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Order of Fiji Awarded



Investiture Ceremony Government House Suva, His Excellency President Epeli Nailatikau with Dr Satendra Singh and Mrs Singh

Fiji has recognized New Zealand citizen, Dr Satendra Singh with Officer of the Order of Fiji (OF) for distinguished services rendered in the past forty plus years, going back to his work in the foundation Department of Foreign Affairs under Fiji's first Prime Minister, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara to his most recent contributions since 2006 in judging annual writing competitions with Lady June Hillary on behalf of the New Zealand High Commission, Suva. Dr Singh hails from Fiji where his ancestors settled in 1894 from Rajasthan. In 2013 he was awarded India's highest civilian award to its diaspora, the Pravasi Bhartiya Samman Award (PBSA). In 1990 he was recognized in the Queen's Birthday Honours List in NZ with a Queen's

Service Medal (QSM) and in 2006 Dr Singh was made an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit (ONZM) for outstanding service. The Order of Fiji is the highest decoration awarded by the President of Fiji, rarely to non citizens. The investiture ceremony took place at Government House, Suva where President Ratu Epeli Nailatikau pinned the gold

medal and commended Dr Singh on his efforts for the country of his birth and for humanity in general. Guests at the ceremony included the High Commissioner of New Zealand, Mr Mark Ramsden, who presented his credentials a few days after Dr Singh's investiture. High Commissioner of India Mr Gitesh Sarma also attended and the High Commissioner for Papua New Guinea. Others appointed Officers of the Order of Fiji were Ambassador Kaliopate Tavola, Ambassador Robin Yarrow, Ambassador Peter Thompson, Brigadier General Mosese Tikoitoga, head of the Fiji Military Forces and the Commodore of Fiji's Navy, Viliame Naupoto. SEE EDITORIAL COMMENT

Modi Charms Fiji and the Pacific



India's Prime Minister Hon Narendra Modi charmed Fiji and the Pacific Islands leaders on 19 November when his State Visit to Suva brought commendations from all around. The Fiji Prime Minister greeted Mr Modi warmly and introduced him to twelve other colleagues from around the South Pacific. He also

presented his own Government Ministers and leaders. The Indian Prime Minister clearly enjoyed being in the Fiji Islands, a place where Indians first settled in 1879 when the British Raj in India provided a means to develop the Colony of Fiji. Despite Fiji's recent turbulent political history, especially since 1987

during which India had closed its High Commission for nearly 10 years, current warm relations between India and Fiji led to several milestones. These included India's role as a lead nation in the international observers overseeing Fiji's return to parliamentary government.

NZ High Commissioner appointed

New Zealand and Fiji have mended diplomatic fences by re-appointing High Commissioners in Suva and Wellington. Mr Mark Ramsden, who was Acting head of mission presented his credentials to the President of Fiji Ratu Epeli Nailatikau at Government House. In the past eight years, relations between Fiji and NZ were

invariably at a low point with three Acting heads of missions expelled from Suva. New Zealand has urged Fiji to restore democracy and helped with financial and other ways in the lead to elections held in August when an elected government was restored to office.

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Order of Fiji awarded to Dr Singh

A nation usually shows its gratitude to worthy citizens in exceptional cases, occasionally signaling those who might have taken up a new citizenship but have maintained close links with the country of birth, with appointments such as the Order of Fiji. In an extraordinary list of contributions going back to 1970, Dr Satendra Singh, ONZM, QSM, PBSA, OF, JP has shown that three nations can be linked through a myriad of ways and despite ups and downs, remain engaged in fundamental ways. Such a person well deserves the accolade given from all three partners – New Zealand, India and Fiji. When Fiji became independent in 1970, its newly established Foreign Office had many challenges, not the least of which was to negotiate and sign new treaties. A young nation began slowly to make its special mark. Dr Singh's support role with Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, Ratu Sir Penaia

Cross, Bayly Clinic, Save the Child, Prime Minister's Relief Committee and many NGO's. Typically, in the most recent flooding disaster he was able to secure help from NZ Dairy, making possible a dairy component in the "hot meal" project by Save the Child, delivering daily nutrition to children in makeshift camps and relief centers.

