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PAPER WITH PASSION

Murder without killer

Nithari killing prime suspects win relief, justice for kin families goes abegging

This has become an intermittent habit with our justice delivery system, our judicial system and us as society. From Jessica to Arushi to now at least 19 underprivileged kids in the Nithari are of the NCR, there have been murders most foul discovered, but our learned courts at last tell us that the investigation does not prove that the suspects/accused did it. So they are let off with a rap on the knuckles. The investigators ---- transferred, promoted, retired or dead ---- face no accountability either. That seems to be the bane that has come to revisit us in the form of Allahabad HC's shocking decision on the Nithari murder accused, domestic help Surinder Koli and his master Moninder Singh Pandher. The incident, reported from Noida in 2005-06, took years for the horrifying details to come out. The Nithari murders were especially gruesome as they involved killing innocent children in cold blood; several dead bodies were recovered from a nearby drain. Many bodies had internal organs removed, hinting also at an organised organ racket. But a botched-up investigation along with loopholes in the judicial system made sure that the perpetrators could go scot-free. Though Koli and Pandher were found guilty in 2009, the High Court has recently overturned the guilty verdict ostensibly because of lack of evidence and the testimony of alleged witnesses.



In the annals of Indian criminal history, the Nithari serial killings stand as a chilling testament to the depths of human depravity. The case shocked the nation as young women and children fell victim to unimaginable brutality. The Nithari killings were a series of abductions, sexual assaults and murders. The victims disappeared without a trace, leaving their families in anguish and despair. As investigations progressed, the police unearthed gruesome evidence at the residence of Pandher and Koli. The house was a charnel house, revealing the ghastly remains of several missing persons. The CBI recovered many bodies and body parts from the nearby drain and it was thought that the case was foolproof against the prime suspects. But turns out that the scales of the blindfolded lady do not tilt equally for the influential and the underprivileged. Most victims were migrants from UP and Bihar, living on day's earnings and thus hardly had any say in the system or resources to pursue the case. The Nithari case is emblematic of the slow, convoluted and frustrating Indian justice system. The Nithari case is not just a local tragedy but a national shame. It epitomises the systemic issues that afflict India's criminal justice system, including lack of accountability, shortage of forensic resources and the inordinate delay in adjudication. It calls for immediate and comprehensive reforms within the Indian criminal justice system. Only then we can hope to prevent the travesty of justice from being repeated. This decision to acquit the prime suspects should stir society's collective conscience. If it does not, we are all as good as dead.

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PICTALK



Artisans prepare effigies of demon King Ravana ahead of the Dussehra festival, in Rampur

Hamas's resolve may survive IDF onslaught



ASHOK K MEHTA

Hamas pulled off Pearl Harbour and 9/11 combined, on October 7, which shows its mettle and motivation. Annihilating it will not be easy for Israeli Defence Forces

On this page last week, a colleague expressed misgivings about the Israeli Defence Forces' (IDF) resilience and wondered if the steel was blunted. No one has ever doubted the will, fighting prowess and potential of Israelis given their history of conflict, survival and incredible prosperity. Israel has almost similar experience in its conflicted history as our own: war on creation in 1948, a second bigger round in 1956 and full-fledged regional wars in 1967 and 1973.

IDF, like now, was caught with its pants down when Egyptians executed a cross-Suez offensive that hesitated allowing the counter-Canal riposte led by Ariel Sharon's Centurion Tank division and Squadron and Troop leaders like Chaim Erez and Benny Taran. In the 1973 war on the Syrian front, the hero was Avigdor Kahalani who later became Mayor of Tel Aviv and Minister of National Security. His book Heights of Courage is a prescribed reading for the Israeli military. He was worshipped by Armoured Corps officers who used to take a second oath near Mount Hermon on Golan Heights where a UN Indian Mechanised force is currently located.

And who will not remember Moshe Dayan, the toast of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war and Commander of Jerusalem Front? He became a legend: his eyepatch was replaced with the Jaffa orange in an ad proclaiming The Best. I was privileged to know Kahalani, Erez and Taran, all Armoured Corps, the sword in desert terrain. With the last two, we spent year-long training and friendship at Fort Leavenworth, US and Belgravia, UK. I visited Israel before India formally recognized it in January 1992. That travel is etched as the journey that commenced in Cairo where the Yom Kippur War was conceived. The taxi was driven by a retired Artillery Lieutenant Colonel from the Egyptian Army. We crossed the Suez and drove through Sinai still littered with debris from the 1967 and 1973 wars. The drive was punctuated with a vanquished Veteran's narration of victory turned into defeat. In 1991,



Israel had a string of pearls of UN/EU Peacekeeping Forces. Most are still there - Lebanon, Syria and Jerusalem. Before entering Israel on the border with Egypt, we were welcomed by Lt Gen Johannes Van Ginkle, the Dutch Force Commander of the EU Peacekeepers. He like I was an Erez admirer who we were going to meet after nearly 20 years since Fort Leavenworth. Since then, I have been in Israel more than a dozen times including attending uninterrupted since 2010, the annual International Institute of Counter Terrorism conference in Herzilya till COVID paused it. So, I think I know the IDF pretty well. For anyone doubting its combat strength is a strategic error. Israel has signed peace treaties with Jordan and Egypt and the Oslo Accord in 1993. The most recent is the Abrams Accord which hopes to improve Israel's relations with Arab states. Except with Iran, Syria and Lebanon, there is peace including efforts to mend ties with Saudi Arabia. Since 1973, no Arab country has challenged de facto nuclear Israel. Tel Aviv is fighting internal wars against non-state actors Hezbollah in Lebanon, Islamic Jihad and Hamas which has been misgoverned since 2007 Gaza is the periodic source of Hamas rocketry against Israel.



