

# Crisis In Israel

—By Wing Commander Dinesh Mathur, VSM (Retd.)

Academic achievements notwithstanding, in the recent past, the quality of an individual to become an effective team member is being attached increased significance. In several surveys of American companies, most respondents have consistently indicated that the “ability to work in teams” is an essential skill for MBA graduates, more important than knowledge of quantitative and statistical techniques. For some time now, it has been well-recognised that knowledge without adequate team spirit and a sense of responsibility could easily become a liability for any organisation. A group discussion, a regular activity in the corporate world, implies examining or considering something in detail, usually in a conversation. A person’s ability to work in a team easily comes to the fore while participating in a group discussion. Owing to this reason, MBA graduates are now being trained to participate in group discussions effectively. At the same time, group discussion is also being used as an essential tool to screen candidates for admission to prestigious management institutes and entry-level jobs.

In the present case, ten candidates were called to participate in a group discussion during the selection process for managers in a PSU. Three assessors were deputed to assess these candidates, who briefed them about Dos and Don’ts to be followed. The candidates were told to address each other by the Identification Nos. allotted to them, which were displayed on their shirts. Candidates were told that they could speak as much as they wanted, but all candidates must be given a chance to express themselves. They were also told to maintain discipline and that only one candidate should speak at a time. After that, they were offered three topics and asked to pick up one for this discussion after mutual consensus. They were given two minutes to jot down any points they could refer to while discussing the topic. Subsequently, the group discussion proceeded in the following manner :

**Candidate No. 10 :** Good morning, friends. I hope you are all set to express your thoughts on this interesting, current international topic. As we are well aware, recently, Israel was in the news headlines for unprecedented protests and strikes, which were certainly the worst and the



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largest in the history of this country. This was primarily due to months of dissent over the government’s plan to strip power from Israel’s judges. People feared that democracy in the country was being systemically destroyed since the government was trying to curb its judiciary’s independence drastically. But several other issues are involved in making these protests so widespread. While Israel’s largest union supported this strike, doctors, educational institutions, military reservists and pilots also joined the protests and refused to come on duty. These developments triggered warnings that the crisis even threatened Israel’s security. What developments led to this situation, and what lies ahead for Israel in the coming days are the issues we are required to discuss now? You may all express your ideas on this topic now.

**Candidate No. 9 :** No. 10 has given us a good introduction to this topic, but to put things in perspective, we need to talk about some significant developments in Israel a few years before these unprecedented protests. Talking about them would make us understand the topic better.

**Candidate No. 7 :** Yes, quite right. The fact remains that the period from 2018 to 2022 has been a time of political

crisis and instability in Israel. Five elections for Israel’s Parliament, known as Knesset, were held in a short period of four years. If I recall correctly, these elections were held in April 2019, September 2019, March 2020, March 2021 and November 2022. These elections revealed that Israel is a highly polarised country, and because of this, the polls did not yield a stable government.

**Candidate No. 3 :** I hope we know that unlike Indian Parliament, where we have two Houses—Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, the Israeli Parliament has only one, which is called Knesset. It is the only legislative authority in Israel, which has 120 members who the citizens elect. Whichever party wins 61 seats is allowed to form the government. But, it is also a fact that in the history of Israel, no single party has ever won 61 seats to form the government. Yet another important piece of information about Israel is that Israel does not have a written Constitution. Instead, it has a set of Basic Laws. Many of these laws are based on individual liberties and deal with the formation and role of the principal institutions.

**Candidate No. 2 :** These facts about Israel are significant information for us.

**Candidate No. 10 :** The first two elections in April and September 2019 failed to produce a governing coalition, and the third election in March 2020 led to a Unity Government led by Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu and Mr. Benny Gantz. But, it was soon dissolved in December 2020, which caused a fourth election in March 2021. The 2021 election resulted in the thirty-sixth government of Israel, a diverse coalition of parties with various ideologies led by Mr. Naftali Bennett and Mr. Yair Lapid. But, this was dissolved in June 2022. A fifth election in November 2022 saw the victory of the right-wing bloc returning Mr. Netanyahu to lead the thirty-seventh government of Israel. So this ended the deadlock. Thus, looking at all these developments, political instability has prevailed in Israel for quite some time now.

