

EditorialTime



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NEW ZEALAND'S ENVOY IN FIJI - GOOD MESSAGE

The expelled Acting High Commissioner of New Zealand in Fiji, Mr Todd Clever delivered some wise words to a wide audience two weeks ago, in what has become his last public engagement. "As in my own country, race relations are a journey...best done together" he told students and parents from over fifteen secondary schools, gathered recently at the New Zealand High Commission Residence for the Prize Giving Ceremony of the Syria Essay Competition.

The Fiji media, operating under censorship, was present. The event was well reported with excellent TV coverage. It was a simple message, with a meaning that is succinct.

It is to the credit of the High Commission to have stepped up in full measure to support the Syria Essay Competition instigated by the Fiji Association in Auckland.

The Prize Giving Reception saw a large number of students and their parents enjoy the hospitality of New Zealand, along with a cross section of community representatives.

Full marks to Mr Clever and his staff - diplomacy at its finest when there is such a warm spirit created in recalling a special moment in Fiji's and India's history, when the Syria was lost. New Zealand's connection and that of other nations such as Britain, Scotland and Australia made the project even more significant. There is such a valuable lesson, and who better to show this than students of today, our leaders of tomorrow. It was an extraordinary way to engage with the youth of Fiji and to focus attention on an important, somewhat forgotten event in Fiji's history.

It was an excellent way to mark the 125th anniversary of something that laid the foundation of brotherhood among Fijians and Indians. A unique moment came to pass, and the High Commission stood at the fore-front. Congratulations to all concerned. The Acting High Commissioner Mr Clever leaves Fiji with goodwill from a large community - pity the diplomatic sense currently displayed in the Fiji Interim Government is so poor. At a time when Fiji needs to get New Zealand and Australia on its good side, another diplomatic blunder comes to pass, this time envoys from both Australia and New Zealand have been told to leave.



PRIME MINISTER'S POPULARITY

The popularity of the Prime Minister, Hon John Key (pictured left) seems secure. Mr Key has emerged with an image as a news maker who cares for the wide cross section of New Zealanders. While this spells good news for the government, complacency would be the last thing Mr Key would envisage. There is a widespread perception

the Prime Minister is listening to the people. At the end of the day, this is exactly what counts. But in political life, nothing can be taken for granted. Leaders can and do seize opportunities that show them in a good light. This can be easier to do if current policies are popular. For Mr Key, the time seems good.

DIPLOMATIC GAMES..... CONTINUE FOR FIJI

It is getting somewhat tedious. In the world of diplomacy, harsh and difficult messages can and are sent to governments via diplomats stationed in each others' capitals. There are ways to engage without expelling messengers because the messages delivered are not what you want to hear.



Mr Todd Clever Acting High Commissioner of NZ - expelled

While accepting or rejecting a diplomat in its territory is a time honored privilege that a host nation enjoys, Fiji's military based, illegal government has demonstrated yet again, its immaturity. Expelling the High Commissioner of Australia and the Acting High Commissioner of New Zealand will further isolate it in the region and in the international community especially from sources where its historical and traditional interests lie.

The travel ban imposed by Australia and New Zealand will not be removed in the near future for the very reason it is working. The ban is a thorn for Fiji's military based government and its appointed officers. Instead of listening to good sense, Fiji leaders are adamant to travel a path away from traditional allies. Another sad day for Fiji - the coup cycle which began in 1987, has taken the nation further and further down.

Prize Giving Ceremony - A day for memories of the SS Syria 1884-2009 NEW ZEALAND HIGH COMMISSION, SUVA FIJI

Thirty five students received Certificates and Cash Prizes, to commemorate the 125th anniversary of the loss of the SS Syria near Fiji.

Students from the following Fiji schools participated in the S S Syria Essay Competition, run by the Fiji Association in Auckland Inc and the New Zealand High Commission - Mahatma Gandhi Memorial High School, Guru Nanak High School, Indian College, Bhawani Dayal Arya Secondary School, St Joseph's Secondary School, Dayanand Anglo Vedic College, Cuvu College, Lautoka Muslim College, Lami High School, Xavier College, Vunimono High School, Nadroga Arya School, Tuva College, Rishikul Sannatan High School, Dilkusha Methodist



High School, Sigatoka Methodist College, Yat Sen Secondary School, Dudley High School, Nausori High School,

Baulevu High School, Nadi Muslim College, Swami Vivekananda College, Form Seven College, Jasper Williams High School, Labasa Arya Secondary School, Navatu Secondary School, Ahmadiyya College, Sila Central High School, Khalisa College, John Wesley College, Natubua High School and Tavua College.

"The New Zealand High Commission has been tremendously proud to support the essay competition" said his Excellency Mr Todd Clever

Dr Satendra Singh, ONZM, QSM, JP said, "It is important in our busy lives, to stop and remember the achievements of those who have gone before us...you have shown us how such people can inspire us today."



