She can't see, but her dreams are in sight

IFS Gets 1st 100% Visually Challenged Officer

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Chennai: The phone hasn't stopped ringing since the night of June 12 for N L Beno Zephine. The 25-year-old from Chennai was informed by the external affairs ministry on Friday that she has been inducted into the Indian Foreign Service (IFS), making her the first 100% visually-challenged person to gain entry into the 69-year-old service.

"I am really thankful to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for taking this big decision. I am told IFS was not identified for the blind except for some exceptions made for candidates with low vision," Beno, a probationary officer with the State Bank of India, told **TOI** in an interview. Since the news broke, she has been on her toes, giving motivational lectures at schools and colleges across the city.

"I received word about my appointment on the night of June 12 from the external affairs ministry and the phone calls have not stopped since then," she said.

Former diplomats hailed the decision to allow fully visually challenged people into the service.

"This is nothing short of a revolutionary decision as many promising people have lost out for lack of 20:20 vision. Usually, candidates wearing spectacles (and thereby having perfect vision) are accepted. I know of at least one case last year where someone who lost an eye in an accident was admitted to the income tax or a related revenue service," former diplomat T P Sreenivasan said from Thiruvanathapuram.

"It's a forward-looking view taken by the Centre. She (Beno) will have some difficulties, but having come so far, she will do extremely well. Moreover, field work that is usually important for IAS cadres is not required for IFS officers; they need to study, analyse and give guidance," he said.

Beno cleared the civil services exam last year but her posting was pending. "I am grateful that the central government modified some parameters to give me the assignment," Beno reiterated.

N L Beno Zephine (right) with her parents Luke Anthony Charles and Mary Padmaja at Kingmakers IAS Academy in Anna Nagar

C Suresh Kumar

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