Fiji's 1987 political crisis saw many fall outs, among them, the expulsion of India's High Commissioner from Suva, many Fiji citizens caught out in NZ with expired visitor permits and many levels of strife among Fijians in their homeland. Fiji's 2000 political crisis likewise saw many fall outs; again in 2006. Despite souring relations among former friends, India maintained a close interest in Fiji and especially that Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Prime Minister David Lange were close friends who both wanted to ensure human rights were not trampled in

centre in Fiji.

Dr Singh was invited with Lady June Hillary to a special event marking the Indian Cultural Centre's 40th anniversary in 2012. In the intervening decades his connections with the Indian Council for Cultural Relations were vast, bringing huge benefits and programs into Fiji, South Pacific and NZ.

In 1986 when Fiji's last Governor General Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau visited NZ, he was delighted to be welcomed by Dr Singh, with whom he traveled to many countries while in a different role. Likewise, when the Fiji President, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara agreed to open the 1999 Pacific Vision Conference organized by the NZ Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, he was somewhat unhappy to learn that Fijians of Indian descent were not participants and he discussed the subject with Dr Satendra Singh at length. Ratu Mara did not mince his words when he appeared on the stage to address the large conference attendees in Auckland. President Mara said he felt there was a noticeable omission as Indians from Fiji were not there. Ratu Mara told the meeting Indians in Fiji were Pacific people in every sense of the definition, had lived in the region for over a century and one of their number had risen to become head of government. Fiji's 2006 political crisis saw many fall outs. Relations between Fiji and NZ soured. Broken fences meant lost opportunities. They also signaled some distances in links. However, given the strong historical and people to people connections, fundamental aspects were carried through with great decorum. Dr Satendra Singh and Lady June Hillary judged the annual essay writing competitions which saw hundreds of Fiji's senior secondary students each year, producing extraordinary material on diverse subjects like Fiji's Future in the Region, Fiji and NZ's Sporting Links, The race relations lessons learnt from the sinking of the Steamship Syria and How School Cultures could help Fiji.

In 2006 NZ saw the appointment of Sir Anand Satyanand as Governor General. Dr Singh secured a Tabua which is regarded as the highest cultural gift that can be accorded in Fiji, from the President of Fiji, for the Fiji Association in Auckland to present to Sir Anand. The extraordinary ceremony took place and was witnessed by several



Fiji MP's. They included Adi Koila Nailatikau (now Fiji's First Lady) and Adi Samanunu Cakobau. At the conclusion of Sir Anand's term in the Vice Regal Office, he consented to Dr Singh's suggestion to present the same Tabua to the NZ High Commission, Suva, to recognize the close historical ties. The Tabua was duly presented to the embassy by Dr Singh and has a high place of honor with another such important artifact which was given by Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara to the Maori Queen to mark her coronation. It was later gifted to the embassy.

Fiji's High Commissioner in New Zealand Her Excellency Mere Tora praised Dr Singh on the prestigious award from the President of Fiji. Ms Tora said Dr Singh well deserves the honour bestowed in a list that has eminent citizens recognized at the highest level. Pukekoe stalwart of the community Ganges Singh, QSM, JP said "This is a much deserved medal and appointment to the Order of Fiji. Dr Singh's vast contributions have reached many parts of the world. One such project was to link several nations that were involved in the 125th anniversary marking the sinking of the S S Syria, when he managed to locate and engage with people from England, Scotland, Australia, Fiji, India and ofcourse New Zealand. The amazing artifact donated to Manukau Memorial Garden Crematorium has been admired by scores of people and is a permanent reminder of this sad day in our joint history, that terrible day in 1884 when so many Indians



Ganilau, Ratu Sir Edward Cakobau, Ratu Sir George Cakobau and other pioneering statesmen of Fiji took him to many destinations, including North and South America, Asia and Europe. He was in the fortunate position to meet the Pope in 1974 at a Private Audience in the Vatican – a young man who so warmed the Pontiff's heart, His Holiness gave him a special large statute from his own hometown. In 2014 the late Pope was beatified – now, Pope Blessed Paul VI, for millions of people around the world, worthy of veneration.