ISRAEL HAS SIGNED PEACE TREATIES WITH JORDAN AND EGYPT AND THE OSLO ACCORD IN 1993. THE MOST RECENT IS THE ABRAMS ACCORD WHICH HOPES TO IMPROVE ISRAEL'S RELATIONS WITH ARAB STATES

The West Bank, which was infiltrated by Islamic State last year, has opened a third front for the IDF where more than 300 Palestinians and 50 Israelis have been killed this year. But Hezbollah appears to be only shadowboxing. Iran is external enemy no 1. Both Iran and Israel have vowed to destroy each other and do not recognize the other's right to exist. Iran backs Syria, Lebanon and Gaza. Hamas has a stockpile of 130,000 rockets and missiles. It was only in 2012 that their accuracy improved and Israel devised the Iron Dome whose launch I witnessed. It is an expensive antidote to missiles but can distinguish which missile will hit populated areas. Its discrimination capacity makes it valuable.

The current ground offensive against Hamas will be the fifth large-scale operation with the first launched in 2008 after Hamas took control of Gaza. Similarly, Israel has invaded Lebanon thrice - in 1978, 1982 and 2006. IDF has failed to deter Hamas and diminish Hezbollah. Its punitive strikes only degrade capability till their next rocket attack. This time IDF is tasked to permanently destroy Hamas and rescue the 199 hostages hidden in an underground web of tunnels. This cordon and search operation can take months and become an abattoir. Taran says the

operation is not the reoccupation of Gaza. Israel is known to have exchanged 1,200 Palestinian prisoners for one soldier. Iran says Hamas will release hostages if air attacks cease. Ultimately the safety of hostages will constrain operations with IDF fighting on enemy terrain.

Hamas's daring incursion into Israel is a brilliant strategy but the barbarity and brutality of tactics shaming Chengis Khan. Hamas achieved total surprise and horrendous gains. This time they did 9/11 and Pearl Harbour combined, inflicting on Israel their highest losses since the Yom Kippur war.

It has already become the world's largest man-made humanitarian catastrophe that you and I watch on TV. But no one can stop the mauled Israelis from retaliation and the IDF from wreaking retribution by reducing Gaza to the stone age. Fingers crossed the Gaza Front does not spark Lebanon and the West Bank. IDF may destroy Hamas's capability to fight; but not its will to fight another day.

(The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. The views expressed are personal)

Development census serves our goals better

A census on the educational and professional profiles of citizens would help the government devise policies to plug in gaps that impede our development

Even though scientifically we are one species of Homo sapiens, human beings continue to show discrimination based on religion, race and caste. It's a shame for our country in particular and humanity as a whole when people kill each other in the name of caste, religion and race in different parts of the country. Most of the so-called developed countries have reached the level that we see today as they were able to do away with this social mischief. Unfortunately, in our country caste is a dominating player in our social set-up. To preserve the dignity of one's caste even parents are killing their children who try to move away from the clutches of caste rules. People make relationships, friendships and even helping hands based on caste factors.



However, the colonial British rule, as part of their policy of divide and rule, reinstated the social divisions. They introduced census operations that classified people into various castes and communities. This had the effect of reinforcing existing social divisions.

The great spiritual philosopher from Kerala Sree Narayana Guru advised people to follow the "one caste, one religion, one god" philosophy for the betterment of humanity. Unfortunately, even in his home state, no one is following this in true spirit. The Christian missionaries who converted native people on the belief that Christianity does not follow a caste system and gives respect to everyone are also bereft of a culture of oneness. Few Christian sects in Kerala are more fanatic than any other community in

the country. It seems that caste is a deeply ingrained aspect of Indian society, its reflection can be seen in every religious group in the country.

Even after 75 years of independence despite efforts to dismantle the formal caste system through legal means, caste-based discrimination and social stratification continue to be significant challenges in contemporary India. It is at this juncture, that the demand by the opposition parties in "INDIA" pushing for a nationwide caste census comes as a retrogressive step. What do our political parties expect from this? Do they want to reinstate the caste sentiments in the mindset of our youngsters? Are they promoting the historical wrongs our predecessors have done and want our youngsters to fight against one another along caste lines? Are they not interested in seeing our country as a developed nation? Politicians should not play petty electoral politics by fooling people. What is the ultimate objective of pushing for a caste census? If it is for the upliftment of a community/ caste by providing reser-

ventions, previous experience shows that it has failed miserably as the community that receives reservations remains backwards even today. What is the use of giving reservations to the children of government servants based on caste lines? Government support can be provided for one generation for their upliftment. There is no meaning in providing reservations to the next generation, as these people have been lifted from the marginalized category. Many communities that had been the dominant earlier are becoming marginalized now.

