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Introduction

Mr. Ahmed Farooq joined the Foreign Service of Pakistan (FSP) in 2001. During his ten years service, he has served as third secretary, second secretary and first secretary at New York in Pakistan's mission to the United Nations. He also served as Assistant Director at Moscow in Pakistan's embassy and had been Director SAARC at Foreign Office in Islamabad. Presently, he is serving as Director MOS in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan.

Please throw some light on your education and achievements.

I did my masters in 'Economics' from Government College University (GCU), Lahore, in 1997, after that I started preparation for the CSS exam. In fact, even before my masters I had an idea that I had to appear in the competitive exams. So I appeared in the CSS-2000 exam and got selected for the Foreign Service of Pakistan (FSP).

Why did you opt for 'Foreign Service' and to which extent it is unique?

Well, you see all services having the same purpose that is to serve the people and Pakistan. They are all very useful and have their significant position in the working of government. But joining 'Foreign Service' personally, it was a great privilege because it provides you a chance to represent your country abroad.

Yes, I agree it is a unique service because it provides an opportunity to carry the flag of your country and I think this feeling is priceless as nothing can be parallel to it. Moreover, in this service you meet cream of people around the world and you deal with issues at the global level.

Furthermore, this is my 10th years in 'Foreign Service' and I found it the best place where I wanted to see myself. And I am very thankful to Almighty Allah for His grace that he gave me an opportunity to serve my country through this service. In fact, I even feel most proud to sit behind the name plate of Pakistan and I must say this feeling is matchless.

That is the biggest honour which I can think bestowed on anyone in any national service. In addition to this, when you represent your country in any part of the world then you will be called "distinguished delegate from Pakistan" as it is also a matter of great honour and prestige. Hence, these features brought me to this service.

Lastly, I would say to carry the national flag in the world was the main reason for joining the 'Foreign Service'.

What are the prerequisites for CSS in your opinion?

The first and foremost requirement is good command of English language. Every candidate should be able to represent himself or herself in a proper and effective manner. Actually, when one joins the 'Civil Service' then the official language is English; so one has to communicate and interact with people in this language.

Secondly, candidates must choose their subjects carefully, according to their aptitude and area of interest. Instead of what people say or recommend one needs to have an apt assessment of what he or she could do best. What are the subjects in which you can excel; you can get good score and score to that extent which can distinguish you from others?

I am not saying that one should not consult the subject specialists and those who already qualified the exam but at the end of the day there should be reflection of your abilities rather than what others think.

Third is proper time management because proper utilisation of time is necessary for your success.

What strategy should candidates adopt for essay and composition paper?

In fact, essay, précis and comprehension writings are not ordinary things to cram; these are skills in which one has to develop strength by continuous practice.

Candidates cannot learn these things by just reading some material or book overnight. For perfection, candidates should have proper mentoring and consistent practice. I would say every day if not possible then every other day, candidates must do each assignment of précis, comprehension and expansion of an idea or short essay and get it checked from a teacher.

Similarly, one should write at least one essay in a week. So I think these are appropriate ways to develop your capacity in these areas. I would say practice, practice and more practice.

What is the key to get higher marks in interview?

There are some skills required to surpass different stages of this exam and interview is also a part of this exam. This includes command of English language, knowledge about subjects (Optional), general knowledge and proper way to reply or give answer to a question.

As candidates know there is a proper way to attempt the paper similarly, same technique applies to viva or interview. In fact, a well-informed person can perform well in interview but it does not mean that candidates should know everything; you are expected to drop questions. If you do not know then simply say sir I do not know the answer, rather than trying to give a spin.

Moreover, as I said earlier apart from knowledge the skill of answering a question is very important and it can be learnt by mock interviews. For instance, the most common question i.e. introduce yourself, so the answer should be like this:

My name.....

I am from.....

And I have done this (qualification)

Then see what their reaction is if they want to know something else then tells them. I mean they should know who you are and your introduction makes a sketch of your personality.

Furthermore, the candidates always listen to interviewer carefully, read their body language and do not behave in a manner which make them upset. While answering a question make eye contact always and remember in interview one should be polite and well mannered.

What sort of written presentation is needed for a 20 marks question?

When one attempts a question in the CSS exam then answer should be logical. Think about it as you have to present a case; so it should have a proper introduction about what is asked then argue. One should give cogent and convincing arguments based on facts and figure then draw a proper conclusion.

I tell you people always say write this or that or take a particular line of arguments because it will please the examiner. I do not believe in this and I can assure you if you attempt the question in logical and cogent manner, you will get good marks, no matter examiner agrees with your point of view or disagrees. Lastly, do not go beyond the ambit of your question while answering.

Are academies necessary for CSS or these are only tools of making money?

Academy is not essential at all basically. It depends how you prepare, work hard, show diligence and determination. There are number of academies which are just to make money

but at the same time there are people who are doing much better work.

In fact, your own commitment to pass the CSS is much better than any thing else. To sum up, I would say candidate's own determination and hard work matters a lot, no matter he or she has joined any academy or not.

Any Message

For all aspirants of CSS I would say, they should believe in their own and believe in Almighty Allah. Tell you can do this and you will do this, then start preparation and work hard and in the last after putting your all efforts pray for your success. Here, I would also like to add for the aspirants of the Foreign Service that keep this thing in your mind, after joining the Foreign Service:

- You have to spend lot of time of your foreign service outside Pakistan.
- At times you have to be away from your family.
- Here, you have not any 'Danda' to reflect your power or authority. In other services you might have it.
- In the beginning it is interesting but after 2 or 3 postings it becomes a challenge because you have to move after every three years.
- In this service, you keep on reading and traveling a lot.

To sum up 'Foreign Service' is a package deal so if you like the package and want to carry the national flag then join it.