

Proactive Release

Date: 4 May 2023

The following Cabinet paper has been proactively released by the Minister of Foreign Affairs

Title	Reference
Report on Overseas Travel: Hon Nanaia Mahuta	CAB-23-MIN-0090
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- 6(b)(i): to protect the passing of information from another government on a confidential basis;
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Cabinet

Minute of Decision

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Report on Overseas Travel: Hon Nanaia Mahuta

Portfolio **Foreign Affairs**

On 20 March 2023, Cabinet **noted** the report from Hon Nanaia Mahuta under CAB-23-SUB-0090 on her travel, from 7 to 10 February 2023, to New Delhi and Mumbai, India for a bilateral visit.

Rachel Hayward
Secretary of the Cabinet

Proactively Released
by the Minister of Foreign Affairs

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Office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs

Cabinet

Report on Overseas Travel: Hon Nanaia Mahuta

1 I recommend that Cabinet note this report on my travel to India 7-10 February.

Report

2 My visit to India 7-10 February 2023 included three days in New Delhi and one day in Mumbai. The visit reciprocated the visit by External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar to New Zealand in October 2022, and was the fourth ministerial visit from Aotearoa New Zealand to India since September 2022.

3 The trip met the objectives outlined in the Cabinet paper seeking approval for the visit - as set out in paragraph five below.

4 India is a priority relationship for Aotearoa New Zealand. MFAT's *India-New Zealand 2025: Investing in the Relationship* strategy identified political engagement as an essential tool to strengthen our relationship with India.

5 The objectives for my visit were to:

- Provide an opportunity to engage with India as a strategic partner in the region, on issues that have direct impact on Aotearoa New Zealand's geostrategic interests such as security and climate change. s6(a), s9(2)(g)(i)
- Support our trade recovery strategy - global economic headwinds, and the need to continue trade diversification have further underscored the need to invest in the India relationship. My visit provided the political momentum for officials to continue to work on a range of innovative initiatives to grow bilateral trade and investment that were discussed during Minister O'Connor's visit in September. My visit included a trip to Mumbai, the centre of Indian commerce, to promote New Zealand trade and talk to business leaders.
- Strengthen India's understanding of Aotearoa New Zealand's value proposition in the Pacific. India remains interested in strengthening its relations with Pacific Island countries and it expressed a keen interest in engaging with us on this s6(b)(i). This visit provided an opportunity to further discuss India's engagement in the Pacific, including through the Pacific Island Forum.
- Increase in-person, direct engagement with India that will have a strong domestic resonance, as our significant people-to-people links with India continue to grow at pace. Aotearoa New Zealand's Indian diaspora now accounts for five percent of the population, one of the highest proportions of Indian diaspora in the world. The

diaspora is increasingly prominent in all spheres of Aotearoa New Zealand life and tends to maintain close links back to India, s6(a)

- Further cement my constructive working relationship with Minister Jaishankar, building on the bilateral engagement we had in Aotearoa New Zealand in October. s6(a)
- Provide opportunities to develop deeper relationships in the area of engagement with India's large indigenous population building on Minister Whaitiri's visit to New Delhi in September.

- 6 The centrepiece of the programme was a meeting with Minister of External Affairs Hon Dr S. Jaishankar. I also met with Hon Meena Singh, Minister of Tribal Welfare, State of Madhya Pradesh, and Rahul Gandhi, MP and leader in the Indian National Congress Party. In New Delhi, I had a number of Pacific and solar focused meetings including a panel discussion on Solar Power in Oceania, a meeting with the International Solar Alliance Director General Dr Ajay Mathur, and a large reception convened with other Pacific missions in New Delhi. I also took part in a roundtable with Heads of Mission of Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka, to discuss the opportunities and constraints for bilateral and regional cooperation.
- 7 In Mumbai, I took part in a NZTE Business Roundtable and Reception; a virtual opening of New Zealand company Fresco's office in Gujarat, and I met a group of New Zealand's Prime Minister scholarship recipients from the University of Auckland. In Mumbai I participated in a lunch with a select group of women leaders to discuss gender issues in Indian society and conducted two media interviews to promote New Zealand tourism and culture.
- 8 Detailed reporting has been produced by the diplomatic post in New Delhi and circulated through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade's formal message system.

Strengthening the bilateral relationship

- 9 My interaction with Minister Jaishankar included a one-on-one discussion before convening the formal bilateral meeting followed by dinner. I presented the signed copy of the International Solar Alliance (ISA) Framework Agreement to Minister Jaishankar.
- 10 At the formal biateral meeting and dinner our conversations traversed a wide range of bilateral, regional and global issues, including the Pacific, s6(a) and Russia/Ukraine. Minister Jaishankar was pleased that my visit to New Delhi came so soon after his own visit to New Zealand. s6(a)

We agreed on the need to "take the next step" in the relationship building on our people-to-people connections and deepening the trust between us. s6(b)(i)

- 11 I noted that during his visit to New Zealand Minister Jaishankar had "*raised some points; and that we have listened.*" In addition to signing the ISA, we had, s6(a) issued post-study work visas to individuals stranded outside of New Zealand during the pandemic lockdown. Both of these developments were warmly acknowledged by Minister Jaishankar.

12 s6(a), s6(b)(i)

13 On the Pacific, Jaishankar expressed India's interest in collaborating s6(b)(i) with New Zealand s6(b)(i) . I emphasised the centrality of the Pacific Islands Forum and the need to support and endorse our regional Pacific institutions. s6(a), s6(b)(i)

Next steps on potential cooperation in the Pacific will be taken forward at officials' level between development experts. s6(a), s6(b)(i)

14 s6(b)(i)

15 On the trade relationship, Minister Jaishankar urged New Zealand to focus on addressing market access issues one by one to make progress and that he had directed his officials to do the same (rather than waiting for a FTA), signalling the interest to India of gaining access for Indian mangoes to New Zealand. We noted progress on air services negotiations to update the bilateral Air Services Agreement and our joint hope this might help toward the creation of direct flights. s6(b)(i)

Bilateral: Strengthening Business Linkages

- 16 In Mumbai, NZTE arranged a roundtable with business leaders from the most significant New Zealand businesses operating in India, followed by a wider networking reception. The roundtable showcased the breadth and capability of New Zealand companies in India. The key messages from the business group were:
- Relationships matter, particularly in the context of India's "self-reliant India" focus;
 - Tariffs still matter. In the absence of an FTA we should be creative in looking to find ways to level the playing field for our exporters who are now significantly disadvantaged against their competitors from countries that have FTAs with India (i.e. Australia);
 - The need to bring more visibility back in New Zealand to the opportunities in India both in the government and corporate spheres;
 - They are keen for more support– particularly manufacturers and tech companies – to tell the story of our country's capabilities to potential customers in a more compelling way; and
 - Ease of travel is about more than just improving visa processing, the Government should be actively supporting the establishment of commercial air services.

Proactive Release

- 17 This paper will be proactively released as per Cabinet Office Circular CO(18)4 on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade's website. Proactive release is subject to redactions as appropriate under the Official Information Act 1982.

Recommendations

The Minister of Foreign Affairs recommends that Cabinet:

- 1 note this report.

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Nanaia Mahuta

Minita Take Aorere / Minister of Foreign Affairs

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by the Minister of Foreign Affairs