Irrespective of caste, governments should support every citizen who is marginalized based on their financial status. Instead of a caste-based census, our political parties should take steps to conduct a census on the educational profile and professional profiles of citizens. This can help devise policy measures to identify gaps that impede our development.

(The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore, views are personal)



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

SWINE FEVER OUTBREAK IN MANIPUR

Sir—The Manipur's Veterinary and Animal Husbandry Department has confirmed an outbreak of African Swine Fever (ASF) in the state, with the Pig Farm of the Central Agriculture University (CAU) in Imphal West District declared as the 'epicenter' of this contagious disease. Measures have been taken to prevent, control, and eradicate the infectious disease, including prohibiting the movement of pigs from the affected areas.

Reports indicate that ASF might have been introduced through pigs or pork from neighboring countries like Myanmar and Bangladesh. The outbreak has already caused significant damage to the region's pork industry, affecting thousands of families and causing financial losses. The northeastern region's annual pork business is substantial, and this outbreak poses a severe threat to the livelihoods of many.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

IN BAD TASTE

Sir—MakeMyTrip's recent advertisement, aimed at Pakistan cricket fans during the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2023, has faced backlash for its lack of sensitivity. The ad begins with an "Open Invitation to Pakistani Fans," encouraging them to put aside rivalries when visiting India.

It goes on to offer discounts based on Pakistan's performance: a 50% discount if they lose by 10 wickets or 200 runs, with the code "BoysPlayedWell"; a 30% discount for a 6-wicket or 100-run loss, using the code "EkShaheenHaar"; and a 10% discount for a 3-wicket or 50-run loss with the code "NoMaukaMauka." India has a historical record of victories over Pakistan in World Cup matches, having won in 1992, 1996, 1999, 2003, 2011, 2015, and 2019. Nevertheless, the ad has faced criticism for its tone and the way it ridicules the Pakistani team.

Manzur Hasan | Howrah

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Two distinct eras



The four decades before and after 1990 mark two distinct eras in India, accompanied by differing social and economic philosophies. The 1950s represented a shift from agricultural deficiencies, with the Green Revolution transforming India from a nation living hand-to-mouth to a self-sufficient one. The Nehruvite philosophy emphasized technology, economic growth, and progress, leading to the

establishment of the first IIT before the nation's first general elections. The present day reflects a thriving middle-class that emerged from this transformation and ushered in the era of aspirational India. While the 1990s witnessed economic liberalisation, the current leadership is focused on leveraging India's political and economic standing. This progress has, however, led to social strain and disproportionate wealth distribution, exacerbated by jobless growth from disruptive technologies. The next generation of leaders faces the challenge of optimising multiple factors, using technology to promote inclusiveness and bridge socio-political divides. This requires statesmen with vision and foresight, and it's essential to trust in India's ability to produce such leadership through the electoral process.

R Narayanan | Mumbai

CHECK ELECTION SOPS

Sir—Election dates have been announced for five states. The Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar has pointed out that freebies offered by political parties have a "tadka" of populism, and voters have every right to ask the parties how they intend to fulfill these promises if elected to power. He is correct, and the promises made by these parties are often extravagant, unrealistic, and outright absurd.

However, these promises are still made because there are certain sections of society that are susceptible to such grandiose assurances. As long as there are segments of the population ready to be exploited, there will be political parties willing to offer free rations, direct money transfers to women's accounts, monthly cash incentives for women, free electricity up to a certain unit consumption, specific annual allocations of free

gas cylinders, and the list goes on. It appears that the Election Commission (EC) can do little to curb this practice. So, who else can put an end to this unsavory practice? The courts, of course. Politicians find courts easy to approach and convenient to evade the issue, which would otherwise be their own responsibility. The Supreme Court had, on a previous occasion, criticized the "freebie culture," noting that offering freebies disrupts the level playing field in an election, with the party making such promises standing to gain. The Supreme Court suggested the formation of a committee of experts to address this issue. Indeed the country must decide a policy on freebies that are offered by the political parties so that there is no confusion on the issue.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

