

**Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs & Sugar Industry**

**Signing of Memorandum of Understanding between Fiji Sugar Corporation, and National Sugar Institute, Kanpur India**

Tuesday 19th March 2024, 1530-1630 hours, Level 4, Bali Towers, Fiji

1. **INTRODUCTION**

His Excellency, Sri Palaniswamy Subramanyan Karthigeyan,

Permanent Secretary, Yogesh Karan,

CEO, Fiji Sugar Corporation, Bhan Singh,

Invited participants,

Ladies, and gentlemen.

Bula Vinaka and good afternoon to you all.

* 1. At the outset, I want to express my gratitude to His Excellency, Sri. P.S. Karthigeyan for taking his valuable time and availing himself on behalf of Government of India to sign the MoU between the National Sugar Institute, Kanpur, and the Fiji Sugar Corporation.
  2. Excellency, India has been an important bilateral partner to Fiji and your office has had a significant role in enhancing our relationships to greater heights. I sincerely thank you and the High Commission’s dedication and commitment in strengthening our bi-lateral and historical relationship.

1. **BILATERAL RELATIONS**
   1. Excellency, Fiji as a nation has benefited from numerous supports provided by the people of India through your Government. We have been deeply enriched by India and Fiji’s mutual understanding, engagements, and genuine collaboration for over more than fifty years now. Both countries have respect for each other’s sovereignty, common development, and shared prosperity.
2. **FORUM FOR INDIA-PACIFIC ISLANDS COOPERATION**
   1. Excellency, India has been playing a major role at the Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC), which was launched during Hon. Prime Minister. Mr. Narendra Modi’s visit to Fiji. Through FIPIC, the Pacific Island countries have been benefitting from trade and various projects supported by India to improve quality of life in Pacific, especially in climate change and energy, improvement in connectivity, technology, and trainings.
   2. Fiji sincerely welcomes India’s another recent affirmation at the FIPIC, where India announced its commitment to provide 100-bed specialty-hospital to be housed in Nasinu, entirely at the cost of India Government.
3. **HEALTH**
   1. Excellency, India is fast becoming a global hub of medical services with its world-class health facilities and medical experts. Patients from Fiji have been fortunate to access India’s medical services at relatively cheaper costs over the years.
   2. Excellency, Fiji is looking forward to welcome further co-operations with India to improve our health sector and develop our medical system including training of our medical personnel.
4. **Agriculture and Sugar Sector**
   1. Excellency, our Agriculture including sugar sector, has also greatly benefitted from our partnership with India. We acknowledge and express our appreciation to India for supplying approximately 14 tonnes of hybrid vegetable dry seeds to support the expansion of commercial and export agriculture and food security in the wake of COVID-19 and rehabilitation following damages and losses from Tropical Cyclones.
   2. Excellency, as the Minister of Multi-Ethnic and Sugar Industry, I have visited India several times and witness the level of advancement made by India’s sugar industry. We are grateful for the various financial and technical assistance already received by Fiji’s sugar sector in past and your continued support for the development of our industry.
   3. The Ministry of Sugar Industry and industry stakeholders have established strong association with India’s sugar research institutions, especially, the Vasantdada Sugar Institute in Pune, Sugar Breeding Centre, in Coimbatore, ICAR-Indian Institute of Sugarcane Research, Lucknow and National Sugar Institute, Kanpur.
   4. Excellency, Fiji has become part of the regular sugar conferences organised by your sugar industry. Such conferences have helped build staff capacity, whereby our officers have been offered opportunities to learn from India’s research and developments and advanced technology developed by India’s sugar sector in all areas of the supply chain. The Ministry of Sugar Industry is extremely grateful to have been offered opportunity by India at executive level and be included as organizing committee member for the 8th IAPSIT International Sugar Conference scheduled to be held in Vietnam in September, this year. And I am pleased that my Director of Research and Policy, Reshmi, is member of the organizing committee.
   5. Excellency, we are looking forward to establish relations with the milling sector of India. Following my recent trip to India, my Ministry is funding to bring experts from two top Mill Association namely the Uttam Sugar Mills and the Indian Sugar & General Engineering Corporation (ISGEC). These experts will be engaged with FSC to assess the three mills and provide solutions to improve efficiency in the three mills.
   6. Our focus is also to revive the railway networks and expand it to establish networks possibly for both, passenger and cargo. We are thankful for the RITES experts of India for conducting initial survey in past and would be happy to engage them for future studies.
   7. Excellency, the grant of US$1.06m provided to Ministry in 2017 has rendered great benefit to our cane farmers. The mechanical harvesters and tractors procured through the grants have brought much relief to farmers in reducing their cultivation and harvesting costs.
   8. The Sugar Research Institute of Fiji (SRIF) has been forever grateful for the services of Prof. Santiago Mahimairaja (former CEO) from India, who completed his term, recently. Prof. Raja has made significant contributions to SRIF in research and development, technology transfer and trainings. The institute is also fortunate to receive two experts (plant breeder and an entomologist) deployed under Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC). The two experts have also made significant contributions with assistance in quality seed cane production and crop protection.
   9. Excellency, I have been informed that the first of its kind and recent trip of 18 persons including 14 Fijian sugarcane farmers was an eye opener to these participants, whereby they visited three research institutes and five sugar factories within the state of Uttar Pradesh. For this, we are genuinely appreciative to the Indian government for financing their trips and the generous hospitality provided to our delegation by the Indian counterparts. I am hoping that this becomes an annual event for our local farmers to learn from India.
   10. Excellency, we also extend our gratitude that through the recent discussions between the two governments, the Government of India has generously offered to waive overdue interest of US$3.11m owed on arrears by FSC on EXIM Bank loan and offered opportunity to restructure the EXIM Bank loan with a moratorium period of five years.
5. **CONCLUDING REMARKS**
   1. Excellency, today’s event is yet another testament of our growing relationship with India and your sugar industry.
   2. Through this MoU, we intend to benefit from your advanced research and technology and learn from your experts, through the National Sugar Institute of Fiji and Fiji Sugar Corporation, representing our government. We intend to make more submissions through your ITEC program and value the increase in quota for scholarship opportunities given to us.
   3. I look forward to our continued collaboration, for greater and meaningful engagements to build our ties together in future.

Dhanyavad, thank you.