

## **India – Fiji Bilateral Relations**

### **Background**

India's links with Fiji commenced in 1879 when Indian labourers were brought here under indenture system to work on sugar-cane plantations. Between 1879 and 1916 around 60,553 Indians were brought to Fiji. Beginning with early 20th century, Indian traders and others also started arriving in Fiji. In 1920, the indenture system was abolished. Prior to Fiji's independence in 1970, India had a Commissioner since 1948 who was later upgraded to High Commissioner after independence.

Prior to Fiji's independence in 1970, India had a post of Commissioner since 1948 to look after the interests of people of Indian origin. It was later upgraded to High Commissioner after Fiji's independence in 1970. Fiji's Prime Minister Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara visited India in 1971 and Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi visited Fiji in September 1981.

India-Fiji relations are based on mutual respect, cooperation and strong cultural and people to people ties. The bilateral relationship received a major boost after the visit of Hon'ble Prime Minister of India to Fiji in November 2014, when the First Meeting of the Forum for India-Pacific Islands Co-operation (FIPIC) was also held. Over the years, as a major development partner of Fiji, India has been privileged to support Fiji in its nation building efforts across key sectors and also in the area of capacity building.

**Visit of Prime Minister of India to Fiji:** The visit by Hon'ble Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, to Fiji on 19 November 2014 was a watershed moment not only for India-Fiji relations but also for India's relations with all the Pacific Island Countries. During the visit three MoUs were signed with Fiji: (i) MoU for Extending a Line of Credit for Establishing a Co-Generation Plant in Fiji, (ii) MoU on Cooperation in the field of training of diplomats, and (iii) MoU on the Earmarking of Land for their Diplomatic Missions in the respective Capitals.

**Visit of External Affairs Minister to Fiji:** Hon'ble EAM, Dr. S. Jaishankar visited Fiji from 14-17 February 2023 to attend the 12th World Hindi Conference held in Nadi, Fiji from 15-17 February. On 16 February 2023 EAM visited Suva for bilateral visit. During the visit Visa Waiver Agreement was signed between India and Fiji on 16 February 2023. During the visit three side events were also held in Suva, i) Launch of the Solarisation of the Pacific Head of State Residences at the State House, ii) Inauguration of Girit Gallery funded by GOI and iii) Unveiling of bust of Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel at India House followed by an interaction with the vibrant members of diaspora.

**Visit of MOS (RRS) and Administrator of Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Daman & Diu and Lakshadweep:** Dr. Rajkumar Ranjan Singh, Hon'ble Minister of State for External Minister and Praful Patel, Administrator of Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Daman & Diu and Lakshadweep visited Fiji from 14 to 16 May 2023 for Girit Day Celebration in Suva. On 15 May 2023, Hon. MoS (RRS) was guest of honor at the 144<sup>th</sup> Girit Day celebrations organized by the Fijian Government. Hon'ble Administrator, Shri Praful Patel also attended the celebrations.

### **High-Level Exchanges**

**FIPIC:** The Forum for India-Pacific Island Countries was inaugurated on 19 November 2014 at Suva. Hon'ble Prime Minister of India also hosted the First Summit of the Forum in Suva (Fiji) during his historic visit to Fiji on 19 November 2014. The Forum saw participation of 14 Pacific Island Countries. India announced various development assistance initiatives during the Summit and other cooperation projects in various fields including, Climate Change, trade, economy, tele-medicine and tele-education, IT, Grants for community development projects, human resource development and deputation of experts from India, etc.

**FIPIC-II:** As a follow-up of the historic first FIPIC Summit in 2014, India organized the second FIPIC at Jaipur on 21 August 2015, which was hosted by Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Building upon the success of the first FIPIC, India announced major initiatives to boost cooperation with the 14 Pacific Island countries. Fijian delegation, led by Prime Minister Hon'ble Josaia Vorenqe Bainimarama, attended the Forum.

