

The New Face Of Gen Z

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

Quite a few universities and colleges, including some IIMs, currently use Group Discussions (GDs) during their respective admission process. This is so as Group Discussions provide a fair and comprehensive assessment of candidates. Unlike written tests that mainly evaluate theoretical knowledge, GDs reveal a number of significant personality traits. GDs allow assessors to compare multiple candidates simultaneously in the same environment, making the selection process more efficient and objective. Moreover, Group Discussions encourage healthy competition and creativity. While the aspirants discuss a given topic, assessors get an opportunity to observe how individuals communicate, interact and solve problems as part of a team.

In today's professional world, the ability to express ideas clearly and confidently is considered essential. During a GD, candidates are expected to present their opinions, listen carefully to others, and participate actively during the conversation. This enables selectors to assess their fluency, clarity of thought and ability to persuade others with logical, convincing arguments. Secondly, evaluators also observe leadership qualities during a Group Discussion. In a GD, if a candidate naturally takes the initiative to start and summarise key points, guides the team, encourages participation, helps maintain a positive environment, organises the discussion, and resolves conflicts, he demonstrates vital leadership traits. GDs also test teamwork and interpersonal skills. Respecting others' opinions, cooperating with team members, and contributing positively indicate team spirit. Similarly, critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and other qualities are also visible during a GD.

The above topic was given to candidates by a reputed private and specialised business school as part of its process of selecting candidates for admission to its MBA programme. As expected, aspirants arrived formally attired and, after establishing their identities, were made to sit in a semi-circular seating arrangement. This seating plan ensured that all candidates could easily see and hear each other, and that the three assessors could also hear and observe them. Thereafter, candidates were allotted Identification Numbers and asked to address one



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another by these numbers rather than by name. The assessors then conducted a detailed briefing on all aspects of this Group Discussion. They were permitted to speak as much as they wanted, but were asked to ensure that all participants had an opportunity to speak as well. Of the three topics given, this group of candidates opted for the above topic for the discussion. Once the topic was decided, candidates were given 3-4 minutes to recall and jot down points they could refer to during the GD. Candidates were asked to conclude in 25-30 minutes.

The Group Discussion then started as described below:

Candidate No. 8: Good morning, friends. The topic given to us is currently very hot and the talk of the town in India across all platforms. As we understand, Gen Z or Generation Z includes people born between 1997 and 2012. In India, it was just a social label until recently, when Gen Z took to the streets to protest strongly and assertively. This generation has grown up with Internet, social media and smartphones, making them more connected and informed than any previous generation. Over the past decade, Gen Z has led and participated in several protests across the world, demanding action on issues such as climate change, racial discrimination, democracy, education

and human rights, to name a few. In India, the recent Gen Z protest was mainly against the current education system, exam conduct, and high unemployment. The United Nations has estimated that India has 407 million people aged 14 to 29 in 2026, fitting the Gen Z definition. However, Government figures, based on census projections, put the number at 391 million. Either way, India has today the largest Gen Z population, far ahead of China's 264 million. Obviously, such a large population cannot be wished away by any democratically elected Government. In accordance with the assigned topic, we need to discuss how and why today's Gen Z reacts as it does to highlight and address current situations.

You all may now express your views. Thanks.

Candidate No. 4: Thanks, Number 8, for introducing the topic. Friends, I suggest that, since this topic has several dimensions, we first decide on a format for discussing it. This will avoid repetition of ideas and will ensure adequate coverage of all aspects of this topic. In this regard, may I suggest that, after understanding the term Gen Z, we highlight how Gen Z has been responding to and helping to resolve the pressing global issues of our time. Subsequently, we can discuss in detail the recent Gen Z protest in India, its distinctive features, and its impact. Finally, we may also suggest some measures to effectively deal with Gen Z. Do you agree with these suggestions?

Candidate No. 1: I think Number 4 has made very valid suggestions, and we should discuss this topic as per this format.

Candidate No. 9: I agree. Let's go ahead.

