would be formed to frame a new constitution for the country. This Assembly would have **members elected by the provincial assemblies** and also nominated by the princes.
- Any province unwilling to join the Indian dominion could form a separate union and have a separate constitution.
- The transfer of power and the **rights of minorities** would be safeguarded by negotiations between the Constituent Assembly and the British government.
- In the meantime, until this new constitution came into force, **India's Defence would be controlled by the British** and the powers of the Governor-General would remain unaltered.

Significance of Cripps Mission

- For the first time, the British government acknowledged India's right to be a dominion.
- Indians could frame their own Constitution.
- The proposal of giving freedom to the provinces to be a separate union turned out to be a model for the country's partition in 1947.
- The right to cede from the Commonwealth indicated full sovereignty at a later stage.
- In the interim period, Indians were guaranteed a good share in the administration.

Why did the Cripps Mission Fail?

- The **proposals were seen as too radical** by the British and as **too conservative** by the INC who wanted complete independence.
- The Mission was **rejected by the INC, the Muslim League** and other Indian groups.
- The Hindu Mahasabha and the Liberals were against the right of states to secede.
- The Sikhs objected because they thought any partition would leave Punjab in the hands of Pakistan.
- The Depressed Classes objected because they were apprehensive about their status in a country 'dominated by upper-caste Hindus.'
- It is also believed that the mission failed because of a clear lack of support for it by the Viceroy Linlithgow, British PM Winston Churchill and the Secretary of State for India, Leo Amery.

Note:

After the failure of the mission, Cripps returned to England, and the Congress-led by Gandhi started their new campaign, the Quit India Movement in August 1942.

Indian National Congress Rejected the Mission

INC rejected the Cripps Mission for the following reasons:

1. The INC was against the provinces' right to separately form unions as this was damaging to national unity.
2. They were also against the Governor-General's power being retained as against him being only a constitutional head.
3. They also protested the lack of share in defence.
4. There was no concrete plan for the immediate transfer of power.

Muslim League Rejected the Cripps Mission

Muslim League rejected the Cripps Mission for the following reasons:

1. They did not like the idea of a single union of India.
2. They protested against the method for the Constituent Assembly's creation and also against the procedure to decide on the provinces' accession to the Indian union.

