

PROBABLE QUESTIONS & HOW TO TACKLE THEM

— S. B. Singh —

Any interview, more so an IAS interview, is mainly about questions being raised by board members and answers being offered by the candidates. Thus, anticipating questions and formulating their answers is an important part of the interview preparation. After acquainting oneself with the purpose and technique of the interview, one must turn one's attention on creating a pool of probable questions on a variety of topics and formulate their answers, explanations that sound logical and acceptable to the interview board. This exercise will minimise the surprise element during the interview session in that most of the questions will appear to have been asked on expected topics.

Area wise analysis of questions

1. Educational Background

In this section, questions will pertain to the name of school, college, subjects studied there and performance in terms of marks or grades obtained. You must know what is the significance of the name of

your school/college, when and by whom it was established, any alumni you can recall from the institution you have studied in etc. Say for example, if you have studied in a school called ' Navodaya Vidyalaya' you should know the objectives of such schools, your personal experience about it , values inculcated by you from your association with the school.

2. Parental Background

In some cases, they will also take interest in your parents occupation by asking you as to what you have learnt from their professional experience, and if your parents are role models for you.

3. Work Experience

If you have worked in private sector or under government, they will definitely ask you couple of questions related to your job description. You are expected to know what your organisation is all about, details of tasks performed by you, why you want to leave that job and want to join civil services, how your job experience can help you in your career in civil services.

4. State to which you belong

A wide range of questions will be raised on your state. Its cultural, historical importance, law and order situation, governance , performance on various economic indicators, state of agriculture, industrialisation, resources available and solutions to various problems of your state, will constitute areas on which questions will be asked.

5. Hobbies, Extra Curricular Activities

On your hobbies, questions are meant to assess your genuine interest in what you pursue as your hobby. If reading is your hobby, whether you read fiction or non fiction, who is your favourite author, which books you have read recently, are going

to be likely questions. Similarly, if watching documentaries or photography is your hobby, they will delve deep in the subject to find out your level of commitment and interest in the stated hobby. Say for example, you have mentioned watching wildlife documentaries as your hobby, you will be asked to name a few famous Indian and foreign documentary makers, whether you have watched their documentaries or not. If you are not able to recall any famous wild life documentary maker's name, then it is going to leave a poor impression before the board. Similarly, if you have mentioned yoga or meditation as your hobby, expect both theoretical and practical questions on these hobbies. For example, what is the underlying philosophy of yoga, who was its main proponent, what books you have read on yoga, who are leading yoga experts, will be areas of interest for the board members to ask questions. This way, you should frame likely questions on your different hobbies and fortify your knowledge on them.

6. Why you want to join Civil Services?

During the interview session, the common refrain is - "Why you want to join civil services." Almost every candidate is asked this question by one or another member of the board. Though this question is common, it does not mean answer to it should be common too. Rather than sounding idealistic, you should offer a realistic answer to this question. Answers like - I want to serve the nation, or I want to serve the society, or, It offers a diverse, challenging career, looks like an old, repetitive cliché used by every candidate. A more realistic answer to this should be: "I want to join civil services for a number of reasons. First, it offers job security. Second, it offers some of the most coveted jobs under the government. Third, I will derive higher job satisfaction in civil services because of its diverse nature. Four, I consider civil services not just a job but a service with a deep public interface. Finally, it will provide me an opportunity to be a part of the governing architecture of the country which will allow me to contribute

meaningfully to public service. If you phrase your answer like this, you will sound more realistic about the civil services .

Another related question here can be: how your knowledge of your discipline of study (engineering, medicine, agriculture, botany etc), can be used in administration. To this, you should say that such domain knowledge will help you understand the issues better and will be handy to make better policies and decisions. You can substantiate this answer with some examples. For example, If you are from medical background, you can say that it will help you formulate more practical health policies with your first hand knowledge of medical issues. Like this, find relevance of your educational discipline in civil services before you face the interview board.

Similarly, there will be some questions whose answers you may not know. There are two ways to tackle them . First, if you don't know anything about the question, just politely accept it and say you don't know the answer. Second, if you have some vague idea about the question, ask the board if you can try to attempt it with some guess. If allowed, make an intelligent guess and answer it.

7. Situation Based Questions

Not always, but in many cases, one of the board members may raise situation based questions. This can be either on a real situation that has appeared in news, or a hypothetical one. In both types of situations, real or hypothetical, your answer must weigh in all factors and then provide a solution that sounds implementable on ground, beneficial to the country or citizens and innovative in thinking. For example, consider this situation : A private company was asked to close down its plant because its product manufacturing process was posing dangers to environment and people's health. However, the company has facilities to produce oxygen in large quantity which can help overcome oxygen crisis in the country in the wake of corona resurgence. The company has made a request to you to permit it to reopen the plant so

that it can produce and supply much needed oxygen. Will you allow it to be reopened if you are the authority to decide it. Now, your answer should be based on putting priority on protecting human life by accelerating oxygen production from all possible sources. Since the company has approached you for permission, you will consider it on most urgent basis. But at the same time, you will also consider the fact that the company was closed due to environmental hazards, and therefore, it should not be allowed to operate permanently in the garb of producing oxygen. Your concern for environment will remain and you will grant it only temporary and conditional permission to produce oxygen only and not its mainline product it was manufacturing before its closure. By this, the objective of meeting oxygen requirement will be met without compromising on the environmental risks the company can pose again.

8. Current Affairs

Since corona is making most of the news for a long time, expect a number of corona related questions on its health, economic, and social ramifications. Vaccine production and distribution, vaccine diplomacy, vaccine nationalism, vaccine passports, are issues at hand now that can be framed as questions. Why second wave occurred, was it preventable, how to contain the second wave, whether third wave may also occur - these are most likely questions.

As regards international issues, Indian foreign policy in corona times, our disputes with neighbours like Nepal and China will surface during the interview. Abraham accords, quad, Indo Pacific policy, waiving of patents in corona times, role of UNO, WHO during the pandemic, India's relations with China, Russia, USA could be areas of interest to the interview board. Also, comparison between SAARC and BIMSTEC, India's stand on military coup in Myanmar, Rohingya crisis, India's opposition to BRI and CPEC, opting out of RCEP, are going to be most likely topics for questions.

In particular, read in details the recent ceasefire agreement between India and Pakistan and the ongoing LAC disengagement talks between India and China. The best way to prepare on these topics is to read the editorial comments on related issues in good newspapers and formulate your answers.

9. Questions on Social Issues

There are a host of issues that relate to our society, for example, nutritional issues in children, women and the poor , inequality in online education , issues of mental health of citizens during the pandemic, rising domestic violence during lockdown and so on. You must embrace these topics with compassion and offer solutions from both your heart and mind.

10. Controversial Questions

There are many sensitive issues on which taking the right stand may look difficult to a candidate without guidance. My suggestion here would be not to take an extreme stand on them. You should present both sides of the argument, assess their respective merits and present a middle ground. You should not take a stand that sounds anti government. But you are free to point out to failures of the government and suggest better policy measures. Some criticism is always welcome, but you need not appear like an opposition party or like a newspaper article in criticizing government vehemently. To take an example, on the controversial farm laws, rather than opposing or defending them, take a stand that encapsulates both perspectives, that of the government and of the farmers. Then, suggest a conciliatory approach to solve the issue.

Thus, by following the above advice, you can reasonably hope to get many questions on expected lines with prior preparation so that you are not taken by surprise during your interview.