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Towards a peaceful and  
prosperous Indo-Pacific



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Landmark Dialogue to bolster Australia-India cooperation with Island States**

*February 7, Suva, Fiji*

A first of its kind dialogue, the Fiji Dialogue, will be held today in Suva, Fiji, focusing on enhancing the security of island nations in the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

Hosted by leading think tank the Australia India Institute and in partnership with the University of the South Pacific, the Fiji Dialogue will tackle the most pressing issues facing island states in the Indo-Pacific region and how Australia and India can work with them to help build resilience.

The Fiji Dialogue will bring together leading experts and government officials from across the region including Maldives, Sri Lanka, Tonga, Fiji, Australia and India. It will include a keynote address by Fiji's Minister for Defence, the Hon. Pio Tikoduadua as well as from ambassadors from Australian and Indian governments. The Dialogue will address prevalent security challenges facing island nations including maritime safety; illegal fishing; disinformation; infrastructure management; climate change; and regional governance.

CEO of the Australia India Institute, the Hon. Lisa Singh, said the insights and strategies developed during the Fiji Dialogue will be invaluable in contributing to regional stability, security, and prosperity.

"New Delhi and Canberra have shared interests to foster a free and open rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region," she said. "Hosting this dialogue in Fiji will ensure both nations better understand the security challenges from an island state point of view.

"India and Australia have long played influential roles working with island states and are well placed as development and security partners to address maritime and human security threats."

Vice Chancellor and President of The University of the South Pacific, Professor Pal Ahluwalia, welcomed the Institute and the Fiji Dialogue to USP for the one-day event.

"As the regions premiere higher education and research institution, the University of The South Pacific is committed to fostering meaningful dialogue and collaboration," Professor Ahluwalia stated.

"The Fiji Dialogue represents a crucial opportunity to address the unique challenges faced by Indo-Pacific Island States and advance the goals outlined in the 2050 Blue Pacific Strategy,

reinforcing our dedication to sustainable development, cultural integrity, and regional resilience.”

“By convening this dialogue, we not only engage with pressing issues but also strengthen the bonds of cooperation that are vital for the future of our islands and our communities,” he added.

The University of the South Pacific (USP) is the premier dual sector university serving the Pacific region and only one of three regional universities of its kind in the world. USP is committed to ‘Shaping Pacific Futures’ by nurturing Pacific minds to overcome the development challenges that we face, through research, innovation, and future-proof thinking.

The Fiji Dialogue is part of the Australia India Institute’s Defence Program, supported by the Australian Government’s Department of Defence. It focuses on promoting policy dialogue in new areas of Australia-India defence and security cooperation with the goal of strengthening strategic ties between the two countries and promoting regional stability.

### **Quotes from Ministers**

“The South Pacific is becoming prominent in the geopolitical competition. We have our friends that we work with. Partnership is the solution for us in every way.” – **The Hon. Pio Tikoduadua, Fijian Minister for Defence and Veteran’s Affairs**

“Australia and India’s place in the Indo-Pacific makes us natural stewards of cooperation, as we seek to foster a more interconnected and resilient Pacific and understand and respond to the unique security challenges faced by Pacific Island states.” – **The Hon. Richard Marles Australian Minister for Defence**

“India has deep cultural, and people-to-people ties with Fiji. India remains committed to strengthening relations and development partnership with the Pacific Island Countries (PICs), among which Fiji is an important partner. Indo-Pacific has emerged as one of the world's important geopolitical region. India and Australia's partnership is based on a shared vision of a free, open, inclusive and prosperous Indo-Pacific region.” - **Shri Rajnath Singh, Indian Minister for Defence**

### **Key delegates include:**

Professor Pal AHLUWALIA, (Vice Chancellor and President of the University of the South Pacific), Fiji, *Co-Chair*

The Hon. Lisa SINGH, (Chief Executive Officer of the Australia India Institute), Australia, *Co-Chair*

The Hon Pio Tikoduadua (Fijian Minister of Defence and Veteran's Affairs), Fiji

His Excellency Mr Ewen McDonald (Australian High Commissioner to Fiji and Special Envoy to the Pacific and Regional Affairs), Australia

His Excellency Mr Suneet Mehta (High Commissioner of India to Fiji), India

His Excellency Ibrahim Latheef DC (Retd) Lt Col (Retd) (National Security Advisor in the President's Office, Maldives), Maldives

Captain Akhilesh Menon, (Indian Defence Adviser Australia and Fiji, Indian High Commission),  
India

Mr Esala Nayasi (Deputy Secretary General – Strategic Policy & Programming, Pacific Islands  
Forum), Fiji

Mrs Fane Fakafanua (Director of Operations, Royal Oceania Institute), Tonga

Professor Michael Wesley (Deputy Vice-Chancellor Global, Culture and Engagement, The  
University of Melbourne), Australia

Dr Anthony Bergin (Senior Research Fellow, Strategic Analysis Australia), Australia

Professor Bec Strating (Director of La Trobe Asia, University of La Trobe), Australia

Dr Kate O'Shaughnessy (Research Director, Perth USAsia Centre), Australia

Captain (Retd) Sarabjeet S Parmar (Council for Strategic and Defence Research), India

Rear Admiral (Retd) YN Jayarathna (Former Chief of Staff of the Sri Lanka Navy), Sri Lanka

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