Co Winner 15 year old Sekaia Niumataiwalu (Yat Sen. Secondary School) with his proud parents and Dr Satendra Singh at the Prize Giving Reception, at New Zealand Embassy, Suva



Co Winner 16 years old Ashwini Neelima Prakash (DAV College) receives her Certificate and Prize from His Excellency the Acting High Commissioner, Mr Clever



Remains of the SS Syria at Nasilai Reef

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Former NZ acting High Commissioner Todd Clever with Nadi student Veniana and mother

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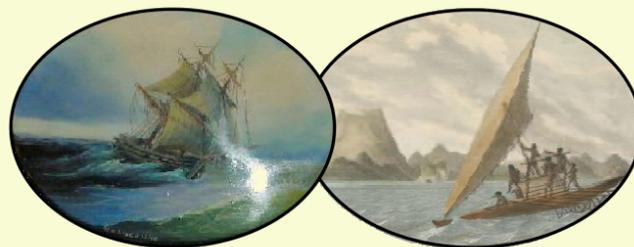
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125th Anniversary of the Loss of the S S Syria near Fiji
1884 – 2009

Fiji Association in Auckland Incorporated
Supported by New Zealand High Commission, Suva

LIST OF PRIZE WINNERS HONoured **CERTIFICATE OF DISTINCTION**

SEKAIA NIUMATAIWALU (Yat Sen Secondary School)

ASHWINI NEELIMA PRAKASH (Dayanand Anglo Vedic College)

CERTIFICATE OF EXCELLENCE

JASON WESLEY RAVAI TITIFANUE (Yat Sen Secondary School)

RADILAITI TURAGA (Indian College)

MONISH KUMAR (Dayanand Anglo Vedic College)

SHIVNEEL KUMAR (Nausori High School)

CERTIFICATE OF MERIT

VENIANA SAUSAU (Swami Vivekananda College)

RAVINEET ROHIT DATT (Bhawani Dayal Arya College)

SANJIV KUMAR (Natabua High School)

SHANNON TERESA QUAI-HOI (St Joseph's Secondary School)

LITIANA WATI (Sila Central High School)

SONAM ARTIKA CHAND (Baulevu High School)

PREMIKA DARSHANI (Bhawani Dayal Arya College)

LAVENIA WASEIYAROI (Dudley High School)

NATHANIEL NAVNEEL CHAND (Indian College)

CERTIFICATE OF COMMENDATION

RASHNEEL ASHUTOSH KUMAR (Rishikul Sanatan College)

ASHNEEL ASHENDRA PRASAD (Dayanand Anglo Vedic College)

SUDESHNA DHAR (Yat Sen Secondary School)

SHERITA DEVI SHARMA (Mahatma Gandhi Memorial High School)

KIRTI KOMAL (Dayanand Anglo Vedic College)

JUDITH GIBLIN (Indian College)

JOSEPH WORK (Sigatoka Methodist College)

RONEEL RAHUL DEO (Tavua College)

AVNEEL AMIT SINGH (Vunimono High School)

MARGARET RADINABOU GILL (Nadi Muslim College)

SWASTI SHUBHA NARAYAN (Bhawani Dayal Arya College)

RAMIZA FAUZEEN ALI (Baulevu High School)

SHERLEEN NAMRITA SHARMA (Rishikul Sanatan College)

MONESH KUMAR (Swami Vivekananda College)

RUCI DRANIBAKA (John Wesley College)

ARIETA VAKASUKAWAQA (Dilkusha Methodist High School)

BINDIYA DEVI GOUNDAR (Cuvu College)

ARON AVINAY PRAKASH (Xavier College)

SALANIETA KOTOYAWA TAGICAKIVERATA (Indian College)

ASHNEEL SHARMA (Dayanand Anglo Vedic College)

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EXTRACT FROM THE SPEECH OF THE NZ ACTING HIGH COMMISSIONER TO FIJI, HIS EXCELLENCY MR TODD CLEVER, AT THE PRIZE GIVING RECEPTION, AT THE NZ RESIDENCY

“Our two top winners presented short but moving portrayals of two very relevant aspects of the Syria tragedy. Ashwini chose to write her essay as a story putting herself in the shoes of a migrant labourer aboard the Syria, setting out from her homeland India for the distant and unknown land of Fiji... My own ancestors for example most of whom came to New Zealand from the UK couldn't wait to leave... the promise or at least the simple hope of a better life... Fiji then, as now, promises much.

Sekaia's story focuses on the contemporary aspects of race relations with an Auckland bench (donated by the Fiji Association two years ago commemorating the S S Syria) acting as a porthole through time and space back to the deck of the Syria.”



Dr Satendra Singh (left) with Mr Todd Clever in traditional Fijian sulu

EXTRACT FROM THE SPEECH OF DR SATENDRA SINGH, ONZM, QSM, JP AT THE PRIZE GIVING CEREMONY

“You (students) have demonstrated in your essays and commented on the bonds that were forged in the trusting hands of those drowning Indians in 1884 as the Syria sank, with remarkable acumen.

