

Too late, too little, Mr. President

HIGH NOTES LOW NOTES



HASAN FERDOUS

PRESIDENT Obama's heroics at the fading hours of his presidency may have come too late too little, but it was just enough to ruffle both the Israeli Prime Minister and the incoming US President. The outgoing US President's decision not to veto a UN resolution condemning Israel's construction of illegal settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory will most likely cause no change on the ground. The occupation will continue, as will the expansion of Israeli settlements. What's worse, an unhinged Israeli Prime Minister, encouraged by the in-coming US Administration, could feel emboldened to scrap even the appearance of a commitment to a two-state solution in the Middle East.

And yet, the US President's action was not without significance. The US President-in-waiting, Donald Trump, has announced, things would be different after the 20th January when Obama exits and he enters the White House. He was so incensed at Obama's refusal to heed to his call - "veto the resolution" - that he now thinks the UN is nothing but a club for some occasional chit chat. The Israeli Prime Minister, frothing at the mouth, is literally counting the days when he would finally have a man in the White House he could call a friend.

But, if the future looks so rosy, why is the Prime minister panicking? Mr. Netanyahu seems to be in a fume ever since the resolution was adopted. He has vowed to cut off funding to four UN agencies that support Palestinian refugees. He has also promised to stop all Israeli economic aid to countries that voted for the resolution condemning Israel.

What Mr. Netanyahu hasn't acknowledged is that the resolution was supported by all members but one of the UN Security Council, including four of its permanent members. In retaliation, Netanyahu has announced freezing diplomatic relations with Britain, France, Russia, China, Japan, Ukraine, Angola, Egypt, Uruguay, Spain, Senegal and

New Zealand, the countries that had supported the resolution. His action was not without an irony. In recent months, Mr. Netanyahu has been claiming success for his "go tough" policy with the Palestinians, saying the world was queuing behind him. So many world leaders wanted to visit him that he was having a tough time managing his appointment schedules. If the world is behind him, why did no one side with him in the Security Council, taunted his arch enemy, Labour



US President Barack Obama, right, shakes hands with Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu during a bilateral meeting in New York, September 21, 2016 . PHOTO: AFP/JIM WATSON

Party's Isaac Herzog. Ehud Barak, a former Israeli Prime Minister, was equally merciless in his appraisal of the Prime Minister. "This is the same prime minister who told us dozens of states are on board with us," Mr. Barak told journalists. "I looked for Russia, China, England, France. Where are all the friends that were meant to stand with us?" Political backlash aside, there are reasons why Netanyahu and his cohorts are panicking. The Security Council resolution

condemning the construction of all Israeli settlements on the occupied land as "illegal" renews the legal framework for future negotiations with the Palestinians. At the minimum, it is a signal from the international community that construction of Israeli settlements in occupied territories is a "flagrant violation of international law." Of course, there are numerous other UN resolutions that impose specific mandates on Israel and their Palestinian counterparts. On the issue of Israeli settlements, Israel has time

and again been shielded by the US. Wagging its finger - figuratively and literally - the US has used its right to veto no fewer than 40 times to save Israel from repeated international condemnation of illegal occupation. In casting the "no" vote, the US has cited its preference for direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. Such talks have been halted a long time ago, allowing illegal construction of Jewish settlements to continue unchecked. Just look at the numbers.

According to Btselem, the Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories (<http://www.btselem.org/settlements/statistics>), notwithstanding those in East Jerusalem and settlement enclaves within Hebron, currently there are at least 125 government-sanctioned Israeli settlements in the West Bank. In addition, there are another 100 or more settlement outposts throughout the West bank, set up by Jewish settlers without the Israeli government's approval. All told, there are close to half a million settlers in West Bank alone. Another nearly 200,000 settlers live in East Jerusalem. Through these settlements and an intricate arrangement of security checkpoints and separation walls, Israel has already seized control of over 60 percent of 1947 UN partition plan that proposed the creation of Israel and an independent Palestinian State.

