

Cripps Mission 1942

[UPSC Notes]

What is Cripps Mission?

When the Second World War broke out in 1939, Britain declared India a party to the war as part of the British Empire. This led to a massive uproar, as Viceroy Lord Linlithgow, without consultation with Indians took this step. This major decision led to massive protests from the Congress Party, and as result party leaders, who were heading 7 provincial governments resigned from their posts. The Muslim League celebrated it as Deliverance Day. The background that led to the series of events concerning the Cripps Mission were:

- The Japanese army was at the border of India after Burma and Singapore. The loss of Burma to Japan was a big blow to the Britishers in the Second World War.
- The British were alarmed at the successive victories of Japan during the 1940s.
- There was a constant threat of Japanese invasion of India and the Indian support, both by military and the people was essential for Britain to win the war.
- Britain was facing pressure from the US and other allied powers over its imperial policies in India. To secure Indian cooperation for the Allied war efforts, the British government sent the Cripps to India. The Cripps Mission 1942 was headed by Stafford Cripps.

Cripps Mission Members

The Cripps Mission 1942 was headed by Stafford Cripps, accompanied by Lord Privy Seal. There were other members from the State Council of Britain, including the leader of the House of Common, etc.

Though originally, the Cripps Mission was constituted by

- Stafford Cripps
- Pethick-Lawrence
- A.V. Alexander.

Cripps Mission: Purpose

Post the Second World War, the Cripps Mission had several reasons to come to India. The main reasons were:

- Britain was pressurized by USA, USSR & China to seek India's cooperation.
- Britain wanted India's support as they suffered tremendous losses in Southeast Asia and Japan's threat to invade India seemed real to them.

Cripps Proposal

The proposal of the Cripps Mission 1942 was “India would be a dominion associated with the United Kingdom”. The Cripps Mission, through the proposal, promised that immediately after the war stopped, steps would be taken to set up an elected body charged with the task of making the Indian Constitution and provisions would be made in such a way that the Indian states could participate in the framing of the Constitution of India.

The main Cripps Proposal were:

- During the war, the British would retain their hold on India and once the war finished, India would be granted dominion status with complete autonomy.
- The dominion of India 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 organizations.
- At the end of the war, a Constituent Assembly would be set up that would frame the Constitution of India. The members of the assembly were to be elected based on proportional representation by the provincial assemblies. Any province unwilling to join the Indian dominion could form a separate union and have a separate constitution. The British government would also invite them to join the commonwealth.
- The Princely States would also be given representation in the Constituent Assembly.
- The transfer of power and the rights of minorities would be safeguarded by negotiations between the Constituent Assembly and the British government.
- During the war, an interim government comprising different parties of India would be constituted. India's defense and external affairs would be controlled by the British (Viceroy).

Significance of Cripps Mission 1942

The Cripps Mission 1942 was sent to India to achieve Hindu-Muslim consensus on some constitutional arrangements and to convince the Indians to postpone their freedom struggle till the end of the Second World War. The major significance of the Cripps Mission were:

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

Rejection of Cripps Mission

The meetings, known as the Cripps Mission, took place in Delhi from March 22 to April 12, 1942, and marked an attempt to rally, the rival Indian National Congress and Muslim League. The Congress and Muslim League, both objected to the Cripps Mission of 1942 because

Congress's reaction to Cripps Mission

- The Cripps Mission proposed representation of the princely states by nominees and not by elected representatives.
- It offered the dominion status to India, instead of a provision for complete independence.
- The principle of national unity was kept at stake as the Cripps Mission gave the right to provinces to secede according to their will.
- There was an absence of any plan for immediate transfer of power and an absence of any real share in defense.

- The supremacy of the Governor-General's power was retained, along with the demand that the Governor-General be only the constitutional head was not accepted.

Muslim League reaction to Cripps Mission

- They were against the idea of a single Indian Union and thus criticized it.
- The Muslim League was of the opinion that the Cripps Mission denied the Muslims the right to self-determination and the creation of Pakistan.
- 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.

Failure of Cripps Mission

The main reasons for the failure of Cripps mission include:

- The proposals were seen as too radical by the British and as too conservative by the INC who wanted complete independence. Thus, the Cripps Mission was unanimously rejected by the INC, the Muslim League, and other Indian groups.
- Cripps, in the Cripps Mission had talked of 'cabinet' and 'national government, but later stepped back stating that he had only meant an expansion of the executive council.
- The Hindu Mahasabha and the Liberals were against the right of states to secede.
- There was no clear demarcation as to who would implement and interpret the treaty affecting the transfer of power.
- The procedure of accession was not well-defined. The decision on secession was to be taken by a resolution in the legislature by a 60 percent majority.
 - If less than 60 percent of members supported it, the decision was to be taken by a plebiscite of adult males of that province by a simple majority.
 - This scheme weighed against the Hindus in Punjab and Bengal if they wanted accession to the Indian Union.
- 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.

Frustrated with the failure of the Cripps Mission, Stafford Cripps returned back. Gandhi, backed by the Congress seized the opportunity and called for voluntary British withdrawal from India, which resulted in the Quit India Movement.