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FIRST COLUMN

SPIRITUAL LITERACY IS A MUST

Our real enemies are not our rivals but suspicion, fear, hatred and violence



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ

It's a proven fact today that disharmony in human relations gives rise to not only wars but to almost all other problems directly or indirectly related to us. The phenomenon of split in families, the rising number of cases of divorces, and even most of the psycho-somatic diseases which are caused by stress or mental tension are due to disharmony in human relations only and nothing else. In the past few days, we all have witnessed how extreme conflict between 2 countries over a border issue resulted in a mass exodus of people from their homeland as well as deaths of innocent people in massive bombings during night time. Hence one cannot deny the fact that the forces that are leading to the disintegration of nations, communities and political parties crop up primarily from disharmony. Most problems of law & order and even the commotions and disturbances in major Legislatures also are due to disharmony in relations between political parties or various linguistic groups, religious communities, etc. It is, thus, very much essential to find a solution to eliminate this problem lest it will eliminate us. But what is the way out? How does one move ahead? Well!!! It is quite clear from some of the examples that have been given of the world-events that these problems are mainly the creations of our minds, our attitudes and our negative thinking. Hence, to create harmony, we need to first of all disarm our minds to dismantle the forces of disharmony. It is estimated that world over approximately two trillion dollars are spent every year by various countries on what is called 'Defence' or 'Security' and yet it's quite surprising that insecurity is increasing rather than decreasing. What's more saddening is that all the diversion of resources to war purposes deprives the poorer sections of society of the help that they need or deserve. In this respect, it is essential to redefine security and to break the link between security and military force. We need to understand that our security lies not in an armed state of readiness for war but in friendliness, love and peace with others.



Our real enemies are not men and women but suspicion, fear, hatred, violence and feeling of revenge and these enemies cannot be eliminated by military means. It has, therefore, rightly been said in the Gita: 'Arjuna, the soul is its own best friend and it is its own worst enemy'. A deep study of the history of human civilization would reveal that presently, there are prevalent certain wrong beliefs that have led us to this kind of a negative culture, negative lifestyle and negative attitudes, one of these wrong beliefs is that there has always been disharmony in the world and there was no time in the history of mankind when there was total harmony. If that were so, then why today do we have a greater number of wars that are more devastating and which result in mass killings? Why are we today inventing more and more deadly weapons? It shows that there was a time in the distant past when there were less and less wars and there was also the earliest era which was free from all kinds of disharmony.

Thus, there must have been a time when the world population was small, the environment was clean and there were no wars and people lived in amity and peace. Such an era was known as the Golden Age. That was the time when there was Universal Harmony. It is that new world which we wish to usher in again. And, we want those attitudes and that thinking which can restore harmony in human relations. So, how can we bring about that change? It's very simple, for that we need to realize that most of our problems arise from our spiritual illiteracy which has to be eradicated. If, therefore, we can get rid of this kind of illiteracy and have a new lease of consciousness beyond war and enmity, then we can open to a new paradise, otherwise, we will end in eternal darkness.

(The writer is a spiritual educator and popular columnist; views are personal)

State doles can put discoms at risk

Discoms will be profitable only when they are unshackled from state controls and electricity distribution is deregulated



UTTAM CHAKRABORTY



Even as the Central government is making all-out efforts to remove the financial distress of power distribution companies or discoms (situated at the core of the power supply chain, they procure electricity from power generating companies or gencos and distribute it to the consumers) and restore them to robust health, actions of the state governments undermine these efforts. The financial distress of discoms arises fundamentally due to their inability to generate enough revenue to pay for the electricity they buy. For over two decades, they have been incurring losses year after year. They have funded these losses by borrowings from banks and other FIs apart from keeping bills pending. At the end of FY 2021-22, their total debt was Rs 620,000 crore. Discoms' inability to generate required revenue has to do primarily with two factors viz. aggregate technical and commercial (AT&C) losses - a jargon for power theft - and shortfall in the average revenue realisation from the sale of electricity vis-a-vis the average cost of supply (cost of purchase, wheeling and distribution), or the ACS-ARR gap. During 2020-21, AT&C losses were 22.32 percent while the ACS-ARR gap was Rs 0.54 per kWh.

Both maladies arise due to constant meddling in the running of discoms by their owners namely the state governments. Power theft on such a massive scale is unthinkable without the complicity of the political establishment. People living in slum settlements/jhuggi clusters being a big vote bank, the party in power encourages unauthorized connections to enable their access to free power.

As for the second malady, the political brass orders discoms to sell a major slice of electricity to households (HHs) and farmers, either at a fraction of the cost of supply or even free (the state electricity regulatory commissions or SERCs which are mandated to fix tariff merely act as rubber stamps). Even as the state government promises to reimburse the differential amount to discoms, most states don't reimburse or do it partially and after considerable delay.



REPORTEDLY, MORE THAN 100,000 METERS HAVE BEEN BIFURCATED OR TRIFURCATED ENABLING EVEN HIGH-END CONSUMERS TO AVAIL OF THE FREE BONANZA

(The writer is a policy analyst, views are personal)

Given nearly a quarter of the revenue lost due to power theft and a substantial amount in subsidies remaining unpaid, the financial stress of discoms is inevitable. The politics of freebies now deeply entrenched in the system has exacerbated the already grim situation. Let us look at the developments in Punjab. Last year, amongst a host of freebies promised by AAP the most prominent was free electricity to households (HHs) for consumption up to 300 units per month. Going by sheer common sense, the State should give help only to those HHs who can't afford to pay cost-based tariffs. The way to go is to identify households whose income is below a threshold. AAP hasn't gone by this. Could it be presumed that only low-income HHs have consumption of fewer than 300 units? So, in essence, the assistance reaches only to those who can't afford it. A closer scrutiny would reveal that the approach adopted by the AAP government is mischievous. Its real intent was to give the dole to 'all and sundry'.

