

the PartyRoom

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P MICHAEL JOHNSON MP



Elected at the age of 31, Michael Johnson, 38, is in his third term as the Federal Member for Ryan. An Arts and Law graduate of the University of Queensland, he is the first Member of the House of Representatives to have Chinese heritage. He also holds a Masters Degree from the University of Cambridge and is a 2004 graduate of the Kennedy School of Government's Executive Leaders' Program at Harvard.

Michael was named in 2007 as a Young Global Leader (YGL) by the Geneva based World Economic Forum (WEF). He is Chairman of the Australia-China Business Forum (ACBF), a Member of the Asia Society's International Advisory Board and sits on the Australian Advisory Board. His policy interests lie in foreign affairs, trade and energy.

Michael was recently appointed to the position of Opposition Whip. He lives in Brisbane with his wife, Huyen, and their twenty month old son, Ryan.

Kevin Rudd's declaration that this freshly minted Labor Government would have Australia play an even larger role on the world stage provides this country with a second chance to profoundly re-cast our ties with an emerging 21st century superpower.

India, with over a billion people and the world's largest democracy; a nuclear power and strategically located in South Asia; holding memberships of international councils including the UN; the Commonwealth; the WTO and the East Asia Summit, is a country that is on the move. It is a country whose people now sense that India's emergence is an "idea whose time has come". New Delhi's expectation - justifiably - that it should occupy a permanent seat on the UN Security Council is further confirmation.

The economic reforms of the early 1990's initiated by none other than current Prime Minister, the Cambridge trained economist, Manmohan Singh, are now returning much needed dividends to the Indian economy. Average growth rates of 7-9% over the last five years have given India a respect that had eluded this South Asian giant. As Singh stated at the 2007 Indian-ASEAN Summit: "Today, India is very different from the India of 1991. It is now a vibrant market-place. Our entrepreneurs are aggressively investing overseas... We have a \$700 billion economy that is growing at 7-8%".

But inextricably linked to India's capacity to grow its economy and reduce its rates of poverty, is the reliable supply of affordable energy. As Singh eloquently put it in a 2006 speech: "If we need to improve the lives of our people, we need adequate energy at a reasonable cost...if we have to free them from drudgery and

ill-health, we need to address the issue of access to energy" India's huge dilemma, however, is that she simply cannot meet her energy demands from current sources of oil, gas or coal.

The clear alternative is imported uranium - a source for 17% of the world's electricity and as much as 23% for the OECD countries. The Indian Government's policy position is crystal clear. India's uranium deficit has led to India's own brand of "Energy Diplomacy" - a policy that has India's foreign and diplomatic activities orientated on securing reliable supplies of uranium from friendly countries like the United States and Australia.

This is where an Australian Government with vision has an opportunity to cement enduring ties with this re-emerging superpower. Like the Bush Administration, we can and should acknowledge India's role in the world's changing architecture by calling for an exception to compliance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Holding 40% of the world's uranium, we are uniquely positioned to be a reliable supplier of yellowcake at a time when India is clearly in search of such supplies. The environmental reasons alone make the case compelling. Electricity, generated from nuclear reactors, has zero emissions and has the capacity to supply large population centres.

The IAEA calculates that nuclear power annually avoids more than 2 billion tonnes of CO2 emissions that would otherwise have been required from fossil fuels. Expansion of nuclear power could further reduce greenhouse gas emissions in 2050 by between 1.9 and 2.9 billion tonnes of CO2 according to the IAEA. This rests on predictions that the world's

demand for nuclear energy grows by up to 120% by 2050. India's global emissions are on target to be third in world rankings within a decade. India is primed for such energy producing infrastructure that does not compromise emissions reduction policy. Add to this the unequivocal moral imperative of supplying crucial energy to 800 million people in poverty, and the case for uranium sales is difficult to rebut.

As for the economic returns of selling uranium, tens of billions of dollars in earned exports for the country should focus the mind. Which Federal or State Department would turn away billions of dollars in additional revenue? Rural hospitals, inner-city schools or neighbourhoods adjacent to clogged suburban freeways stand to receive billions of additional dollars. If uranium for Australia is oil to Saudi Arabia, then Australians must demand Rudd return to the Howard Government's policy settings.

The Howard Government had travelled down this path before signing off in August 2007 on a deal to sell uranium to India for conversion to domestic energy usage only. Regrettably, for entirely party-political purposes, the Rudd Labor Government has now fully reversed the Howard Government's decision. At a time when a British Labour Government is in dialogue with European partners on the next generation of civil nuclear technology, Australian Labor policy reflects dinosaur thinking and outdated ideology. Not to mention terrible politics and flawed policy. The irony of it all is that the Rudd Government has absolutely no

qualms about selling our uranium to China or Russia. This is intellectually, politically and strategically indefensible.

The sale of Australian uranium to India in their hour of need would create the essential pre-conditions for a future security framework with India for the 21st century. In its most mature form, the bilateral relationship would evolve into a formal alliance embracing a broad security dimension complementary with our US strategic umbrella through the 1951 ANZUS Treaty. This new vision with India does envisage an entirely unprecedented strategic linkage and historically new alliance partnership. But where the inter-state tensions of tomorrow will invariably arise from hard energy deficits and soft resource deficiencies, Australia's energy collaboration now with India could be a bedrock for international stability.

India is unquestionably a country on the march to great power status in the 21st Century. With Indian leaders speaking about the country in terms of being "on the move, on the cutting edge of economic, technological and developmental transformation", circumstances are ripe to seize our "India Moment". A genuine bond fashioned by similar values and perspectives with one of the giants of 21st century global politics is unquestionably in Australia's national interests. Kevin Rudd now has a unique opportunity to showcase his much feted diplomatic skills in assessing the historical opportunity that beckons in our India relationship. If he is up to it, the time to act is now.

"Australia's energy collaboration now with India could be a bedrock for international stability."

He who wrestles with us strengthens our nerves and sharpens our skill. Our antagonist is our helper.

EDMUND BURKE