

Ministry of Fisheries

A national political party has recently announced its intention to form a Ministry of Fisheries if voted to power. It is interesting to note that the fisheries industry contributes 0.91% to the GDP of the nation. Juxtapose this against the gems and jewellery industry of India which contributes 7% of the GDP and is INR 6,50,000 crores in size, provides employment for 6.1 million people, is comprised 90-95% by MSMEs. However, despite its size and its immense contribution to the economy of the nation, and the fact that it so heavily made up by MSMEs, our industry continues to languish with little or no support from the government policies. On the other hand, the fisheries industry has been able to achieve what we have not. Methinks the primary reason they have managed this is because the fisheries industry employs 15 million people. That is, they represent 15 million votes against 6.1 million of ours. This may, perhaps, be the critical factor while declaring an intention to create a ministry, as this would help uplift the fisherman who would, in turn, give their votes to the said political party.

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the said industry), it is rather frustrating that all political parties continue to ignore the potential of our industry and its contribution thereof, for the economic development of the nation. Despite the tireless efforts of all our trade associations, we have not even been able to have a Domestic Council formed, (this is now finally in progress, thanks to it being recommended by the Watal Committee Report), let alone supportive policies to help the industry grow. The Tea Board and Coffee Board exist, but ours continues to be a distant dream. (The Watal Committee Report has recommended the formation of a Gold Board under the Ministry

of Finance, but there has been no progress in implementing this, thus far).

The answer seems rather clear. We, (the industry), have never offered ourselves to political parties as a vote-bloc. Given the amount of time customers spend at our shops, the reality is that our industry can serve as a huge influencer in the political campaigns. But this remains as a missed political opportunity and one that we, (the industry), should capitalise on. (I had written on this subject matter in an article titled, ‘Politicizing Jewellery’ which was published in the October 2017 issue). It seems that political curiosity is heightened when the topic of discussion includes votes. And let’s face it. While we, as individuals, decide which political party to vote for, (or against), the fact that the said political party would help uplift our industry would be a welcome deciding factor to help make that decision. I believe that if our industry receives political support, our business would grow, and we would each benefit individually through its growth. I am confident that this has far more relevance than the rhetorical talk which one hears during election campaigns. Imagine if a political party were to promise a

reduction in the import duty of gold to 1%, increase the PAN Card requirement to Rs. 5.0 lacs, revise the proposed hallmarking laws by removing criminal liability and the requirement of keeping accounts by the jeweller etc., and promise to make it more trade-friendly, along with other long pending demands of the industry. I am sure that the entire industry would come together and choose to uplift the industry and vote for the political party that promises to do so; business growth is the most important factor for all of us in the industry.

But getting such political support would probably have to start with the political party in the opposition, as politicians are usually most sympathetic when not in power. Once any national political party in the opposition adds this to their election manifesto or publicly declares their intention of support, it shall quickly snowball into a 'who-gets-there-first', with all political parties suddenly recognising our industry as a potential vote-bloc and would declare their support to ensure our votes for them. Of course, the industry would finally obtain the support that has thus far been elusive.

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The leaders of our various trade associations should consider approaching politicians and apprise them of the demands and apathy of our industry. And you, the reader, could ensure this by insisting with the leader of your association to do so. All of us in the industry need to remember that we are the result of our efforts. Thus, it is up to us, and us alone, as to whether we want our government to support us and to frame policies to help us grow.”

you, the reader, could ensure this by insisting with the leader of your association to do so. All of us in the industry need to remember that we are the result of our efforts. Thus, it is up to us, and us alone, as to whether we want our government to support us and to frame policies to help us grow. Keep in mind that that the industry only grows if we, as individuals, grow. We need to recognise that politicians need us as much as we need them, and we should not hesitate in taking advantage of the current elections. The way forward is not to leave

this work to the association leader, simply commenting that you may not know the senior leader of any political party. It is for all of us, individually, to apprise all politicians of the contributory benefits of the gems and jewellery industry to the economy of the nation and the apathetic policies thereof. A mention of the 6.1 million employed by this industry needs to be emphasised for them to see the benefit to them as a political unit. The more we spread this information and make our industry seem as a potential vote-bank, the closer we shall get to finally getting political patronage. Political will must be manipulated so that it includes our industry in its ideologies and plans of growth for the nation. For too long, we merely watched other industries have received support from the government through the framing of 'friendly' policies. The time has come for us to seize the moment as we need to be publicly declared as the 'sunrise sector' by all political parties and have policies tailored around helping us grow to our fullest potential. ■



The article is written by **Ajay Mehra**,
Managing Director, Mehrasons Jewellers
He can be reached at ajay@mehrasonsjewellers.com