If a household consumes less than 300 units a month, it doesn't necessarily follow that it is a family with low income. For instance, there would be umpteen number of well-off/high-income old-age couples living alone who consume less than 300 units a month. Even for others, who consume more than this threshold, we see a dastardly trend of consumers applying for multiple connections within the same HH. For instance, a household consuming 900 units a month, gets three meters installed to keep consumption of each under 300 units thereby ensuring zero bill. Reportedly, more than 100,000 meters have been bifurcated or trifurcated enabling even high-end consumers to avail of the free bonanza. As a consequence, cur-

rently almost over 95 per cent of power consumers in Punjab avail of subsidies. The swelling number of connections has increased the subsidy by Rs 125 crore per month on average. As a result, the total domestic subsidy for the current FY is now expected to be Rs 8,813 crore - Rs 1,500 crore higher than the initial estimate of Rs 7,313 crore.

In Delhi, where there is no charge for HHs consuming up to 200 units (HHs consuming between 200 and 400 units get a deduction of Rs 800 from their bill), the possibility of the majority of households availing of access to electricity - free of any charge - is not ruled out. The situation in other states won't be different. Given almost the entire population of the State - including the rich, millionaires, billionaires and so on, getting to enjoy the free bonanza, the burden of power subsidy is bound to gallop. Faced with budget constraints, the states will take increasing recourse to underpayment and delayed reimbursement of subsidy dues to discoms.

Meanwhile, the Centre is dealing with discoms under a two-pronged strategy (i) forcing them to make timely payments and (ii) helping them cut AT&C losses and reduce the ACS-ARR gap. Under (i), it implemented late payment surcharge (LPS) and related matters Rules, in 2022. The LPS rules made it mandatory for discoms to clear their legacy dues as existing on June 3, 2022, in a time-bound manner in 12 equal monthly instalments (EMI) with the benefit of non-applicability of the LPS after its implementation date. The same rules are also provided for time-bound clearance of current dues failing, which will attract a power supply cut.

The pressure tactics have worked. The legacy dues of all stakeholders in the electricity supply chain viz.

power generating companies (gencos) and transmission companies (transcos) from discoms decreased from Rs 1,39,747 crore in June 2022 to Rs 69,957 crore in July 2023. Faced with the threat of LPS, the latter could have used loans taken from PFC and REC (out of Rs 130,000 crore sanctioned under 'Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan') to make payments to the former.

As for (ii), under the 'Reforms-Linked, Result-Based Scheme for Distribution' (RLRBSD) launched in July 2021, the Centre has undertaken a massive investment of Rs 300,000 crore to improve the reliability and quality of the power supply chain, including in about 250 million households. The Scheme has yielded results.

The AT&C losses of discoms have gone down from 22.32 per cent during 2020-21 to 13.5 per cent during 2022-23. The ACS-ARR gap has also reduced from Rs 0.54 per kWh during 2020-21 to Rs 0.15 per kWh in 2022-23. A 9 per cent cut in AT&C losses is a stupendous achievement. It seems that pre-paid and smart meters have been installed, and power theft is almost eliminated. The Centre is keen that the ACS-ARR gap should be reduced to 'zero' by March 2025. This will require making power theft 'nil' and timely recovery of all subsidy dues from the States. But, this won't be possible if states continue with business as usual; it could even lead to erosion of the gains made in 2022-23. Modi's efforts would deliver only when (a) discoms are unshackled from state controls; (b) States give subsidies directly to the beneficiaries and (c) electricity distribution is deregulated.

The Israel-Hamas war: Where does India stand?

India's diplomatic stance, which supports a two-state solution, may necessitate a revision in light of the evolving dynamics of the conflict

When the global economy is reeling under the crisis, the current geopolitical crisis in the Middle East has doubly heightened the level of inflation. This crisis emerged following the unexpected offensive launched by the Hamas against Israel, which subsequently led to Israel declaring war. Since Israel is a significant trading partner for India, the effects could be escalating.

With sheer surprise, the weekend's unexpected strike by Hamas on Israel has triggered a huge armed war in the Middle East. More than 2300 people have been killed in the fighting so far, and hundreds more have been held prisoners. Israeli Prime Minister has warned of a harsh response, so the situation is unlikely to



UTTAM CHAKRABORTY

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improve very soon. In this context, India, one of Israel's oldest and greatest allies, has expressed its support for the Jewish state and has pledged to assist in the time of crisis. India's Prime Minister has timely expressed shock and condemnation of the terror incident. Inflation throughout the world is possible if the terror attack and retaliation between Israel and Palestine escalate into a full-scale war. This might be economically comparable to the beginning of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

Consequences on India's Trading

At present, Israel is India's third-largest Asian trading partner and India's 10th-largest trade partner globally. Military trade between India

and Israel is valued at approximately Rs 74,000 crore, making it the second largest supplier of military equipment to India after Russia. India's goods exports to Israel constitute 1.8% of India's overall exports, mostly driven by the sale of petroleum products. Israel imports between \$5.5 to 6 billion worth of refined petroleum products from India. During the fiscal year 2023, the aggregate value of India's exports to Israel amounted to \$8.4 billion. Hence, there exists a significant likelihood of rupee devaluation, necessitating intervention by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). In such a scenario, the currency range is expected to increase to the '83-84 bracket. In contrast, India engages in the importation of equip-

ment, pearls, diamonds, and other valuable gemstones, including both precious and semi-precious varieties, from Israel.