Last week's Security Council resolution is only the latest to have been adopted by the UN critical of Israel. Since the present resolution calls for no sanctions or stipulates no new legal requirements, Israel could - and most likely would - just ignore it as they have done to the 225 or so resolutions adopted by the Security Council and another 200 by the General assembly in the past sixty or so years. However, there is a difference.

First, after a lapse of nearly a decade, this nearly unanimous resolution puts the question of Palestine back on the table for international conversation. The last measurable action taken on the Middle East Peace Process was in 2010 when, with pressure from President Obama, Israel had agreed to a 10-month partial freeze on construction of settlements in the West Bank. At that time the two sides had also agreed to relaunch their peace talks, which never actually happened. Now, if the pressure on Israel continues, the talks could finally resume.

That's exactly what the UN hopes. The outgoing UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon has called the adoption of the resolution a "significant step, demonstrating the Council's much-needed leadership and the international community's collective efforts to reconfirm that the vision of two States is still achievable."

The other, perhaps more urgent issue for Israeli is the possibility of the Palestinian Authority seeking the intervention of the International Criminal Court (ICC). As Israel's popular liberal newspaper Haaretz points out, the settlement activities are illegal under the Fourth Geneva Convention. This has now been reconfirmed by the Security Council with a near-unanimous resolution. Thus, the legal path has been cleared for the Palestinian Authority to go to The Hague. In 2012, when the Palestinian Authority sought full membership of the United Nations, Israel fought tooth and nail to stop it out of its fear of such an international intervention. Due to US opposition, Palestine could not become a full member of the UN, but the State Of Palestine was welcomed as a non-member observer by the General Assembly, enabling it to become a member of ICC.

The world has largely forgotten the Palestinians. At least four wars have been fought, nearly three million have been rendered homeless and countless people have died. Now six decades later, there is a certain numbness and considerable "news fatigue" over the conflict.

However, thanks to an overzealous Netanyahu and a Twitter-happy US President-elect, the world will now have to revisit the issues, including the illegal occupation of the Palestinian land. Mr. Trump could only help the case by trying to overturn the resolution, something his supporters have suggested.

As for Mr. Obama, this was perhaps one final act of defiance. In dealing with Israel, throughout his eight years, he has vacillated - between a rock and a hard place. His liberal heart probably wanted to confront Netanyahu, but settled on talking big and taking no action. With an eye on the 2016 US elections, he even made amends with Netanyahu by signing this year in September a 10-year, USD 38 billion arms deal.

With the election lost and his days numbered, the UN resolution gave Obama a final opportunity to exact revenge on his old nemesis. It may have come too late and it is too little for the long-suffering Palestinians. However, it may have earned Obama a little footnote in the chequered history of the protracted Middle East peace process.

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Securing our energy future

DR. BADRUL IMAM

The core problem Bangladesh faces is a shortage of primary energy to run the rapidly growing industry and power installations. Being a local gas based mono energy nation for the last four decades, Bangladesh was caught unprepared with an energy crisis when the trend of depleting gas reserve was confirmed.

IN a recently held international conference sponsored by Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI), Mr. Anders Hasselager, an energy expert from Denmark pointed out in his keynote speech that the share of renewable energy, mostly solar and wind, in the energy mix in Denmark is 30 percent at present with prospect of raising it to 50 percent by 2030. Many other European countries are also forward moving towards an all renewable energy market.

What Mr. Hasselager tried to suggest based on the European energy sector concept, was that Bangladesh should have a diversified future energy mix with a long term perspective towards renewable energy sources with solar energy as the primary source. However, biomass, wind, hydro and wave or tidal water systems could also be relevant.

Denmark and other European countries are not rich in sunlight. Sunlight is abundant in Bangladesh, yet the share of renewables (including solar, wind, hydro) in the energy mix in Bangladesh is only 3 percent, way behind a sun poor Denmark. Bangladesh targets to raise the renewable share in the energy mix from 3 percent today to 10 percent by 2020. This implies an increase of renewable based power to 2,400 MW (10 percent of projected generation capacity of 24,000 MW) from the present 450 MW in just four years. The absence of visible projects to fulfil the target led most observers to be sceptical about its success.