Candidate No. 6: Let me clarify some terms for ease of reference during this discussion. Gen Z comprises those born between 1997 and 2012; Gen Alpha includes those born between 2013 and 2024; Millennials were born between 1981 and 1996; Gen X were born between 1965 and 1980; and finally, the Baby Boomers are those born between 1946 and 1964. At present, India has the highest share of Gen Z voters among the world's major economies. To be precise, the total Gen Z population in India is 407 million, and Gen Z's share of eligible voters is 29.2%. This is

a big chunk of voters who will have a major say in India's forthcoming elections. That is a reality no one can ignore, and the voice of Gen Z cannot be just shrugged away.

Candidate No. 2: Let me talk about the role of Gen Z in highlighting several issues in various parts of the world. Over the past decade, Gen Z has led and participated in numerous protests demanding action on vital issues. One of the most talked about event was the global climate strike. Inspired by Swedish activist Greta Thunberg, millions of young people skipped school to demand stronger action against climate change. Commencing in 2018, these protests spread across Europe, Asia, Africa, the Americas, and Australia. Students joined together and urged the Governments to cut down greenhouse gas emissions, invest in renewable energy, and protect the environment for future generations. These protests attracted global media attention, and many citizens also supported the cause, which has now become a major global issue adversely affecting many nations, including India.

Candidate No. 4: Yes, you are right. Through these protests, Gen Z did play a major role in highlighting the adverse impacts of this serious global issue.

Candidate No. 8: I would like to talk about the role of Gen Z in Black Lives Matter protests, especially in the United States, subsequent to the death of George Floyd in the year 2020. Friends, you will recall that George Floyd died after a police officer knelt on his neck and back for more than 9 minutes during an arrest. Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man, became unresponsive while pinned face down and was later pronounced dead. Subsequently, young people of different races marched together against racism, police brutality and social inequality. In this instance, through social media platforms, Gen Z organised rallies, shared information and encouraged millions to participate in discussions about justice and equality. These Gen Z protests became a global call for human rights.

Candidate No. 7: I agree. This movement brought the issue of discrimination to the fore and became front-page news around the world.

Candidate No. 6: I can say something about some Gen Z protests in the West Asia. Protests erupted in Morocco in late September 2025, led largely by the youth-led 'GenZ 212' movement, with demonstrators demanding better public healthcare and education, greater social justice and action against corruption. The youth were further frustrated by unemployment exceeding 35%. At the end of these protests, the Government began introducing reforms. Similarly, in 2025 in Turkiye, thousands

of Gen Zers took to the streets over a dismal situation wherein a third of Turks were neither employed nor studying, and fewer than two-thirds of university graduates had jobs.

Candidate No. 3: These are quite good inputs about Gen Z protests in West Asia.

Candidate No. 2: Let me talk about the Gen Z protests in Latin America. Gen Z protests also spread to Peru in 2025. While the political turmoil and public distrust continued, a new generation of Peruvians began to assert itself. Most were members of Generation Z, young people who had grown up amid Peru's recurring corruption scandals, economic uncertainty and fragile democratic institutions. Disillusioned with traditional channels of political participation, they turned to social media to organise, share information and rally thousands into the streets. Then in Mexico, several thousand people also took to the streets in November 2025, in a large-scale, youth-led demonstration under the banner of the 'Gen Z Mexico' movement. One of the triggers of these protests was the assassination of Carlos Manzo, the Mayor of Uruapan in the State of Michoacan, who was critical of the Government. They reflected broader grievances among youth and were hugely supported by other citizens as well.

Candidate No. 8: Yes, we should not forget recent developments in the U.S.A. regarding how Gen Z is reshaping political life. The recent election of Mr. Zohran Mamdani as Mayor of New York City was one of the most significant developments in Generation Z politics in 2025, symbolising the generation's growing influence in the developed world. Although the first wave of upheavals, as we mentioned just now, had occurred in the developing world, Mr. Mamdani's campaign centred on the city's cost-of-living crisis, mobilising young voters. His base was overwhelmingly under 35, and a surge in Gen Z turnout helped propel him to a convincing victory. This again goes on to show the increasing influence of Gen Z in highlighting significant issues of our times. Let me also emphasise that Mr. Mamdani's principal opponent, a former Governor, embodied the politics of an old order. The race here was not between Left and Right but between generations. The victory clearly suggested a shift in the political mood among the wealthy world, and Gen Z was driving it.

