

Today's Paper » NATIONAL » TAMIL NADU

## Willpower that surmounted all obstacles

**N.L. Beno Zephine is the first visually-challenged woman to be selected for IFS**



Beno Zephine's mother read out all her daughter's books during her preparation —Photo: B. Jothi Ramalingam

“What will you do if you are posted in the northeast?” — This was the first question the interview panel shot at N.L. Beno Zephine, a completely visually-challenged candidate, when she sat in front of the panel for her civil services interview. Pat came the answer: “Ensure that its residents feel they are part of India.”

On Friday, she became the first visually-challenged woman to be selected for the prestigious Indian Foreign Service (IFS) after clearing the civil services exams in her second attempt. “I told the panel that the northeastern States can be made a trading hub with neighbouring countries. This will ensure development and weed out problems there,” says Ms. Zephine in a conversation with *The Hindu*.

She is now preparing to travel to the capital for training. “I may not have vision, but that did not stop me from achieving my mission to become an IFS officer. One should make the most of whatever resources they have rather than lamenting over what they don't have,” explains 25-year-old Ms. Zephine of Rajaji Nagar, Villivakkam.

She says earlier, there were some candidates with low vision who got into IFS. “But in my case, government took pro-active steps to offer a job to a completely visually-challenged person. I know there are challenges in the profession, but I am confident I can deal with them,” she says.

The credit for her success also goes to her parents L.A. Charles, a technician at Perambur Carriage Works and Mary Padmaja, a home maker. “My father brought me the books and my mother read them out to me,” she explains. “I studied only for four hours per day. I believe in understanding the subject rather than preparing for hours,” adds Ms. Zephine.

Her mother and father were naturally saddened when they discovered their daughter could not see at all. “But then we were overjoyed when she started studying well. All parents should allow their children to pursue what they want,” says Ms. Padmaja.

Ms. Zephine says that she has a wish to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalithaa to seek their blessings before joining duty. “I would also like to thank all those who helped me achieve this,” she adds.