**Candidate No. 1 :** I think No. 3 and No. 10 have adequately summarised the prevailing political instability in Israel.



**Candidate No. 7 :** I would like to add that the election results in November 2022 gave Mr. Netanyahu's Likud party only 32 seats; they also revealed a major shift in favour of extreme right-wing parties. The right-wing coalition, headed by Mr. Netanyahu, with 64 seats, thus obtained a majority in the 120-member Knesset, while its centrist-leftist rivals got only 51 seats. The significant development is that to form the government, Mr. Netanyahu was forced to compromise with his extremist colleagues in his Cabinet. Therefore, for the first time in the history of Israel, it is a nation now shaped more by right-wing elements.

**Candidate No. 3 :** Yes, quite right. Now Mr. Netanyahu's Cabinet agenda included several actions which were perceived directly against the Palestinians and, at the same time, provided Jews more influence. But the most important part of the right-wing agenda included the reform of the judicial system of the country. This was considered important as right-wing politicians are against the country's Supreme Court for its presumed bias against the settler movement and the ultra-religious community, its role in preventing the eviction of Palestinians and its capability to nullify laws passed by the Knesset which are considered as contrary to the country's Basic Law.

**Candidate No. 4 :** It has also been reported that to make things worse, the Israeli government took several provocative actions against the Palestinians, which created tensions.

**Candidate No. 9 :** Can some friend tell us what judicial reforms led to so much chaos and protests in Israel?

**Candidate No. 1 :** The governing coalition says the judiciary has granted itself increased authority over the years. In its proposed judicial changes, the government first tried to change the makeup of a nine-member committee that selects the judges. The proposal would give representatives and appointees of the government an automatic majority on the committee, effectively allowing the government to choose the judges. Thus, through these reforms, the government wanted to have direct control over the appointment of judges.

**Candidate No. 4 :** Is that all the government was trying to do concerning judicial reforms?

**Candidate No. 10 :** No, there is much more. More importantly, the government also wanted to curb what it

calls the Supreme Court's overreach by drastically restricting its ability to strike down laws that it deemed unconstitutional. Critics say the proposed overhaul would place unchecked power in the hands of the government of the day. They fear that Prime Minister Mr. Netanyahu, who is himself standing trial for corruption charges, could use these changes to extricate himself from his legal hassles.

**Candidate No. 8 :** But, regarding judicial reforms, why is there so much difference of opinion in Israel? Can some friend tell us about this aspect?

**Candidate No. 7 :** Yes, to the critics of these reforms, the Supreme Court is seen as the last resort of the secular, centrist people. Religious Jews, especially the ultra-Orthodox, consider the court an obstacle to their way of life. In the past, the court has frequently opposed certain privileges and financial subsidies for the ultra-Orthodox. Significantly, the court rejected a special dispensation that allowed ultra-Orthodox Jews to postpone military service in favour of religious study, inciting religious leaders. Right-wing Israelis also see the court as an antagonist.

**Candidate No. 3 :** I would like to add that the far-right and religious parties have also argued that Israel has lost its balance between the judiciary, executive and legislature. They essentially say that liberals and leftists control the judiciary while the polity has shifted to the right. The government also wanted to give mass exemption from joining the armed forces to religious Jews. They have also passed a law preventing legal authorities from removing the Prime Minister from office (only the Knesset and the Cabinet can remove the leader from the office).

**Candidate No. 9 :** Yes, very correct. In fact, the government fears that the Supreme Court can strike down these plans unless the judiciary's powers are curtailed. Therefore, for the right-wing parties, the existing judicial system hinders the implementation of their elaborate plans to remake Israel. I think this seems to be the main issue with regard to judicial reforms.