**FIPIC-III:** The 3rd Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC) Summit was held in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea on 22 May 2023, which was hosted by Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi and PNG Prime Minister, James Marape. Fijian delegation led by PM Sitiveni Rabuka attended the Summit at PNG on 22 May 2023. A 12-step action plan was announced by the Hon. Prime Minister of India for the 14 Pacific Island Countries including Fiji during the 3rd FIPIC summit. On behalf of the Fijian President, H.E. Mr. Ratu Wiliame Maivalili Katonivere, Prime Minister Rabuka bestowed Prime Minister Modi with the highest honor of the Republic of Fiji – the Companion of the Order of Fiji (CF).

**Visit of Prime Minister of Fiji to India for ISA Founding Conference:** Fiji has become one of the first Founding Members of the International Solar Alliance (ISA) – a joint initiative of the Governments of India and France to promote solar energy. PM Bainimarama participated in the Founding Conference of the ISA held in New Delhi on 11 March 2018.

**Foreign Office Consultation (FOC):** The Fifth round of India-Fiji FOC was held on 18 July 2022 at Suva. Secretary (East) led the Indian delegation, while Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs led the Fijian side to review the whole gamut of bilateral/multilateral cooperation activities. The two sides also exchanged views on regional and global issues of interest and agreed to enhance their cooperation in the multilateral fora.

**Interaction with PSIDS at New York:** On 24 September 2019, on the sidelines of the UNGA, Prime Minister of India Hon. Narendra Modi held an interaction, first of its kind, with the leaders of the Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS). Dr. S. Jaishankar, Hon. External Affairs Minister of India also held a bilateral meeting with Hon. Inia Seruiratu, Minister of Defence, National Security and Foreign Affairs of Republic of Fiji on the margins of the UNGA on 24 September 2019 at New York.

**India-Pacific Islands Sustainable Development Conference (IPISDC):** Government of India organized the India-Pacific Islands Sustainable Development Conference (IPISDC) which was held at Grand Pacific Hotel, Suva, Fiji on 25-26 May 2017. Minister of State for External Affairs Gen. (Dr.) V.K.Singh (Retd.) hosted the event. The Conference saw the participation of several high profile leaders from the 14 Pacific Island Countries. India signed MoUs for setting up of Centers of Excellence in Information Technology (CEIT) with Fiji, Cook Islands, Nauru, Samoa and Niue. India and Fiji also signed three MOUs for 'Co-operation in Youth Development', 'Cooperation between Broadcasting Agencies', 'Cooperation in the field of Renewable Energy'. Prasar Bharati of India also gifted programmatic content on India for telecast to all the Pacific Island Countries. India had provided US\$ 1mn. towards Climate Change assistance to Fiji's COP23 Presidency.

**Solarisation of Head of State Residences:** A regional Solarisation Project to improve resilience in the Pacific was signed on 1 June 2020 in Suva between United Nations Resident Coordinator and Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF). The two-year project, costing US\$1.31 mn has been largely funded by Government of India – US\$ 400,000 from UN Development Partnership Fund and US\$700,000 from India-UN Development Partnership Fund Commonwealth Window. Under the project, Photovoltaic (PV) systems will be installed on buildings of national significance, such as the executive administrative residence of 11 countries (Fiji, Federated States Micronesia, Palau, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Solomon Islands, Timor Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu). As of now, the Solar panels have been installed at State House in Fiji and the project was launched by the EAM, Dr. S. Jaishankar on 16 February 2023 in Fiji. For Kiribati, Tonga and Tuvalu, the equipments have reached the site and installation is expected to be completed by November 2023.

### **Development Partnership Assistance**

Government of India is a committed development partner of Fiji. Indian assistance extends to sectors such as capacity building through human resource development and training under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programmes. Every year, many ITEC slots are made available to Fijian nationals. Many others benefit from training opportunities and for pursuing higher education in India every year under various scholarships offered by Ministry of AYUSH of India as well as by the Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR).