Candidate No. 1: Yes, friends. These instances illustrate a wider pattern of Gen Z activism emerging across the globe. Having spoken about these Gen Z protests in other parts of the world, I suggest we should now also mention such protests closer to us in Asia and other countries. In Asia, young people

were also at the forefront of several Gen Z movements. In fact, across Asia, a new generation of young people is increasingly taking politics into its own hands. From the streets of Colombo and Dhaka to Kathmandu, Jakarta, Male and New Delhi, young protesters have challenged Governments over corruption, economic hardship, unemployment, exam systems, inequality, censorship and a lack of political accountability.

Candidate No. 5: Quite right.

Candidate No. 6: I can talk about the Gen Z protest movement in Nepal in September 2025, sparked by the Government's sweeping social media ban, apparently intended to silence dissent. The move, against a backdrop of economic dysfunction and widespread youth disillusionment, ignited mass protests across Kathmandu and other Nepali cities, largely led by Generation Z demonstrators. These massive protests successfully forced the Prime Minister's resignation. Prior to this, Nepal's economy had long been characterised by structural weaknesses. Youth unemployment in the country was more than 20% in 2022-23, which was among the highest in South Asia. Young Nepalis had few prospects and were frustrated. All this was after Nepal had experienced chronic political instability for quite some time.

Candidate No. 2: Sri Lanka provided one of the clearest examples of youth-led political mobilisation in Asia in 2022. The country was experiencing its worst economic crisis in decades, with shortages of fuel, food, medicine and cooking gas, alongside high inflation and frequent power cuts. Young activists used social media to spread information, organise demonstrations and challenge narratives. The protests eventually forced the then President Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa to resign and leave the country. This showed that a largely decentralised movement could unite people across social and political backgrounds, and it became an example for activists elsewhere in South Asia.

Candidate No. 4: Yes, you are right. I think similar protests also erupted in Bangladesh, and they were widely observed by Indians. Let's talk about them now.

Candidate No. 8: Right. Bangladesh witnessed another major youth-led movement in 2024. The protests initially focused on the Government's quota system in public sector jobs. This student movement rapidly developed into a much broader political uprising. Here, too, social media served as a means of communication and mobilisation, while authorities sought to restrict information during the unrest. Use of force and Internet disruption intensified public anger. A number of

young men were killed or suffered injuries during police action, causing more unrest. This led to the then Prime Minister Ms. Sheikh Hasina leaving office and taking refuge in India.

Candidate No. 9: Well-described, Number 8.

Candidate No. 6: Yes, but youth activism in the Maldives focused not only on politics but also on climate change, environmental destruction and the future of the island. This showed that Gen Z protests are not restricted to anti-Government demonstrations. Similarly, Indonesia also experienced waves of youth activism in 2025. Here, thousands of students, workers and activists demonstrated against generous allowances for Members of Parliament and what they described as the privileges of political and economic elites, reflecting broader concerns about inequality, corruption and the growing influence of powerful institutions.

Candidate No. 1: We have not spoken about the recent Gen Z movement in India and what triggered these protests. We could talk about it in some detail.

Candidate No. 2: Yes, some data is relevant to understand this trigger. As reported in the press, over 80% of India's unemployed are in the 15-29 age group, the unemployment rate among graduates is 29.1%, and 7-8 million young Indians enter the workforce every year. The NEET (UG) paper leak and the exam-conducting system mainly sparked these protests, mainly in Delhi. For the first time, India witnessed Gen Z protests. Simmering frustrations came to a boil during these youth protests over exams and jobs. Prior to this, more than 20 students had committed suicide against NEET (UG) paper leaks. Several thousand students protested in Delhi, and severe police action, which included lathi-charge and the use of tear gas shells, further intensified the agitation. This agitation by Gen Z forced the then Union Education Minister Mr. Dharmendra Pradhan to resign, even though the Government had initially opposed it.

Candidate No. 4: In this regard, I wanted to add that until recently, we were celebrating our large Gen Z population, but rising unemployment as opportunities shrink is now having a destabilising effect on the country. As reported, in 2023-24, for 7,999 jobs across 22 civil and defence services, a total of 15,08,430 candidates appeared for competitive exams. That amounted to roughly just over 0.5% success rate, rendering the remaining of candidates unselected. It implies that most of our educated youth do not get jobs that satisfy their aspirations.

