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Fiji Students Enjoy NZ Hospitality

The New Zealand High Commissioner's official residence in Suva was opened to specially invited guests and winners of the S S Syria Essay Competition recently. On Saturday 24 October, many winning students and their parents enjoyed the magnificent park like setting in the Domain, to be welcomed by staff of the embassy. Enjoying refreshments against the back drop of the Suva harbor views, students and their parents enjoyed the hospitality offered by the New Zealand embassy. A magic day for them, said one guest, worthy students winning awards and cash prizes in recalling the Syria tragedy of 125 years ago. Speaking to the students, the acting High Commissioner Mr Todd Clever said it was a very special occasion for the high commission to interact with the youth of Fiji who had written such interesting accounts, based on an important event. Mr Clever paid special tribute to the NZ adjudicators Lady June Hillary and Dr Satendra Singh. It was a special occasion for Dr Singh who had organized and judged a similar competition in Fiji thirty years ago with the United Nations agency. Most winners of the Syria Essay Competition were aged between fifteen and seventeen. The

two overall winners, selected from over 100 essays presented, were Sekaia Niumataiwalu from Yat Sen Secondary School and Ashwini Neelima Prakash from Dayanand Anglo Vedic College, who each received a Certificate of Distinction, a large Book and \$500 cash. They also spoke to the media present. Guests included the High Commissioner of India, Professor Jha and representatives of many schools and community. The Essay Competition was organized by the Fiji Association in Auckland, with support from the New Zealand High Commission. Dr Singh told the students they had sent special messages in their essays, of humanity and hope. Singh praised them for applying the lessons of the 1884 tragedy, to their own lives. The acting High Commissioner, Todd Clever's full interview at the function was shown on Fiji TV, something which some observers said was an interesting surprise, given media censorship in Fiji. Many offered their praise the event had touched so many people in inspiring discussions about the S S Syria, which was lost near Nasilai in 1884. SEE EDITORIAL AND COVERAGE OF SYRIA PRIZE GIVING



SS SYRIA Essay Winners winners, a moment captured at the NZ Embassy Reception for Sekaia & Ashwini

Fiji Isolated following Persona Non Grata

Fiji's self appointed Prime Minister, who forcibly took power in a coup nearly three years ago, sent two neighboring envoys packing. By declaring them persona non grata, unwelcome, the military installed government showed the door to the Australian High Commissioner, James Batley and the Acting High Commissioner of New Zealand, Todd Clever. The favor was returned likewise as Canberra and Wellington immediately tossed out the Fiji envoys from their countries. Commodore Bainimarama maintained Australia and New Zealand are "waging a negative campaign against the government and people of Fiji." New Zealand Prime Minister Hon John Key rejected the claim and pointed to four coups in Fiji in the last twenty years. Mr Key said the present regime's refusal to engage in dialogue with other stake holders within Fiji continued to be a difficulty towards acceptable electoral reform and democracy.

The Prime Minister of Australia, Hon Kevin Rudd said his government would not soften its stance on Fiji. He strongly condemned censorship and lack of freedom of speech in Fiji, as a well known Fiji born academic Professor Brij Lal, one of the architects of the previous constitution that was demolished by the military was told to leave Fiji. Since returning to Australia Professor Lal said he had been verbally abused for several hours on views expressed about Fiji. Lal said "The price of living in Fiji is silence." Australian PM Mr Rudd said "We, the

Australian Government, are engaged in active development programs with our South Pacific partners. We want to see stability in the South Pacific and we are not about to simply allow a coup culture to spread. That is why we will maintain a hard line in relation to this (Fiji) regime."

The Foreign Minister of New Zealand, Hon Murray McCully expressed his disappointment that New Zealand has now lost its third envoy from Fiji since the military coup of December 2006 by Bainimarama. The Minister said "We have got to the point where it is going to have an impact on our ability to provide the normal range of services in our Suva post." This could mean slow visa processing and approving procedures. The United States has deplored Bainimarama's action, urging Fiji to restore freedom of speech in the island nation, which has the media under censorship. A former Fiji land forces chief now in Australia, Colonel Jone Baledrokadroka said Bainimarama wanted to politicize the military, "he sees anyone who speaks out as an enemy". The Samoan PM, Hon Tuilaepa Malielegaoi said patience and prayers were needed with regard to Fiji while there was military grip. The High Commissioner of Britain in New Zealand, George Fergusson said Fiji's action in expelling the Australia and New Zealand envoys from Suva would further isolate Fiji in the region.



Commodore Frank Bainimarama



Professor Brij Lal

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