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Learning lessons from Israel

We are living at a momentous time in human history. Not only is knowledge advancing at an unprecedented pace, but sworn enemies have learnt to live together as brothers – the Germans and the French, the whites and blacks in South Africa, the Israelis and the Palestinians who entered into an agreement for mutual recognition on September 13, 1993. Recently I was in Israel for five days – five of the most educative and rewarding days of my life.

Nations and civilizations have perished through affluence; but no nation, no civilization, has died of adversity. Nations, like individuals, evolve through suffering; and are provided to do their best by hardship and distress. *The holocaust killed six million Jews* – more than the entire present population of Israel.

In 1948 Israel was a barren desert, as a large part still is – and the inhabitants endured for years the trials and tribulations arising from acute scarcity of water. But with hard work and highly developed technology, the Israelis have made the arid wasteland now blossom like a garden. They have become past masters in the modern techniques of

irrigation of recycling sewage water, refurbishing pipelines, desalinating and transporting large quantities of water, and expanding practical research in potential water sources. They are producing vegetables and fruits which are sold to the less industrious peoples who inhabit the far more fertile countries of Europe. Israel estimates that in two decades the population of the Middle East will double, and the demand for water in the region will increase by approximately one billion cubic meters per year. Israel is well geared to meet the challenge. The 'Rio Declaration', ratified by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in June 1992, called for a global partnership of governments and nations for the common cause of protecting the environment. Israel has already started living up to the Declaration. As a nation, it has reached a stage of evolution which holds significant lessons for India.

Admirably equipped

President Mitterand said, 'In future a nation's power will depend less on its financial wealth than on its grey matter'. By this test, Israel is admirably equipped to enter the 21st century. The

tiny country is studded with eight universities for higher learning, and has achieved hundred per cent literacy (barring some recent immigrants).

Israel is to India what quality is to quantity. The territory of Israel extends to 27,817 sq. km. – less than one hundredth of India's 3.3 million sq. km; while its population is only 5.3 million (less than half the population of Bombay), against our 900 million. But its exports for last year totalled \$23 billion, against India's \$22 billion.

Israel is a truly egalitarian society, while India continues to proclaim itself to be, and even largely conducts itself as a socialist state. The Kibbutz is a laudable institution unique to Israel. The members of a Kibbutz own and enjoy their property jointly and each person gets what he needs from the common property and income of the Kibbutz. There are only 125,000 members in the 270 Kibbutzim which are in operation today. They represent a very small percentage of Israel's population, but they are responsible for 35 per cent of the agricultural produce and eight per cent of the manufactured articles. Communism, which is based on the same ideology, has failed hopelessly because it coerces and tyrannizes people into accepting common ownership. By con-

trast, Kibbutzim succeed because workers are free to leave at any time.

The Hindu undivided family is no different, in its concept, from the Kibbutz. In a joint family the members own the family property jointly and the *karta* is expected to satisfy the varying needs of the different members. Today, unfortunately, the Hindu undivided family has become merely a device for reducing or avoiding tax; and thus the noble concept has been debased.

The ultimate resource of any state is the character of its citizens, and it is in this resource that Israel is so rich. No other nation has been known to defeat so many enemies in just six days against overwhelming odds as Israel did in the 1967 war.

Family's donation

A single Jewish family, the Rothschilds, donated to Israel the total cost of the magnificent building which houses the Supreme Court in Jerusalem. It is one of the most imposing structures in that city and is kept spotlessly clean. An impartial and well-selected committee chooses the Supreme Court judges with great care and purely on considerations of merit and calibre. No wonder that the judges command the respect and admiration of the entire population, Jewish and Arab alike. The dignity and decorum with which the legal proceedings are conducted makes you recall, nostalgically, the atmosphere which used to prevail in our own Supreme Court in the first two decades of our republic.

Nine million Jews live outside Israel. Quite voluntarily and out of a sense of moral duty, a large number of them send a percentage of their annual contributions to Israel. Contrast that with non-resident Indians. Fifteen million of them live outside India, and their accumulated wealth is conservatively estimated at \$100 billion. Have you heard of any of them sending a voluntary contribution to the Indian exchequer? Perhaps the explanation is to be found not in their lack of patriotism but their distrust of our corrupt and inefficient administration.

But the most important lesson which Israel has to teach us is in the field of foreign relations. We have only one State across the border whom we regard as our enemy – Pakistan. The politicians in each of our two countries have a veritable obsession about their neighbour. The relations between the two countries are in as decrepit a condition as Jinnah's house in Bombay, which we will neither use, nor have the decency to keep in a proper state of maintenance befitting the founder of a neighbouring country.

Israel has four neighbours who were once upon a time its deadly enemies – Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. But wise statesmanship has effected a transformation. Old, unhappy, far-off things and battles long ago have been consigned to the waters of Lethe. The Government of Israel and the PLO have reached a compromise based on a Declaration of Principles. An agreed process of negotiation between Israel and Jordan will soon bear fruit. The Jews have already started friendly talks with

Syria and Lebanon and are firmly advancing towards an era of enduring peace in the Middle East.

Major premise

The inarticulate major premise on which Israel's foreign policy seems to be based is that the superior power would be well advised to extend the hand of friendship to its neighbours, instead of whining complaints or displaying arrogance. After all, India and Pakistan are culturally akin, linguistically knit, geographically close and historically related. Are there no statesmen in India and Pakistan who, instead of misguiding and exploiting 'the mass man', are keen to bring the two benighted countries together for their common development? Are there no statesmen in our region who, taking a leaf out of Israel's book, can initiate the process which will translate into reality Sri Aurobindo's vision of India and Pakistan coming close together and standing united?

General Omar Bradley said, 'Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants. We know more about war than we know about peace, more about killing than we know about living. We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount'. It would be the greatest day in the history of our republic when India, with its priceless cultural heritage, disproves this dictum, as Israel has already done.

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