Israel's primary exports to India are the essential materials and machinery used in India's major industries and factories, such as precious stones and metals, electronic equipment, fertilisers, machines, engines, pumps, medical and technical equipment, organic and inorganic chemicals, salt, sulphur, stone, cement, and plastics. Currently, Israel exports items and equipment to India valued at more than \$3 billion. If bilateral commerce between the two nations is halted due to the terror strikes and the conflict, India might miss out on commodities worth Rs 25,000

crore, resulting in a surge in the prices of several common household items.

The ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas has caused a sense of unease in financial markets worldwide, leading investors to redirect their investments towards safe-haven assets. Investors maintain a cautious stance and exhibit vigilance in response to global developments, as a risk-averse mentality pervades the market. Investors may tend to exercise caution when considering high-risk ventures.

Indian stock market

Last week, the Indian stock market had a notable decline, along with the performance of other global stock indexes. This decline was influenced by the unexpected multifaceted assault carried out by the ter-

rorist group Hamas, involving land, air, and sea operations, resulting in the loss of more than 1,000 lives in Israel. The aforementioned trend has resulted in an escalation of geopolitical tensions, accompanied by an increase in crude oil prices and heightened volatility in global stock markets.

Only predictions

There are only predictions with conclusions. The right-wing politics in Israel and Palestine exhibit a disinclination towards embracing compromise. This hinders the process of negotiation. India's diplomatic stance, which supports a two-state solution, may necessitate a revision in light of the evolving dynamics of the conflict. Indian citizens stuck in Israel may need to be

evacuated as quickly as possible to avert loss of lives. The Indian diaspora residing in these nations may also experience repercussions in their life.

In the context of the broader Israel-Palestine conflict, India has always advocated for a peaceful resolution that upholds the rights of all involved parties. The persistent war has resulted in heightened geopolitical tensions. The attainment of a peaceful resolution of the issue necessitates the collaborative endeavours of the global community. A balanced approach is of utmost importance, as it not only facilitates the cultivation of positive ties with Arab nations but also ensures a productive and meaningful interaction with them.

SABITZER'S PENALTY SENDS AUSTRIA TO EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP



AP ■ BRUSSELS

Substitute Marcel Sabitzer scored from the penalty spot shortly after entering the game to secure a 1-0 win for Austria at Azerbaijan and send his country to next year's European Championship in a day overshadowed by a deadly shooting in Brussels which saw Belgium's game against Sweden halted at halftime.

"Due to the incidents in Brussels earlier tonight, play is suspended. Our thoughts are with all those affected," a post

from the Belgian national team read on X, formerly known as Twitter. European soccer governing body UEFA confirmed the Group F match had been called off following consultation with both teams and local police. The score was 1-1 at the time. Viktor Gyokeres gave Sweden a 15th-minute lead, but Romelu Lukaku had Belgium level just after the half-hour.

Belgium had already qualified for Euro 2024 while Sweden's chances of a top-two place had been ended by Austria's victory earlier.

AUSTRIA ADVANCES

After losing 3-2 to Belgium in Vienna last week in the fight for Group F supremacy - Austria's only defeat in seven qualifying games so far - Sabitzer and his teammates knew a win in Baku would secure a spot at the tournament hosted by Germany.

With several key players sidelined because of injuries, Austria struggled to create real chances in the first half. It was awarded a penalty just minutes into the second half after a

hand ball. Sabitzer was clinical in converting with a strike into the corner in the 48th.

Sabitzer, who plays for Borussia Dortmund, recently returned to competition after recovering from an adductor injury he picked up last month in a Champions League match against PSG. Austria finished with 10 men after striker Guido Burgstaller was sent off in stoppage time for a second yellow card. Austria became the seventh team to qualify after Belgium, France, Portugal, Scotland, Spain and Turkey,

along with host Germany.

RONALDO SCORES 2

Cristiano Ronaldo scored twice for Portugal in a 5-0 demolition of host Bosnia in Group J. Bruno Fernandes, Joao Cancelo and Joao Felix also scored with all goals coming in the first half. Iceland routed Liechtenstein 4-0 and Slovakia won 1-0 at Luxembourg in the same group. Netherlands came away from Greece with a 1-0 win in Group B to revive its hopes. Virgil Van Dijk's penalty in sec-

ond-half stoppage time sent the Netherlands above their opponents and into second in their group. Both have 12 points.

Wout Weghorst earlier failed to convert his penalty.

"We do not have a specialist for penalties, corners and free kicks," said Netherlands coach Ronald Koeman. "When Virgil was behind the ball for the second one, I suddenly thought Surely it won't be one of those evenings when this one goes wrong too." But Virgil took it well and decided the match.