Fiji is in a particular location where nature often strikes severe blows, invariably with hurricanes and tropical storms. Names like Eric, Hina, Nigel and many more are forever in the recall of people who lived through these. Help that comes from overseas is always welcomed. NZ has been a very generous benefactor. Dr Singh's many and varied roles going back to over four decades brought assistance to a host of organizations, including Fiji's Red

Fiji. Dr Satendra Singh's close contacts with successive Indian High Commissioners in Fiji led to many inputs on how India's future engagement in the region might be. One area of particular interest to High Commissioner Professor Ishwar Chahan was in the Pacific Islands Forum. Dr Singh's invaluable input was noteworthy especially as he was privy to the Forum's establishing process in 1972 while Fiji's Treaty Officer. In like manner, he was privy to the establishment of the Indian Cultural Centre in Suva, especially in the meetings held in India between Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara and Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Dr Singh accompanied Ratu Sir Penaia to India and engaged on various levels in the discussions to see India create a permanent culture





Investiture Ceremony, Government House Suva, from left, His Excellency High Commissioner of NZ, Mark Ramsden, Dr Singh, Mrs Kriti Singh and NZ Trade Commissioner

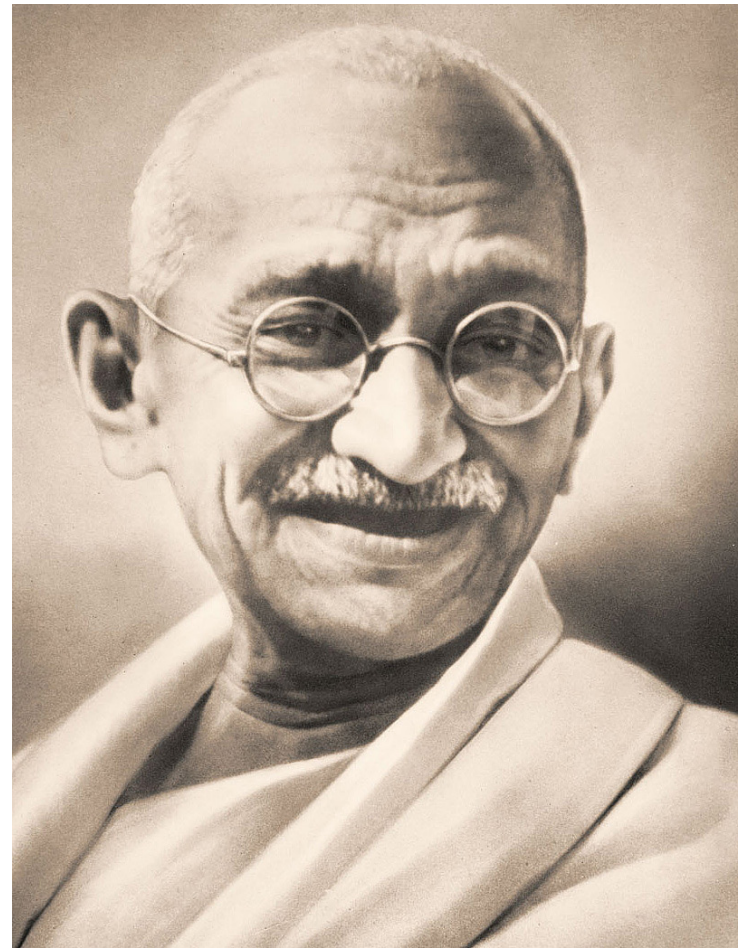
died but so many more were saved by our Fijian brothers and by Sir William McGregor."

