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Engagement in Politics and Public Service matters – “let’s do it better”

By Alok Mitra Chairman of EMBG

Lethargy is no strategy

We are rapidly approaching the local County and European parliament elections and will be facing a general election by the middle of 2010. These elections matter, especially in the current economic climate when competence and good governance are vital. For these reasons it is very important for all of us to take part. The way to influence change is by taking part in the political process and use the power of our vote. Apathy and lethargy is no strategy.

Community support is the key to achieving more

Many of our regular readers will know that Dilip Joshi MBE (Executive Officer - Equality and Stakeholder Relationship for the Hindu Council UK) supported by myself and others have been diligently working towards getting greater diversity and wider representation in public services so that they are more representative of the population as a whole. Over the last 2 years our focus has been directed towards the Hindu community and to date we have had some success through working with the support of those people whose interest we are trying to promote. Hopefully, as the community recognises the value of working in partnership with us, to promote their interest, our support will grow and we can achieve much more.

The Jewish Community shows what can be achieved

Through our interaction with other communities, it is apparent that with the Obama presidency came increased awareness and a bigger drive by all ethnic groups to get more involved in politics, especially from the African Caribbean community. In the UK my impression is that in terms of political engagement it is the African Caribbean and Muslim communities who are currently taking the initiative. The Jewish community is already well established within British public life and their influence extends well beyond their numbers in our country. This is largely due to the fact that they are well organised and united in the pursuit of their cause, and of course the fact that they have been active in the UK for hundreds of years. The Indian/Hindu community on the other hand is not yet very well represented. From my observations I feel that there are a number of reasons for this, including the fact that too many of us are busy pursuing our own personal success to pay attention to the wider community. It seems that some people who are successful and have the resources and influences to help, often do not do so unless they can see an immediate benefit to them. However, thankfully, there are still many within our communities who are doing a very good job in serving the communities often in difficult circumstances. They need more support and greater involvement from the rest of us.

The Indian/Hindu community needs to do more to support their communities

In my opinion, our current economic plight will take more than a decade to stabilise and there will have to be a lot of adjustment to behaviour and living standards. Along the way some of this change may give rise to social unrest and the rise of the far right parties in politics. To minimise the adverse impact of this for Indians/Hindus and the moderate members of our country, we need to vote and where possible to take part in public service. I would urge you all to do your bit to help to promote those from your community who you can trust to do their bit for the community once they are in office. I would also urge you to encourage others you know to do the same. Unfortunately in the past some of those (but thankfully not all) of Indian origin who have reached a position

in public life where they can help the community choose instead to distance themselves from the very people who helped to put them there. Hopefully in the future, by getting the right people in office in the first place, we can redress the balance and with greater numbers it will become easier to influence decision making on behalf of the community without feeling isolated or pressurised to take the soft option.

Above all what gives me confidence for the future is our youth. Many have been born in this country; they are well educated, articulate and have the confidence and self belief to do the right thing. We should give them our maximum support and guidance.