**Syllabus subtopic:** Ministries and Departments of the Government; Pressure Groups and Formal/Informal Associations and their Role in the Polity.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the restructuring in the ministry and its advantages

**News:** The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has undertaken a major overhaul of departments and reporting structure that will effectively empower seven different Additional Secretaries and re-organise their tasks along themes like culture, trade and development, and consolidated geographical divisions for better coordination.

**About the restructuring**

- The restructuring was done in consultation with External Affairs Minister, who as a former foreign secretary (2015-2018) managed the Ministry himself, and authored the plans.

- The silos that will be managed by the Additional Secretaries will range from cultural power, economic and trade coordination, all international organisations and summits including UN, G-20, BRICS etc. and all development partnerships.

- **Departments merged:** All of Europe, all of Africa and West Asia and all of the Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific region has been merged.

- At the secretary level there are now four officers apart from the Foreign Secretary, with the Secretary, (Consular, Passport, Visa and Overseas Indian Affairs) Division who will also oversee officials on the Gulf and West Asia/North Africa (WANA) divisions.

- The additional charge indicates the importance of the Indian diaspora in the Gulf and WANA regions where about eight million Indian expatriates live, about a quarter of the world total, that account for more than 60% of the inbound remittances.
• Another change is the decision to move the “External Publicity” (XP) media and public relations division to work under Secretary (West).

• The Foreign Secretary also reshuffled a number of joint secretary level postings, including in Public Policy and Research, which also entails planning the MEA’s flagship Raisina Dialogue conference in January.

**Reason for the move and its advantages**

• Secretary-level officials are “overburdened and overworked” with day-to-day duties, and lack much-needed time to strategise.

• In the new structure, additional secretaries will be empowered to look at more long-term solutions rather than only “firefighting”, and will travel and give political direction to their assigned portfolios.

• The new Director General for the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), will consolidate the government’s push to promote its cultural, heritage, history, tourism objectives and showcase the diaspora, with the ICCR being rebranded as the government’s “soft power” vehicle.