

TIMES OF INDIA

Education Times 06.10.2008

Making the Most of the Mains

WITH LESS THAN TWO WEEKS LEFT FOR THE UPSC CIVIL SERVICES MAIN EXAMINATION, LAKSHMI KRUPA CATCHES THE MOOD AMONG ASPIRANTS...

An old hostel in Anna Nagar brims with upbeat Civil Service aspirants who have made this their home for a while now, as they gear up to face what will be one of the toughest exams of their lives. "By the time the initial euphoria of having cleared the preliminary examination settled, I was staring at the Main examination. This is my last attempt. I am taking conscious efforts to stay relaxed," Balajee G E says even as he runs through vast notes, made over the last two years.

The Civil Services examination is conducted annually by the Union Public Service Commission for recruitment to various administrative services including the most sought-after IAS, IPS and IFS cadres. The examination is held in three different stages; Preliminary Examination, Main Examination and the Interview. The results for this year's preliminary were announced mid-August. The Main examination is scheduled to begin from October 17th. So how are Chennai's administrative hopefuls preparing? "The general mood amid students, as is expected, is tense as this is a tough exam, especially given the age of many of the aspirants," says Ganesa Subramanian, Director, Ganesh's IAS.

While preparing for this exam one needs a multi-pronged approach as it includes General Studies, English, Language, Optional paper 1 and 2. M Nagarajan a three-time Mains candidate who went to the interview last year says, "I prepare for current affairs throughout the year. But since the last one month is crucial, as optional subjects and general studies have to be revised." "There are so many study materials available, especially for current affairs that it sometimes confuses me. It's impossible for anyone to study all of these. I use my own discretion to study selectively," Balajee adds, "Now is the time for revision. Discussing with friends is the best form of revision." "There is no need to worry about the results, which is what most students do. It is but a natural consequence of an exam, is it not," says Subramanian.

Most often, the English and Language papers that form a part of the exam tend to be overlooked, either due to over-confidence or due to misplaced over-emphasis on optional subjects. "The language and English papers cannot be taken lightly for they are crucial qualifying papers. It is always better to do some basic preparation for this," Balajee adds. "Unless a candidate qualifies in these papers his other answer sheets will not be evaluated. So I'd suggest that students use the entire three hours at their disposal during the exam and attempt every question," Subramanian emphasises.

Preparing for the Main exam is no mean task. Aspirants usually spend close to a year writing the exam's three phases, while having already spent another for preparation. "I study for 12-15 hours a day to cover the syllabus. I also use the internet to find information quickly for last minute references," quips Nagarajan who also maintains a blog for civil service aspirants.

"I would ask aspirants to aim at answering all the questions at the exam hall," Ganesa Subramanian says. "It is like playing on a one-day cricket match. Does not matter how you perform during the net practice, what counts is your performance on-field," he adds.