

## **UPSC should have additional paper in civil service exam for IFS aspirants: Panel**

New Delhi: The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) should introduce an additional paper in the civil service exam for those wanting to join the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) so that their knowledge of international affairs and required aptitude can be tested, a Parliamentary Committee has said.

In its report tabled in the Lok Sabha, the Parliamentary Committee on External Affairs also expressed “grave concern” over “inadequate” size of India’s diplomatic corps considering the tasks and challenges before the country. It said there the number of Indian Foreign Service (IFS) officers currently is 770 as against sanctioned strength of 912.

Stressing on the need for having right people to handle India’s diplomatic engagement, the panel said an additional paper should be made mandatory for candidates opting for the IFS and that the scope of personality test should be enhanced considering the qualities required for a diplomat.

The committee headed by Shashi Tharoor, Congress MP and former MoS in external affairs, said the interview board while conducting personality test may also be asked to indicate whether candidates opting for IFS are recommended for the diplomatic service or not.

“In other words, a candidate may be allotted IFS if he/she is in the merit list, has cleared the additional paper and obtained a recommendation from the Interview Board,” it said.

The committee also emphasised the need for the diplomats to have proficiency in foreign language.

“Out of 770 IFS officers in service, the number of officers with proficiency in a foreign language is only 569. It may be easily inferred that around 200 IFS officers are not equipped with any foreign language and the committee were disappointed by this dismal state of affairs,” said the report.

The committee also expressed concern over shrinking space for “non-career ambassadors” saying there had been a number of highly illustrious ambassadors who were not drawn from the IFS and who served with distinction.

It said currently only two non-career ambassadors are posted and favoured appointment of eminent persons as ambassadors and high commissioners who have excelled in areas of foreign policy, literature, journalism and diaspora affairs.