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BILATERAL RELATIONS

INDIA - FIJI

INTRODUCTION

Bilateral relations between the Republic of India and the Republic of Fiji are anchored in deep historical bonds, shared democratic values, and vibrant people-to-people ties. Formal diplomatic engagement dates back to 1948, when India established a Commissioner's post in Suva to look after the welfare of the Indian diaspora—a mission upgraded to a High Commission following Fiji's independence in 1970. Fiji reciprocated by opening its High Commission in New Delhi in 2004, cementing permanent diplomatic representation in both capitals.

At the heart of this relationship is a shared cultural heritage dating back to 1879, when the first indentured Indian laborers (Girmitiyas) arrived in Fiji. Today, approximately 300,000 Fijians of Indian descent—comprising roughly 37 percent of Fiji's population—form an integral part of the nation's social, economic, and political fabric, alongside a growing community of Indian professionals.

While bilateral ties experienced periods of strain during Fiji's constitutional crises of 1987 and 2000—prompting India to advocate for democratic restoration through the Commonwealth and the United Nations—the partnership has since transformed into a dynamic, multi-sectoral alliance. Revitalized by the launch of the Forum for India–Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC) in Suva in 2014, India has emerged as a key development partner in Fiji's nation-building efforts.

High-level exchanges, including the historic visit of President Droupadi Murmu to Suva in 2024 and Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka's official visit to New Delhi in 2025, have elevated ties under the shared ethos of Veilomani Dosti (caring friendship). As the two nations look toward 2027 and beyond, cooperation spans healthcare infrastructure, renewable energy, digital transformation, agriculture, climate resilience, and maritime security—positioning India and Fiji as close partners in advancing a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific.



HISTORY

On 15 August 2005, Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase said that the Government of India had loaned F$86 million for the upgrading of Fiji's sugar mills, which would be completed in time for the 2007-2008 crushing season. This was to enable Fiji to diversify its sugar industry into bio-fuels. Indian High Commissioner Ajay Singh said that his country had also offered technical expertise with the restructuring of the industry. He was speaking at the India National Day celebrations in Suva.

Following the military coup of 5 December 2006, the Indian Government policy was to engage with Fiji's interim administration rather than isolate the country.

At the second summit of the Pacific Islands countries, held in Jaipur in August 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced plans to open a space research and satellite monitoring station in Fiji. The station will enable India the capability to track satellites independently. India previously relied on the United States and Australia to assist it with monitoring its satellites over the Pacific.



QARASE'S STATE VISIT TO INDIA, 2005

A major milestone in the normalization and institutionalization of bilateral ties occurred from 8 to 15 October 2005, when Fijian Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase undertook his first official state visit to India. Accompanied by Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade Kaliopate Tavola, senior cabinet colleagues, and a prominent Fijian business delegation, the visit marked a decisive step toward deepening commercial and diplomatic engagement. A centerpiece of the itinerary was the formal inauguration of Fiji's permanent High Commission chancery in New Delhi, upgrading a diplomatic mission that had initially operated out of temporary hotel premises following its establishment in 2004.

On 10 October 2005, Prime Minister Qarase held comprehensive bilateral discussions in New Delhi with Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh. During the talks, Dr. Singh reaffirmed India's commitment to Fiji's socio-economic development while emphasizing the value of multiculturalism and inclusive governance as cornerstones of national unity. Addressing domestic political speculation in Fiji surrounding the proposed Promotion of Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity (RTU) Bill, the Indian leadership clarified that bilateral development assistance remained steadfast and unconditional.

Following their summit, the two Prime Ministers oversaw the signing of four foundational bilateral instruments designed to diversify cooperation beyond traditional linkages:

- Agreement on Cooperation in Health: Facilitating medical referrals, public health collaboration, and hospital management expertise.
- Agreement on Cooperation in Tourism: Signed by Foreign Minister Kaliopate Tavola and India's Minister of State for Tourism Renuka Chowdhury to boost bilateral travel and hospitality exchanges.
- MoU on Information Technology and Services: Enabling technical capacity building and digital knowledge transfer.
- MoU on the Establishment of a Joint Trade Committee: Creating a structured intergovernmental mechanism to expand bilateral commerce, complemented by a separate pact between the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and Fiji's trade body to form a Joint Business Council.

Beyond the capital, the Fijian delegation traveled to Mumbai, Kochi, Bengaluru, and Mysuru to engage with Indian industry leaders. A notable highlight was Prime Minister Qarase's visit to the Bannari Amman Sugars facility near Mysuru, which underscored India's vital role—supported by an F$86 million line of credit extended earlier in 2005—in modernizing Fiji's vital sugar sector. Concluding his tour on 16 October, Prime Minister Qarase hailed the visit as a resounding success that laid a practical framework for modern India–Fiji partnership.

MILITARY COOPERATION

Defence, maritime security, and space-based technical collaboration form essential pillars of the modern India–Fiji strategic partnership, reflecting a shared commitment to a free, open, inclusive, and secure Indo-Pacific. Bilateral defence ties were formally institutionalized in May 2017 with the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Defence Cooperation. Designed to strengthen Fiji's naval capabilities, military training, capacity building, and defence industry engagement, the pact laid a structured foundation for long-term service-to-service cooperation.

Building on this framework, defence engagement expanded significantly in 2025 and 2026. Following the inaugural India–Fiji Joint Working Group (JWG) on Defence Cooperation held in Fiji in July 2025, Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka's official visit to New Delhi in August 2025 inaugurated a comprehensive bilateral defence action plan. Under this roadmap, India established a dedicated Defence Wing at the High Commission of India in Suva, gifted specialized medical vehicles to the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF), and deepened collaboration in military medicine and United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKO)—an area in which both nations possess distinguished international records.

Momentum continued at the Second India–Fiji Bilateral JWG Meeting in New Delhi in September 2026, where both sides broadened cooperation to encompass cybersecurity training, defence manufacturing partnerships, and specialized naval and aviation training modules in coordination with the Indian Navy's Southern Naval Command in Kochi. Maritime security remains a central focus, supported by White Shipping Information Exchange (WSIE) and regular goodwill deployments by Indian Naval vessels—such as INS Satpura and INS Kadmatt—to Suva to enhance maritime domain awareness and interoperability with the Republic of Fiji Navy.



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