Solar energy has very small share in the present energy mix in Bangladesh - less than 2 percent. Yet in one count, solar has a successful story.

Bangladesh hosts the fastest growing solar home system in the world with 60,000 SHS units being installed per month. In terms of megawatt this may be tiny (solar produces only 190 MW while the national total power production capacity is 13,000 MW), but its contribution is enormous in socially uplifting millions of people, by raising their standard of living, by providing solar electricity to those who would never have grid electricity.

Lighting a remote off the grid house with small solar power is one thing; providing energy feed for

a large mass of people aspiring for rapid industrialisation is quite different. This is a bigger challenge. Bangladesh at present is energy starved. Its aspiration for entering the club of middle income country requires an increase in per capita energy use to boost the per capita GNI, a prerequisite for the above transition.

The core problem Bangladesh faces is a shortage of primary energy to run the rapidly growing industry and power installations. Being a local gas based mono energy nation for the last four decades, Bangladesh was caught unprepared with an energy crisis when the trend of depleting



gas reserve was confirmed. Although good amount of coal reserves are known to occur in north Bangladesh, local coal could not be used immediately as an alternative to gas because of the absence of enough coal mining. This leads Bangladesh to look for energy from outside. In the medium to long term future, Bangladesh plans to source its energy needs through imported fuels including coal, liquefied natural gas, LNG and oil. In one estimate, Bangladesh will have 90 percent dependence on imported energy sources by the year 2030. And this would come at a cost.

The present downward prices of oil, LNG and coal are likely to be short lived and will bounce back to their original or even higher positions. Therefore, long term dependence on imported fuel for most of its requirement will introduce stress on the economy and will increase prices of industrial products including electricity and import inflation.

Introduction of LNG in the short term future to compensate for the immediate gas supply deficit is perhaps justified, but the merit of a long term supply of large volume of costly LNG may be questionable. A rightful alternative is to launch

serious gas exploration. Major exploration for hydrocarbon has not been undertaken in the country for more than a decade and a little gas reserve could be added to the reserve base. The gas exploration in Bangladesh may be called anything but serious with less than 10 exploratory wells drilled in the last 10 years. In spite of the fact that a large ocean area has now been claimed by the government as undisputed following the verdict of the international court, there has been too little activity by Bangladesh offshore. Yet, on the other side of offshore boundary, Myanmar has been

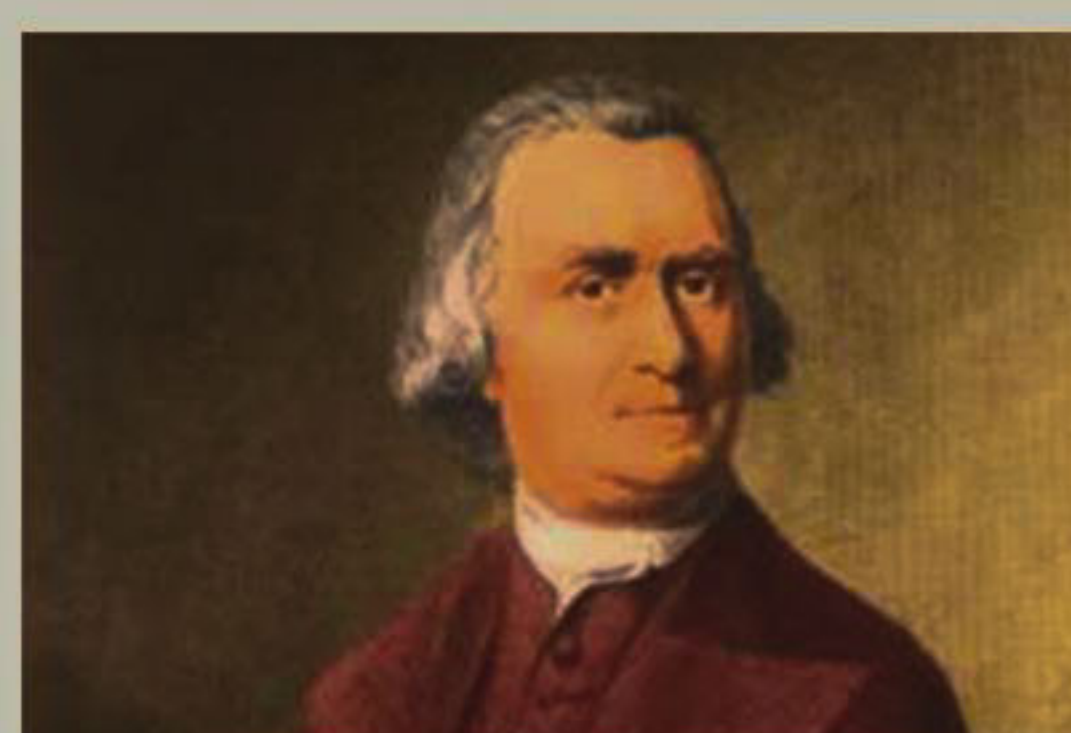
registering significant gas discoveries since the boundary dispute was settled in 2012. Interestingly, the offshore Rakhaine Basin of Myanmar, where the late gas discoveries are being made, is a geologic continuation of the SE offshore Bangladesh. Geologists are therefore pointedly suggesting that the latter area would be equally gas prospective as the former. Unfortunately the Bangladesh offshore sees little exploration to prove it right.

