

Record number

There are more South Asian candidates standing for the upcoming Federal elections than ever, find SHERYL DIXIT and RAJNI ANAND LUTHRA, and surprisingly most are not from the two major parties

For the first time in Australia's election history, we are witnessing the largest number of South Asian candidates actively participating in the 2013 elections. A total of 26 candidates of Indian and subcontinent origin will represent political parties, or stand as Independents, for seats in both the Senate, as well as the House of Representatives. While this may seem like an unimpressively low number across a wide range of political platforms, it does indicate that the Indian diaspora is taking a greater interest in Australian politics and that they are lending their voice and efforts towards better understanding and acceptance of their communities within Australian society.

Conducting research for this report on the Australian elections has been an interesting and enlightening experience. For instance, how many of us were aware that some of the registered parties on the Australian Electoral website are the Fishing and Lifestyle Party, Australian Motoring Enthusiast Party, Australian Sports Party, Bullet Train for Australia, No Carbon Tax Climate Sceptics and Shooters and Fishers Party? Would we vote for the Australian Sex Party, Coke in the Bubbles Party, Help End Marijuana Prohibition (HEMP) Party, Smokers Rights Party or the Pirate Party Australia? We certainly aren't spoiled for choice, are we?

We are all aware that the 2013 Elections will be a

current political scenario. The ALP, with their leadership issues and their suspect policies in relation to asylum seekers and the economy, have lost them the vote of confidence with the public. The Liberals are faring no better. They come across as indecisive and conservative, to say the least. Their policies are unclear and they seem adept at circumventing topics of controversy like the budget deficit and gender parity issues. And while both parties have reasonably strong candidates in the background like Joe Hockey and Penny Wong, neither leader inspires confidence in voters.

For the Indian community, it's a matter of waiting and watching. There are many issues in the balance, such as progressing Indo-Oz relations, visa issues, trade and bilateral relations – the list is endless! But the increased representation of south Asian candidates in the 2013 Election is an indicator that times are changing, and that the voice of multicultural communities are being heard. It is a significant development and one that we must embrace with enthusiasm, as a sign of better things to come.

Both the major political parties have made an attempt to inculcate Indian-origin people into their campaign strategy. The Australian Labor Party has the support of two candidates, Minoj Kumar, candidate for Menzies in Melbourne, Victoria, (House of Representatives), and Bhupinder Kumar, candidate for Cullin, New South Wales, (Senate). However, it also seems



Clive Palmer (PUP) with Gary Loke

For Ganesh Loke, candidate for the Palmer United Party, a solution to the Carbon Tax and the problem with asylum seekers is paramount. "We want to have the Carbon Tax abolished; to have a humanitarian refugee policy whereby Australia is protected while at the same time refugees have opportunities to enhance their lives, and to do away with paid political lobbyists," says Ganesh. "Both major parties are against refugees. That's against international law, which states that genuine refugees must be resettled. Mr Palmer's policy of onshore processing is the most humane policy in the debate," he adds.

