

All in a day's work

Trainee officers take a break to indulge in some non-academic activity

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Very soon they will be at the nerve centre of administration and calling shots. But last weekend they were at everyone's beck and call – cooking, taking orders and serving food. For a change, officer trainees of All India services donned aprons and chef hats to whip up a tantalising fare. Taking a break from their overloaded schedule, they tried their hand at cooking and enjoyed camaraderie.

The normally didactic precincts of Dr MCR HRD Institute of Telangana wore a cheerful look. There was a nip in the air and melodies of yesteryear wafted around - *papa kehte hain bada naam karega*. The open lawns behind the administrative block became the place to cook, create and celebrate. Officer trainees, who are otherwise busy with lectures and debates, grappled with cookers, tongs, rolling pins and frying pans. They mixed craftsmanship with creativity.

As part of the 92nd Foundation Course, the All India Services and Central Civil Services officers are equipped with life skills to face complex challenges. Management calls for multifaceted skills. "Learning to connect with people and understanding their requirements is all part of group dynamics," says Anitha Balakrishna, Course Coordinator and Joint Director General, Dr MCR HRD Institute. Cooking seems quite apt to practice this. The idea is to build a culture of collaboration, engagement and empowerment.

Cooking is the art of adjustment. The young recruits, 207 in all, rose to the oc-



casation. They formed into groups, decided the menu and divided work among themselves. "I am not good at cooking but I can sell things. So I took up marketing of the food coupons," says a vivacious Bisma Qazi of Srinagar. She has opted for Indian Police Service and will be the second Muslim woman to join the force in J&K.

Rippan Dullet of Haryana (Indian

Postal Service) and Manjeet Phetoya of Punjab (Indian Trade Service) made three varieties of parathas – aloo, paneer and onion – with the ease of a pro. "I have learnt it at home," remarks a beaming Dullet frying the parathas on a big pan. Their group member, Ganesh Kumar from Kerala, came up with Puttu rice, the popular breakfast dish of his state besides chicken and chana gravy.



On field (clockwise) Officer trainees try their hand at cooking; Bisma Qazi from Srinagar; Rippan Dullet and Manjeet Phetoya

"This is a new experience and very satisfying. We come to know the food habits of different states. The biggest advantage is the team spirit it develops," says Abhishek Agarwal (IPS) of Chattisgarh.

Most of the recruits who were cooking for the first time avoided attempting fancy or complicated dishes. Cooking is an art that depends more on instinct rather than exact measurement. These recruits proved they had it aplenty.

Each group was given a budget of ₹3000 to buy the raw material. They are expected to sell the dish and make a profit. The sale proceeds go for charity.

Not just food there were a variety of sports to play. Some recruits organised games like blow the candle, bucket challenge, dare to tear, play and gulp a plate of halwa.

"The kind of game one chooses to play helps in understanding the psychology of that person," says Satyam Kumar of Bihar who has opted for Indian Forest Service. The trainee officers have a tough mandate of grounding the government schemes. Group dynamics is what comes handy in taking the right decisions, overcoming prejudices and built-in biases. The fete was memorable take away from the Foundation Course.