Bangladesh stands at a cross road of transition from an under-developed power and energy sector to a more developed one with projections of attaining a power generating capacity of 39,000 MW by 2030 and 56,000 MW by 2040. A major challenge for its successful implementation is to secure a cost effective sustainable primary energy supply.

The government plans major changes in the way Bangladesh runs its energy business. As per the government's plan and publicity, an energy mix is forthcoming in the mid to long term future with massive imported coal, large volume of imported LNG, imported oil, significant cross border electricity, nuclear energy, renewables and some local gas. This is likely to visibly change the energy and power scenario in the country, but the impact of such large volume of imported energy sources raises one question: how would the economy react to the price shock that comes with the large scale energy imports?

Bangladesh should prioritise hydrocarbon exploration especially in the offshore, optimise renewable prospects especially solar and develop local coal to mitigate the energy crisis in the short to mid-term future. For the long term future (beyond 2030 or even 2040) cross border hydro power from Nepal, Bhutan and India and cross border gas import linking projects like Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) or Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI), should these materialise, are among the most feasible options. Into the distant future (2060 and beyond) we tend to believe that renewable energy will gradually take over the world energy market until a point when fossil fuels will find their place in the history books. The world will be a better place to live by then.

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QUOTABLE Quote

SAMUEL ADAMS
STATESMAN, POLITICAL PHILOSOPHER, AND ONE OF THE FOUNDING FATHERS OF THE UNITED STATES

It does not require a majority to prevail, but rather an irate, tireless minority keen to set brush fires in people's minds.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS	DOWN
1 Sound of agony	1 Back tooth
5 Relish	2 Sung dramas
10 Made a choice	3 Certify
12 Find charming	4 Ensnare
13 Inadvertently revealing	5 Cook's mint
15 " -- we there yet?"	6 Spots on TV
16 Tell whoppers	7 Hit song of 1958
17 Historic time	8 Source
18 Knave	9 Do over
20 Opera solo	11 Widen
21 Country division	14 About 10% of Africa
22 Circus structure	19 Academy attendee
23 Red-ink items	20 Bewildered
25 Seaside setting	24 Beach footwear
28 In the future	25 Did a thorough search of
31 Leave out	26 One-celled organism
32 Lathered up	27 Engine part
34 Yr. parts	29 Artemis' twin
35 Storage site	30 Infer
36 Mine rock	33 Bus terminal
37 Bettor's paper	35 Two-wheeler
40 Downloadable read	38 Young one
41 Spirited attack	39 Maple fluid
42 Inferno decipherer	
43 Verse creator	

BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

REST	GRAFT
ALTO	RECUP
DORY	INTONE
APOSTLE	TED
REPTILE	MOD
OLE	SAUL
APART	DANTE
DOLE	HUM
ROT	BUMPKIN
IDO	EXPLORE
FLORAL	EROS
TENURE	RENT
SANDY	SASS