Sweden players take overnight flight home, returning to clubs

AP ■ BRUSSELS

Sweden players were returning to their clubs on Tuesday after taking an overnight flight home from Brussels following the suspension of their European Championship qualifier against Belgium at halftime because a gunman killed two Swedish nationals before kickoff.

The squad went directly to the airport and flew back to Sweden once they were allowed to leave King Baudouin Stadium, which was locked down for 2½ hours for security reasons before officials began an evacuation process around midnight local time.

It was around 4 am local time when the last of the Swedish supporters - totaling about 650, according to the Swedish Football Association - left the stadium under police surveillance, along with some staff from the federation.

All hotels where Swedish supporters were staying were also guarded by police, the federation said.

The Swedish FA confirmed to The Associated Press that the national-team players were now making their way back to

their clubs.

The suspect in the shooting was shot dead by police on Tuesday, Belgian Interior Minister Annelies Verlinden said, and the weapon believed to have been used by the man has been recovered.

Authorities had been searching for a 45-year-old suspected Tunisian extremist who was known to police and was living in Belgium illegally.

Swedish FA officials said information about the shooting incident, which also led to another Swedish national getting seriously injured and taken to hospital, reached them just before the match began and that Belgian authorities and police considered the game should be played because the stadium was viewed as the safest place for the Swedish fans. A decision was made to halt the match at halftime.

Martin Fredman, the federation's head of security, said about 400 Swedish fans "received help during the evening and night."

"The cooperation between supporters, federations and authorities has worked very well in an extremely stressful situation," Fredman said.



Indian men plays compactly at Asian Games: Somaya

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Olympic gold medallist M OM Somaya feels the Indian men's hockey team produced one of the most "compact" performances to win its fourth yellow metal at the recently-concluded Hangzhou Asian Games.

Somaya, who was the Indian contingent's deputy chef de mission at Hangzhou, said it was mostly an unblemished performance from the Harmanpreet Singh-led side, who directly qualified for Paris Olympics by winning the gold.

"I think they (India) played outstanding in all the matches, barring a few lapses of concentration against Japan and Korea, but otherwise, overall, I think one of the most compact and sound performances we have seen," said Somaya, a member of India's 1980 World Cup-winning team in Moscow.

With next year's Paris ticket secured, the Indian team can focus on its preparations now.

"Now that the burden of qualifying is gone, they can concentrate on making a strong

program up to Paris. So just because they're not playing in the tournament for qualification doesn't mean that they will be complacent. They can now engage in preparatory camps and tours with Paris in mind," Somaya said. The 64-year-old also lauded the women's team, who bagged the bronze at the Asian Games but missed out on a direct ticket to Paris.

"The women also played very well, barring that game against China in the first half where they were a little overwhelmed. And then in the second half they opened up, but it was too late. Overall, it was an excellent performance from both the teams."

Somaya also had words of appreciation for the Odisha government for its overwhelming support to Indian hockey.

"Odisha have stood out because of their support for hockey, I don't remember any other sport where a state has supported the national team. It's always been a corporate, but in this case the state itself has supported the national team, which is a big thing."

AITA actions against Sasi for not wearing official jersey

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The AITA is contemplating action against Sasi Mukund for not wearing the official jersey during the Davis Cup tie against Morocco and has also introduced a players' code of conduct to ensure 'discipline' in future.

In the opening singles of the World Group II play-off tie against Yassine Dlimi on September 16, Mukund wore the jersey provided by his personal sponsor and not the one made available by official Indian team sponsor 'OOK' after taking "permission" from skipper Rohit Rajpal.

To make matter worse, the jersey that Mukund wore had 'INDIA' spelt wrongly and the matter was brought to AITA's notice by the team sponsor.

The team name printed on the back had an extra 'I'.

It may be mentioned that the official sponsor only provided the kit and no sponsorship money was given to either All Indian Tennis Association (AITA) or the players who were part of the tie that India won 4-1 in Lucknow last month. AITA issued a show-cause notice to Mukund on September 28, asking him to explain within seven days why action should not be taken against him for not wearing the official jersey and playing with a jersey that had India written wrongly.

On October 3, Mukund sent his reply to the national federation, saying that "shorts received from OOK were not comfortable".

Mukund also wrote that he had taken prior permission from both captain Rajpal and coach Zeeshan Ali to wear the jersey that had his sponsor's



name printed.

Explaining the spelling fiasco, Mukund wrote that he had received eight T-shirts from his sponsor and unfortunately he picked the only one that had printing mistake.

He also lamented that neither the captain nor his teammates noticed when he stepped on to the court. "I have immense respect for my country and I would never do something intentionally to tarnish its image," he wrote and also apologised for the inadvertent mistake. On October 13, the AITA communicated to Mukund that his explanation was not acceptable since the captain has denied giving him any permission and further asked him to clarify his stand.

When contacted by PTI, Mukund said captain Rajpal

had indeed allowed him.

"There was no money involved. The players were not given any sponsorship fee for this tie. Only the kit was provided by the official sponsor. Captain Rajpal had understood this and allowed me," Mukund, who had lost his match to Dlimi, said.