India also provides Humanitarian and Disaster Relief assistance from time to time whenever the need arises. One such example in recent past was in December 2020 when Tropical Cyclone Yasa struck Fiji. India supplied a consignment of 6 tons of relief materials consisting of 1000 sleeping mats and dignity kits airlifted from India for the cyclone-affected people which arrived in Fiji within a week of the Cyclone striking in Fiji. As follow-up assistance, India sponsored renovation of twenty schools in Fiji under Government of Fiji's Adopt a School Programme. India also gifted five tons of vegetable seeds and contributed US\$ 1 million to the Fijian Prime Minister's Relief Fund.

In March, 2021 Government of India donated a sum of FJD 39,602/- to the Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism & Transport for construction of two roadside stalls on the sides of highways of Fiji. In December 2021, India had donated Medical Supplies worth of Rs. 3,55,861.80 containing Anti-Retroviral drugs for HIV patients in Fiji and In April 2022, again provided Medical Supplies containing Anti-Retroviral drugs, PPE kits and N95 masks (125,000pcs) and Tuberculosis medicines worth of Rs. 30,45,320.00. India supplied four Mahindra twin cab vehicles (FJD\$ 2,48,000) and 5500 bottles of indelible ink (INR 1,18,57,790/-) to Fiji Elections Office in 2022 to facilitate the 2022 General Election. GOI gifted 2 Mahindra Vehicles to Tavua and Rakiraki Town councils in March 2023 and Medical Supplies containing Anti-Retroviral drugs and Tuberculosis medicines worth of INR 1,07,23,960.00 in August 2023 to Ministry of Health and Medical Services.

Several high impact community oriented projects undertaken by the Government of India. This includes the very successful Jaipur Foot Camp in Suva, Nadi and Labasa in which close to 600 Fijians were provided customized prosthetic limbs. A unique Parametric insurance scheme with funding from India-UN Development Partnership Fund has helped provide insurance cover and financial support to the most vulnerable households in Fiji. To help promote modern agriculture, two highly skilled experts funded by Government of India started their assignment in Fiji. In an effort to help bring in youth to agriculture sector and improve food security and livelihood, India also assisted the local Government's "Youth Farm Initiative' (YFI) initiative.

**Establishment of Mahatma Gandhi Centre of Excellence in IT:** In 2021 Government of India has established a Centre of Excellence in IT at Fiji National University. The project has been implemented by Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC) under an MoU signed between the Governments of India and Fiji.

### Commercial and Economic Relations

Trade statistics apparently do not project realistically the trade happening through third countries/places such as Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, etc. The bilateral trade figures of the last three financial years (1 April-31 March) are as under:

| Year    | Exports to India | Import from India | Balance of Trade |
|---------|------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| 2020-21 | 1.33             | 46.90             | 45.57            |
| 2021-22 | 0.49             | 57.96             | 57.47            |
| 2022-23 | 0.10             | 80.02             | 79.92            |

(Source: Department of Commerce, Government of India) in US\$ Millions

**Indian Diaspora:** The number of Indians living in Fiji is about 2300, mostly engaged in services like IT, management, finance, banking, educational, medical, hotel industry etc. As for the persons of Indian descent in Fiji, the journey of Girmitya (contract for indentured labourers) started in Fiji in 1879 and ended in 1920. Indian origin population constitutes roughly one-third of the total population of 908,012 (Census - Sept 2017). Hindi is one of the official language of Fiji.

**Pravasi Bhartiya Divas (PBD) / Pravasi Bhartiya Samman (PBS):** PBS awardees from Fiji are: (i) Mr. Mahendra Chaudhry, former PM (2004); (ii) Golfer Mr. Vijay Singh (2005); (iii) Late Sir Moti Tika Ram, former Supreme Court Judge (2007), (iv) Mr. Y.P. Reddy, Reddy Group Chairman and Chairman, (v) Girmitya Council (2010), (vi) RamKrishna Mission (2014) (viii) Mr Vinod Patel, businessman got award for social service in (2017).