Mr Thakur Parbu, QSM said Dr Singh's recognition from Fiji comes at an important time when an elected government has taken over. Mr Parbu praised Dr Singh's countless efforts and offered his best wishes. Mr Rup Singh, a friend of long standing said it was a much deserved honour for which he offered his thanks to the Government of Fiji. Fiji's former Vice President and currently Chief Justice of Nauru, Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi said Dr Singh's recognition from Fiji is immensely pleasing and highly deserved. The CJ offered his warm congratulation. For a man who has met many famous people – the impressive list includes Queen Elizabeth II, Princess Diana, Prince Charles, Prince Andrew, Prince Edward, Mrs Ela Gandhi (grand- daughter of Mahatma Gandhi) Pope Blessed Paul VI, Mr Rajiv and Mrs Sonia Gandhi, President Pranab

Mukherjee, Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi and Sir Edmund Hillary among the more prominent, there is this simple reply when asked to recall someone whose imprint has amazed him – "One of the essay winners a few years ago was a remarkable young seventeen year old girl suffering from Lupus. We read her brilliant essay and both Lady Hillary and I were so moved by it, we hoped here is a future leader who will get to do wonderful things for her nation and beyond. I happened to be in a position where, thanks to the NZ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, we could award her a meaningful cash prize and give her a chance to interact with Fiji's media. The rest was up to her. Last year, I met her again. Despite the odds she is achieving exceptionally well at university and is all set to embark on a very creditable career. There's one hero whose imprint will outshine my feeble efforts!" Auckland Times congratulates Dr Satendra Singh on being made an Officer of the Order of Fiji.

Mahatma Gandhi – 100 Years on

The Prime Minister of India will open the 2015 Pravasi Divas in Gandhinagar, in his home turf Gujarat. Significantly, the occasion will mark the centenary of Mahatma Gandhi's return to India from South Africa, to lead the freedom movement in the country of his birth. He remains, arguably, the most impressive Pravasi or overseas Indian whose impact touched millions.

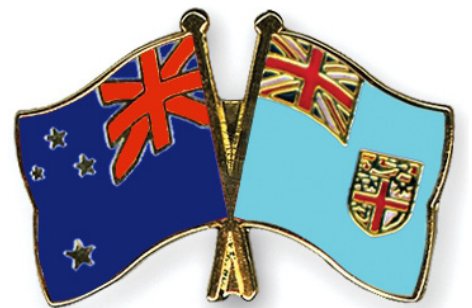


The Pravasi Divas is an important way for India to remain engaged with, and tap into, a vital resource – the 30 million diaspora, settled all around the globe. Mr Modi will no doubt create valuable opportunities for his Ministers to avail themselves of this opportunity when several thousand

Indians from most nations will make their presence. The Government of India will commemorate Gandhiji's special anniversary in style and will showcase a network of opportunities. India awaits. The diaspora is warmly invited to Gandhinagar in early January 2015.

NZ/Fiji Mend Fences

It is great when good neighbors can become good friends again! Congratulations are in order for Fiji and New Zealand in restoring High Commissioners. The troubled past eight years should be set aside. His Excellency Mark Ramsden now our High Commissioner in Suva is a most congenial person, from all accounts, he is very well suited to carry through this important task. Mr Ramsden has been Acting head of mission for some months and finally got to present his credentials officially. His counterpart in Wellington has yet to be named by Fiji but when they do, the Fiji community will be well pleased the thaw is finally over. NZ and Fiji have a very long history together. They have vested interests and people from both countries are tied through many ways. NZ has always been in the front row when Fiji needed assistance after disasters. NZ has contributed immensely to educational goals and to opportunities to further Fiji's place as an important international



player. This is an excellent way to close 2014. Fiji has signaled its goodwill in handing an Honorary Officer of the Order of Fiji to a New Zealander in the same week as welcoming New Zealand's High Commissioner into the diplomatic fold. Fiji and New Zealand have many projects underway and these will be watched with interest. At a time when important matters like climate change and its effects in our part of the world are pressing concerns for many, the road ahead will surely require goodwill and acceptance on all sides. Here's to the Pacific! Bula Vinaka, Kia Ora, Namaste! Here's to the future!

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