"Usually the players are asked to sign a contract with the AITA for that one week if they are being paid for wearing that official kit. In this case, we did not sign any contract. My personal sponsor 'Indian Tree' pays me, so what's wrong in it. The pockets of the shorts were such that the ball were coming out." These are the reasons that the players lose interest in playing for the national team," he said. AITA Secretary General Anil Dhupar said they

have introduced a players' code of conduct for clarity and all players will be bound by it.

"The players code of conduct is before the Executive Committee members. It will come into effect immediately. It is for all players, be it men's, women's, boys or girls," he said. Asked if they will indeed take action against Mukund, Dhupar said, "Mukund has apologised but we are still discussing the matter".

Asked for his viewpoint, Davis Cup coach Zeeshan Ali said, "All players should be wearing only the official kit. During the Asian Games all the players and support staff wore the official kit only. Procedure has to be followed by all".

It is not the first time that an Indian player has preferred playing with the kit that has his

personal sponsor's name written. They do get paid for wearing the sponsor's name. If the match is telecast live, the amount increases.

"The AITA had also introduced the system of paying the players for official sponsor's name. The initiative was taken by captain Rohit Rajpal. If you have to stop players from wearing the name of their personal sponsor during the Davis Cup, then you have to compensate," said a team source.

"In this case (Morocco tie), no sponsor was willing to pay any sponsorship money to the players and the AITA. Just the kits had arrived through OOK, it is difficult to even arrange for kits for Indian Davis Cup team," the source said, summing up the state of Indian tennis.



Contrasting results for Indian sub-junior hockey teams

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian boys' and girls' sub-junior (U-16) hockey teams endured contrasting results on the final day of their maiden tour to the Netherlands. While the boys beat the Netherlands' U-16 side 4-0, the Indian girls lost 1-4 against the Dutch.

Rohit Irengbam Singh, Ketan Kushwaha, Rahul Rajbhar and captain Manmeet Singh Rai scored for the Indian boys team.

"This is a great way to finish off such a historic tour. The boys showed immense character and grit and the efforts that have been put in are unmatched. It's a matter of pride to have produced such a fine show especially in overseas conditions," Indian sub-junior boys' team coach Sardar Singh said.

In the girls' game, Kajal Jr scored the lone goal for India.

Former India captain and sub-junior girls' team coach Rani Rampal, said, "The girls played their hearts out and that is exactly what is expected of them every time they step out on the field."

"There are a few areas for us to work on and this tour has given us exactly what we needed to identify our strengths and shortcomings."

Kusale now aiming for gold

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Rifle marksman Swapnil Kusale's dream of winning an Asian Games medal in Hangzhou might have gone sour, courtesy one poor shot, but that has not stopped him from aspiring for gold at the Asian Championships, scheduled to commence in Changwon, South Korea on October 22.

One of the best 50m rifle 3-positions shooter in the country, the 28-year-old Kolhapur marksman was leading by a huge margin in his event at the Asian Games recently before a rank bad 7.6 on the third-last shot in the finals saw him take a mighty tumble from No.1 to 5.

That effectively ended his hopes of winning even a bronze medal in the quadrennial continental showpiece as he fin-

ished fourth. However, as the shooting team leaves for the Asian Championships, Kusale has put the disappointment on the back-burner and wants to concentrate on the next assignment.

"That shot... How did it go that way, I have absolutely no idea. It's a game basically. I still had two shots remaining and I focused on them. I just forgot that had I shot a poor score," said Kusale, one of the early birds to secure a Paris Olympic quota place.

"Initially, I was a bit shocked how it could happen to me. But without bothering about it much, how and why it happened, I prepared myself for the next two shots," said Kusale, who had bagged the 2024 Olympic quota by finishing fourth at the World Championships in Cairo last

year.

"Yes, it did strike me that I had missed the gold medal because of that one shot, but then I thought it can happen in this sport and I will concentrate on the next championship."

A similar last shot in the finals at the 2022 World Championships in Cairo had robbed him of a medal, but that disappointment was masked by the Olympic quota place he won there.

"It had happened to me at the World Championships in Cairo last year as well, but yes, I bagged an Olympic quota there and finished fourth, so that was the saving grace," said Kusale on the sidelines of a function organised by the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) to felicitate the Asian Games medal winners.

LOCAL EVENTS

CAG, CRPF ENTER FINAL

CAG Delhi defeated Indian Oil in the shootout (4-3) to enter the final the 41st All-India KD Singh 'Babu' Men's Invitation Hockey tournament at Mohd Shahid Stadium on Tuesday. CAG will now face CRPF in the final. CRPF beat Indian Navy 2-1.

HANDBALL TRIALS

Sports directorate is organising handball trials to select the Lucknow region team for State-level Senior Women's Handball tournament to be held at Azamgarh from October 29. Interested may reach Chowk Stadium on 20 October at 9.30 AM.



GULSHAN IN INDIAN TEAM
Gulshan of Saharanpur will represent India in the Asian

Para Games to be held at Hangzhou in China. He will be the part of 16-member blind

judo team. The team will depart from Lucknow on Wednesday.

