

Asian elite reject positive discrimination

Keval Dhokia

Senior Asian leaders from both the public and private sector have rejected the notion of positive discrimination in recruitment, as a way of increasing the disproportionately low level of ethnic minority people in the senior management of organisations in this country. They all voiced concern at the under-representation of Asian people in government as well as the private sector.

The Indian-origin chief executive of controversial outsourcing giant Serco Group, **Chris Hyman**, who grew up in apartheid South Africa, announced that: "Positive discrimination doesn't work for me because it devalues success", adding that employers shouldn't "do diversity because (they) have to but because they want a competitive advantage."

Attending the launch of new think-tank Diversity UK, in Holborn, Mr Hyman joined a panel of high-level speakers including **Baroness Verma**, Minister for Energy and Climate Change, and **Bala Mahendran**, CEO of Basildon Council, to address an audience of young Asian professionals, community leaders and businessman **Oliver**



L-R: Dilip Joshi MBE, Bala Mahendran, Chris Hyman CBE, Lopa Patel MBE, Baroness Verma, Sushila Khoot & Shanthi Waas



Rothschild.

Chairing the board of trustees of the new think-tank, **Dilip Joshi**, opened the proceedings by saying: "We have a formidable panel here today that illustrates the public and private sector potential of diversity in the workplace. I am a Gujarati who, like

so many, came here after **Idi Amin's** expulsion of Indians from Uganda, and I am proud to be here to open this ground-breaking event."

Young Asian representatives of and various managers in the financial services industry were also present as **Lopa Patel**,

founder and CEO of Diversity UK, lambasted Goldman Sachs for their poor record on ethnic variety at its higher echelons. She said: "When you look at Goldman's board what you essentially see are white men. I'm glad to see that they took part in the London Evening Standard's jobless campaign by offering 10 young, mostly Asian, people apprenticeships."

"We are tracking their progress to see what is stopping these minorities from reaching the top, and we have created this forum to bring the debate into the public arena, so we don't just have to talk about this over the 'kitchen table'."

Bala Mahendran, described as the 'Godfather' for his stand-



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ing in the Asian community by Mr Joshi and CEO of Basildon Council, told the audience how he had been maimed as a child, making him "not only an ethnic minority but also disabled".

He was also asked about 'ghettoisation' and the isolation of ethnic communities into enclaves, which generally had lower levels of English language proficiency, and access to the opportunities that led to senior management jobs outside these ethnic enclaves. Mr Mahendran said: "We need to deal with this from the grassroots level, to prepare people to compete in a globalised environment, and improve the skills of minorities so that they are prepared to take on higher responsibilities."

"This isn't even about dumbing down standards or performance to cater to badly represented groups; I agree with Chris, I think diversity is an asset and benefits UK plc. Also, interracial marriage has been on the rise in Britain and the most recent cen-

sus figures show that mixed race people are the fastest growing demographic in this country. So I think there has been great progress in integration over the last few decades, but we have a long way to go."

Baroness Verma, a Conservative party member of the House of Lords, gave the final speech of the evening. She said: "During a recent trip to Scotland on government business I was subjected to an unjustified level of searching, and was not allowed through the airport until I told them I was a Minister of the Crown. My experience shows that prejudice is very much alive and well."

"We haven't made enough progress on diversity because we assume the glass ceiling isn't there to be removed and we accept second best. We shouldn't have to still promote diversity but we also shouldn't accept the status quo. Our generation must not allow things to remain the same for the next generation."

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