**Know India Programmes (KIP):** During the last five years, 123 Indo-Fijians have visited India in KIP.

**First Regional Hindi Conference:** The first-ever Regional Hindi Conference was held at Suva on 25 January 2020 in collaboration with Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts, Government of Fiji. The Conference was attended by Fijian, Indian as well as regional Hindi experts. The Conference also, for the first time in Fiji, attracted the largest ever gathering of Hindi teachers in Fiji.

**12<sup>th</sup> World Hindi Conference:** 12<sup>th</sup> WHC was held in Nadi from 15-17 February 2023 organized in collaboration with the Government of Fiji. EAM led the Indian delegation comprising MOS(VM), Shri V. Muraleedharan; MOS (Home Affairs), Shri Ajay Kumar Mishra; Members of Parliament, Hindi Scholars and senior officials. Fijian President Ratu Wiliame Katonivere and EAM jointly inaugurated the Conference on 15 February 2023. Prime Minister, Sitiveni Rabuka, and three Deputy Prime Ministers viz. Biman Prasad, Manoa Kamikamica and Viliame Gavoka; Minister for Education, Aseri Radrodro; Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar, Charan Jeath Singh; Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations, Agni Deo Singh; and other senior Government officials participated in the conference from Fijian side. The Opening Ceremony saw the release of a commemorative postal stamp by the Government of Fiji. A special Samarika and five other publications were also released on the occasion. About 1000 participants from over 31 countries attended the Conference, including about 500 from India and 300 from Fiji.

**Girmit Day:** As part of the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav (AKAM), celebrating 75 years of India's Independence, the High Commission of India in Suva (Fiji), in association with Post Fiji Limited, brought out a set of commemorative postage stamps and first day cover to mark the 143rd Girmit Day in Fiji. Prime Minister of the Republic of Fiji Bainimarama jointly released the commemorative stamps and the first day cover with the High Commissioner of India to Fiji, P.S. Karthigeyan, at a grand function held at the Suva Civic Centre to mark the 143rd Girmit Day in Fiji. Separately, the 143rd Anniversary Girmit Remembrance Day of Fiji was organised in New Delhi on 14 May. MoS (External Affairs), Shri Rajkumar Ranjan Singh graced the occasion as the chief Guest at the program organized by the Resident Fijian High Commission in collaboration with the Girmitiya Foundation based in India.

144th Girmit Day celebration was organized by the Fijian Government on 15 May 2023. Dr. Rajkumar Ranjan Singh, Hon'ble Minister of State for External Minister, was guest of honor at the celebrations.

**Public Sector Undertakings of India in Fiji:** Four Government of India undertakings, viz, New India Assurance Company Ltd. (since 1954), Life Insurance Corporation of India (since 1956), Bank of Baroda (since 1961), Water and Power Consultancy Services Ltd (Since 2015) are functioning in Fiji.

## **Cultural Relations**

### **Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre**

An Indian Cultural Centre (ICC) in Fiji was established by GOI in 1972 (which was first ever such centre abroad). It has been renamed as 'Swami Vivekanand Cultural Centre (SVCC) in May 2018. SVCC provides classes in seven streams: Indian classical music (Karnataki, Tabla, Harmonium) and dance (Bharatnatyam, Kathak), Hindi language and Yoga. SVCC regularly organizes cultural evenings, exhibitions, film shows, workshops and discussions.

**Namaste Pacifika- Festival of India:** To mark the 70th anniversary of India's Independence, High Commission of India organized a six-month long Festival of India named, 'Namaste Pacifika' from October 2017 to March 2018.

**International Day of Yoga:** Since its inaugural event in 2015, the International Day of Yoga is celebrated with much enthusiasm and fervour every year in Fiji with participation from all walks of life and the event has been honoured by the presence of some of the highest authorities of the country, including His Excellency the President of the Republic.

On 21 June 2023, Mission organized the International Day of Yoga (IDY 2023) at the iconic Grand Pacific Hotel in Suva. The event was attended by more than 100 yoga enthusiasts including Government officials, members of diplomatic corps, Indian diaspora community and friends of India.

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