**Candidate No. 10 :** But, when sudden protests and violence broke out against its proposed legislation to effect changes in the judiciary, the government was much surprised. Several Bills were introduced in the Knesset : first, to protect the Prime Minister from criminal proceedings, clearly meant to protect Mr. Netanyahu from the criminal charges; the second, to amend the Basic

Law to dilute the judiciary's power to invalidate laws considered contrary to the Basic Law; and the third to provide for a greater role for the government in the selection of judges.

**Candidate No. 1 :** The critics of these proposals considered these changes a 'judicial coup' primarily aimed at destabilising the democratic system. Thereafter, mass agitations occurred, and thousands of Israelis took to the streets. Interestingly, protesters included trade unions, universities, entrepreneurs, the business community and even military reservists. All these sudden developments posed huge problems for Israel.

**Candidate No. 7 :** I would like to add that the most significant opposition came from military reservists. Reservists feared being given illegal military orders if the Supreme Court could not scrutinise the government activity adequately. And they also feared being charged in international courts if the Israeli justice system is made too weak to prosecute soldiers. At the same time, military leaders warned that a decline in reservists, who form a key part of the air force pilot corps, might impact the military's operational capability. All this could pose serious security problems for Israel.

**Candidate No. 4 :** Quite right. These protests really created very serious issues for Israel.

**Candidate No. 3 :** While the protests had spread to Israel's reservists and diplomatic community, Israel's Defence Minister Mr. Yoav Gallant, a former Major General and a member of Prime Minister's Likud party, openly criticised the Bills and was quickly removed from the Cabinet. Mr. Netanyahu blamed him for not pacifying the reservists. But, this action of the Defence Minister was also criticised and considered irresponsible given the security issues faced by Israel. However, most people thought that Mr. Netanyahu's actions to overturn democracy threatened the country's security, which was undoubtedly a grave matter for Israel.

**Candidate No. 10 :** I would also like to highlight that for several years now, Israel, with the full support of America and Western governments and media, has appeared as a country of stability, peace and democracy in West Asia, which was involved in confrontations and conflicts. However, this image now stands shattered when there is political instability in the country and PM Mr. Netanyahu himself is facing criminal



charges, and the country stands highly polarised with unrest all around.

**Candidate No. 6 :** Yes, I agree with you.

**Candidate No. 7 :** You are right there, but, to my mind, the main issue revolves around the problem of how to deal with a large Palestinian population which far exceeds Israel's Jewish population. As reported, successive Israeli governments have handled the Palestinian question by denying their identity and rights through a series of actions. In the recent past, Palestinians were provoked by confrontations involving the sacred Al-Aqsa Mosque. This led to problems between Israeli settlers and their Palestinian neighbours in the West Bank.

**Candidate No. 4 :** But how do you think Mr. Netanyahu would deal with this grave situation now? How would he find a compromise formula amid such differing opinions while dealing with his political compulsions?

**Candidate No. 5 :** Can some friend talk about it?

**Candidate No. 3 :** Yes, faced with such public anger against his moves, Mr. Netanyahu decided to delay his plans, and presently, there is a temporary halt in the judicial changes, but the laws have not been dropped, as hardliners have not backtracked from their push to reform the judiciary. It is apparent that Mr. Netanyahu will now try and find a compromise with his hardline members. However, whether their temptation to remain in power will adequately motivate them to agree to a compromise formula is unclear.

**Candidate No. 9 :** But I don't think the problem can be resolved by dealing with only the hardliners, as the protests were not by opposition parties alone. Mr. Netanyahu would have to convince the entire population, which disagreed with his plans and thought democracy was in danger in Israel. It seems that would not be an easy task for Mr. Netanyahu.

**Candidate No. 7 :** Let us remember that Mr. Netanyahu came to power way back in 1996 and has faced quite a few crises in his political career. But, the fact remains that he has met all challenges and eventually emerged as a winner. So, I think we should not underestimate his capabilities. Of course, the present challenge is the gravest he has encountered in his career.