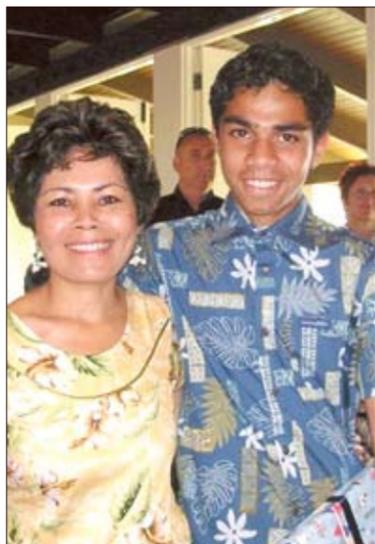
You have described the trusting hands of those who were drowning, with those trusting hands offered by those Fijians who came in small canoes to help.

You have described the tears of strangers who shared a moment or two in the raging sea, who then went about the rest of their lives with just a memory.

You have helped us remember Sir William McGregor, who was a catalyst in the endeavor that saw the rescue of so many, by so few.”



Happy smiles from Baulevu School winner, mother and teachers



Proud Mother and Winner Sekaia



Winners from DAV College Ashwini and Monish with teachers, and special guest Dr Singh

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From Sekaia Niumataiwalu, Yat Sen Secondary School "The Bhai, The Bench and The Indian Boy" ".....You alright Bhai?" Raji asked. "I am..now" Jone replied amid coughs. "What's become of the ship?" "The Syria will not last that long", Raji replied. "After the impact we found five or six lifeboats destroyed and a few crew set out in the last one in search of help from Nasilai...those able to swim jumped overboard to try making it to the shore...the Captain opted to stay with the women and children." "Why did you save me?" Jone asked "I'd expect you to do the same for me despite my race, my origin and my religion," Raji answered. "That is what I believe the Fijians are going to do, when they save us indentured labourers from the sea. I believe they are on their way right now!" Jone awoke suddenly... he was still sitting on the bench in Auckland. He sat up to read the Plaque.. to discover what might have become of his friend Raji and everyone else involved in that historic tale. He was never the same again.

From Ashwini Neelima Prakash, Dayanand Anglo Vedic College "....A loud boom caught my attention, we tried finding out what happened..people started acting wild, running around bewildered. It was 8.15pm and the ship was only half a mile from the reef. The Captain took desperate measures. I realized the ship was taking in water. I held onto Raju. In the crowd we got separated. I did not blame him for saving his life and ran up to the deck. The ship tilted..I was in the water..struggling for breath, how to keep afloat. It is true before dying life flashes by one's eyes. The years of hardship and abuse rolled in my mind like a rapid river. I thought of my family..mataji was sick. At last there was silence. All I could see was mataji, her eyes as kind as ever, calling me to rest, to let down my burden and to sleep peacefully.

From Shivneel Kumar, Nausori High School ".... The S S Syria leaves a message in our lives by showing us the act of kind heartedness and compassion by the villagers for the indentured laborers. We need to learn from their hu-

manity..as responsible citizens of this beloved nation, everyone, regardless of race and political opinion, must come together to start making Fiji a prosperous nation. This was the dream that our Indian and Fijian ancestors were aspiring towards, a peaceful co-existence for all of us.

From Jason Wesley Ravai Titifanue, Yat Sen Secondary School ".....125 years ago, supposedly uneducated and uncultured Fijians had in an instant learnt the lesson that up till now, I and the whole Fiji nation cannot seem to learn. Without thought, our ancestors had displayed a high level of humanity by rescuing strangers from foreign lands who were in need of assistance. They set a standard that to this day, their descendants still struggle to attain.

A Comment from Adjudicator, Lady June Hillary, QSM "It was an enjoyable task to read many lovely essays, presented by so many students. Congratulations to all who participated... our grateful thanks to each school."



Essay Adjudicators-Lady June Hillary and Dr Satendra Singh



Happy Mum Mrs Titifanue with winning son Jason from Yat Sen together with Ashwini (DAV) and her teachers.



Mr Clever enjoys a moment with a winning student Shannon from St Joseph's Secondary School (second from left) with her mother and grand mother, at the reception



From left, Principal of Nausori High School Mrs P Kumar, Dr Satendra Singh, an essay winner Shivneel and his proud mother, with the school's HOD Languages Mr M Kumar at the High Commission Prize Giving. Mrs Kumar said she was proud one of her students had achieved an award, as this was an important encouragement for other students.

The Syria was a 1,010 ton, iron sailing ship with a length of 207.7 feet, breadth of 34.1 feet and depth of 20.8 feet. She was built by William Pile of Sunderland for the Nourse Line, named after the Syria River in Karnataka, India and launched in 1868. She was primarily used for the transportation of Indian indentured labourers to the colonies.

The voyage to Fiji was the last for Syria as she ran aground on the Nasilai Reef, only four miles from shore, at 8.30 p.m. on Sunday 11 May 1884 with the loss of 59 lives. This was the worst maritime disaster

in the history of Fiji. On this fateful voyage, the Syria left Calcutta on 13 March 1884 carrying 497 passengers. Fifty-six passengers and three crew members died in the wreck but a further eleven died in the next fortnight due to complications resulting from their experience.

On 29 June 2006, the Fiji Indian Association in Auckland donated a 100 year old tree root, recovered from the sea, to be placed in the crematorium foyer of the Memorial Gardens Crematorium in the city of Manukau. The artifact commemorates the ship Syria.

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