Welcome Speech by High Commissioner Ms Muanpuii Saiawi on the occasion of 'Celebrating 100 Years of Unity Through Sport'
(Wellington, 17 November, 2026)

Namaste;

Tena Koutou Katoa;

Nau Mai, Haere Mai Ki Tenei Hui;

Hon Minister Louise Upston;

Dignitaries; and

Ladies & Gentlemen

I warmly welcome you to the celebration of a friendship of a 100 years.

It all began with the tour of an Indian Army Hockey team in New Zealand in 1926. The star-player Dhyan Chand mesmerized spectators and deeply influenced the way New Zealand played hockey. Further hockey exchanges, cricket and the Commonwealth Games deepened our sporting ties.

2. A hundred years hence, the historic India-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement has put our economies on a level pitch, with fair umpires, and clear boundaries so that our exporters can step up to the crease and play their best innings. We have broadened, deepened and elevated our relationship to Strategic Partnership which was announced during the visit of Hon Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi to New Zealand in July.

3. For India, sport represents far more than the pursuit of medals. It carries the hopes of a young, confident and ambitious nation, where sporting dreams are finding new opportunities to flourish. India's aspiration to host the 2036 Olympic Games reflects this larger vision, one that is being steadily strengthened through grassroots development, high-performance training and world-class infrastructure. Between January 2025 and June 2026, India hosted 36 international sporting competitions across more than 15 cities, demonstrating its growing experience and readiness to stage major sporting events. As Ahmedabad prepares to host the 2030 Commonwealth Games, India's sporting journey embodies the stride of a billion dreams, driven by a commitment to excellence, inclusion and a lasting sporting legacy.

4. This ambition is strengthened by the belief that sporting excellence thrives through partnerships and shared knowledge. The enduring friendship between India and New Zealand exemplifies this spirit. Under the India–New Zealand Centenary Sports Cooperation Programme 2026, a Joint Action Plan has been launched to deepen collaboration in high-performance training, coaching and sports science.
In May, a joint rugby coaching initiative in Bhubaneswar trained over 30 Indian coaches. We are working on integrating New Zealand's globally renowned coach development framework directly into the curriculum of India's National Institute of

Sports in Patiala. Together, these efforts reflect a shared commitment to empowering athletes, strengthening institutions and building a sporting legacy that transcends borders. Our officials from the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports are with us today to further deepen this collaboration.

5. We have come full circle with the current tour of the Indian Defence Forces Hockey team. They are already doing us proud, having won 2 matches since their arrival in New Zealand.

6. No one warned me how simultaneously agonizing and exhilarating it would be to cheer your national team when they play the host country's national team. And I have done that across cities and sports in New Zealand. You win some, you lose some. Hearty congratulations to the All Whites who won both the friendlies against India's Blue Tigers.

7. Cricket between India and New Zealand is a lot like our bilateral relationship: warm, spirited and full of mutual respect. India may have taken the T20 and ODI trophies, but the Black Caps made sure we kept our feet firmly on the ground, particularly when Matt Henry is bowling. Hon Prime Minister Modi in his speech to the diaspora, acknowledged the contributions of Indian-origin cricketers, including Rachin Ravindra in the national cricket team. We are heading into the Basin Reserve for the upcoming test matches with plenty of respect and a healthy dose of caution.

8. I thank the New Zealand Government, particularly Sport New Zealand and the New Zealand Defence Force, for the tremendous thought, energy and care with which you have partnered with us in celebrating 100 Years of Unity Through Sport. I also convey deep appreciation to the sponsors and the community who have contributed, who have cheered and have turned up at the games. None of this would have been possible without you.

9. And today, we celebrate something that transcends our sporting ties. Our two governments have provided the enabling framework, but it is the friendship of a 100 years, that will deepen and unlock the full potential of India and New Zealand's truly winning partnership.

No reira tena koutou, tena koutou, tena tatou katoa

Dhanyavaad

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