**Candidate No. 3 :** I feel Israel's crisis has been shocking as no one could see this coming just a few days back.

When Mr. Netanyahu formed his coalition and came to power, there were no predictions about any breakdown in Israeli politics and its economy. In fact, it seems unbelievable that just some time back, the World Happiness Report declared Israel the world's fourth happiest country. Therefore, the reaction to the judicial reform proposals has shown a profound split in Israeli society and politics.

**Candidate No. 1 :** I think now we need to suggest how Israel should try and deal with this grave situation.

**Candidate No. 10 :** I would like to add that experts feel that Israel did need judicial reforms as it seems the Supreme Court has assigned itself a bigger role than courts should have in a democracy. However, the real issue now is how this effort has become such a huge national crisis for Israel. It is obvious that it will now take some time for the Israeli society to recover from the damage this situation has caused. There is an urgent need to deal with the situation as to how judicial powers should be distributed in the absence of a written Constitution in Israel and what should be the role of religion and religious Israelis in the country.

**Candidate No. 2 :** Quite right, I agree with you.

**Candidate No. 7 :** Israel is now a 75 years old nation, and I feel that crises like the present one would make Israel think about how to face these political and social challenges, which have been growing for several years. However, with the current acrimony and distrust in Israel, which include efforts to bring down the government, it presently seems difficult to have peaceful and mature discussions in the country to resolve the issues.

**Candidate No. 8 :** Friends, I think the time given to us for this discussion is getting over, and we must conclude it now. Any one of us can conclude.

**Candidate No. 5 :** If you all agree, I request No. 3 to conclude.

**Candidate No. 6 :** Yes, No. 3, you may please conclude.

**Candidate No. 3 :** Right friends. We all had an extremely informative and lively discussion on this widely discussed topic. Initially, after knowing the background information, we talked in detail about the issues which generated so much heat and chaos in Israel recently. While other serious social and political issues are also involved, we highlighted that the recent protests revolved around the judicial reforms

Prime Minister Mr. Netanyahu's government was trying to bring about. We discussed how these protests became so grave that even the security of Israel was endangered. Most people in Israel were convinced that these reforms were an attack on the democracy of Israel. As brought out, the government has taken a step back presently. We also made a mention about how Israel should deal with this situation.

Thank you, friends, and you all have a good day.

### **Critical Assessment of Candidates' Performance**

#### **Good: 3, 7 and 10**

*Observing the performance of these candidates, it can be easily surmised that they have made a major contribution to this group discussion. They could do so since they had prepared adequately before coming for this discussion. They had collected sufficient information and data to support their arguments, which they frequently quoted during the discussion. No. 10 took the initiative to start the discussion as he had enough information on this topic, while other candidates called No. 3 to conclude the GD. All these candidates spoke with confidence, and other candidates listened to them patiently without contradicting them. By the display of their performance, they have emerged as leaders of this group. Due to all these reasons, their performance has been assessed as 'Good'.*

#### **Average: 1, 4 and 9**

*These candidates had some knowledge of this topic, but their performance was not considered very effective during this group discussion. They did help to give directions to this GD at crucial stages, but their own contribution remained limited only. This was because their preparation was insufficient to equip them to participate in a competitive GD like the present one. It was felt that they had the potential to put up a much better performance, but they apparently lacked planned preparation. Due to the same reason, they also did not display much self-confidence. For these reasons, their performance has been assessed as 'Average'.*

#### **Below Average: 2, 5, 6 and 8**

*Looking at the performance of these candidates, it can be easily guessed that they had decided to participate in this group discussion without making any preparation. Their contribution was barely visible. They were seen to be appreciating other candidates who were speaking or just requesting others to speak. This effort on their part was primarily aimed at showing their presence only. They should have realised that sufficient and well-planned preparation is necessary to participate in a competitive GD like this effectively. Due to all these reasons, their performance has been assessed as 'Below Average'.*

**CSR**