Candidate No. 5: Number 2 and 4 have presented relevant data and information nicely to show the origin of this Gen Z movement in India.

Candidate No. 1: One important observation on the protests by members of Gen Z in Delhi was that they did not wait for heroes to lead them; they themselves became heroes. Students demanded answers, transparency and accountability from those responsible. Subsequently, similar protests erupted in Jharkhand against the conduct of competitive exams by the State's JPSC and JSSC. Police lathi-charged and used tear gas to disperse them.

Candidate No. 3: Yes, you are right. It's a fact.

Candidate No. 8: Friends, we have adequately discussed significant Gen Z protests around the world. Let me add that by and large, education and jobs have been the key concerns of Gen Z. In many countries, students protested against rising tuition fees, unequal access to education, and outdated education systems. These protests encouraged educational institutions to consider and improve educational opportunities, and social media has been a defining feature of Gen Z activism. While some critics argue that online activism alone is not enough, it has undoubtedly helped mobilise millions and amplify important social issues. Although many of the problems they protested against still remain unresolved, their activism has inspired global conversations and encouraged Governments and societies to pay attention to the concerns of young people.

Candidate No. 2: Friends, we know that Gen Z is a very curious and terribly impatient generation. It is quite interesting to note that they have devised a new vocabulary to express themselves and use fascinating slang. It is known that, unlike their parents, Gen Z can go from 'delulu' (meaning "delusional") to 'sulusu' (meaning "solution") in seconds. They quickly 'clock it' (meaning: notice it), solve it, and keep moving ahead. In India, apart from Gen Z agitations in Delhi and Jharkhand, small children in small towns of UP and other States are now agitating to demand better educational facilities and civic amenities. The recent Assembly by-election in the so-perceived BJP-bastion of Bankipur (Bihar), in which Jan Suraj Party founder Mr. Prashant Kishor won, is reported to have been impacted by Gen Z voters as well. So, Gen Z is making its presence felt in India.

Candidate No. 4: Friends, the time allotted to us for this discussion is over. Let's conclude.

Candidate No. 6: If you all agree, I can conclude.

Candidate No. 2: Please go ahead, Number 6.

Candidate No. 6: Friends, you would agree that we had a lively discussion on this currently much-talked-about topic. After we agreed on the format of our discussion, we explained the terms used to identify various generations and discussed Gen Z movements globally. We spoke about the global climate strike in Sweden, which later spread to other parts of the world. Then we mentioned the Gen Z Black Lives Matter protests in the U.S., which became a global call for human rights. This was followed by a discussion of Gen Z protests in the West Asia and Latin America, including protests in Morocco, Turkiye and Peru. While discussing these protests in Asia, we also talked about issues in such movements in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, the Maldives and Nepal. We then highlighted the issues which triggered the recent Gen Z protests in India and their outcomes. Finally, we mentioned the typical ways these protests are carried out and how they impact governance and society.

That's all, friends. Have a nice day. Thanks.

Critical Analysis Of Candidates' Performance:

Good: 2, 6 and 8

These candidates remained major contributors throughout this discussion. They spoke with confidence because they had sufficient information to support their points of view. They cooperated with other group members and allowed them to speak as well. In the manner they spoke, it became obvious that they had prepared the topic quite adequately. Number 8 took initiative to introduce the topic, while Number 6 came forward to conclude the discussion. In view of these inputs, the effort of these aspirants has been assessed as 'Good'.

Average: 1 and 4

These candidates also participated in this discussion. It appeared they had some information on this subject, but it was not considered sufficient to enable them to deliver a winning performance. Their major contribution remained their help in keeping the discussion on track and covering all aspects of the topic. It was felt that if they had made more effort to prepare for the topic, they could have shown much better performance. Given these facts, their performance has been evaluated as 'Average'.

Below Average: 3, 5, 7 and 9

It was observed that these candidates had decided to attend this competitive Group Discussion with little information on the widely discussed topic at the time. For this reason, they merely kept admiring other active candidates, while their own contribution was barely visible. They spoke once or twice, perhaps only to mark their presence in this GD. Due to these valid reasons, their participation has been assessed as 'Below Average'.

CSR