Welcome Speech by High Commissioner Ms Muanpuii Saiawi on the occasion of 'Uttarakhand State Foundation Day 2026'

(Wellington, 19 November 2026)

Tēnā koutou katoa, Kia ora, Namaskar, and a very good evening to everyone.

Trustees and office bearers of Devbhoomi Charitable Trust, distinguished guests, and dear friends,

It gives me great pleasure to join you this evening to celebrate Uttarakhand State Foundation Day, marking 26 years since the formation of this beautiful Himalayan state.

Uttarakhand, affectionately known as Devbhoomi, the Land of the Gods, holds a special place in India's cultural and spiritual heritage. Its majestic mountains, sacred rivers, rich traditions and resilient people reflect the extraordinary diversity and strength of our nation.

Despite its relatively small size, Uttarakhand has made remarkable contributions to nation-building. From India's freedom movement to its distinguished tradition of service in the Armed Forces, its people have consistently demonstrated courage, dedication and a deep sense of duty. Among its distinguished sons was General Bipin Rawat, India's first Chief of Defence Staff.

The historical exhibition displayed this evening reminds us of that proud legacy. During the First World War, two soldiers from Garhwal, Darwan Singh Negi and Gabar Singh Negi, were awarded the Victoria Cross for their exceptional courage on the battlefields of France.

It is heartening to see this tradition of service continuing across generations. Just two days ago, the granddaughter of Victoria Cross recipient Naik Darwan Singh Negi was here in New Zealand on an official visit, continuing her family's legacy of service to the nation.

Indeed, many young people from Uttarakhand today represent the third or even fourth generation of their families dedicated to public and national service. That same spirit is visible here in New Zealand, where members of the Uttarakhand community are contributing to the New Zealand Defence Force.

Uttarakhand's achievements also extend to education, science and innovation, with significant contributions in defence technology, remote sensing, geology, petroleum sciences and agriculture.

I too have my connections with Uttarakhand. The Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration, located in Mussoorie, Uttarakhand is India's premier training institute for higher civil services. That is where I spent my first few months of training after making it to the Indian Foreign Service from late August to early December 2005, along with other officers of the All India and Central Services. That's where we built camaraderie and team spirit across the Indian bureaucracy of the 2005 batch. We trained in horse-riding and practised compulsory PT early in the bracing morning air before heading off to lectures and took many scenic walks to Mall Road. I have fond recollections of trekking through the beautiful mountains from Gangotri to Gaumukh, river rafting in Rishikesh, taking a bus down to Dehradun to watch the film Salaam Namaste in the movie theatre. We had our batch reunion last year in May and it was truly a special week to meet our batchmates after 20 years of service in those magical sylvan surroundings.

Today, we also celebrate ten years of Devbhoomi Charitable Trust's service to the community in New Zealand.

Over the past decade, the Trust has brought people together, preserved cultural traditions and passed on important values to younger generations. I particularly appreciate its commitment to serving people regardless of faith, ethnicity or background, reflecting the values of compassion, dignity and service that enrich New Zealand's multicultural society.

The Indian community in New Zealand continues to serve as a living bridge between our two countries. With the India–New Zealand Free Trade Agreement now in force, there are exciting opportunities for cooperation in agricultural research, higher education, tourism, wellness and adventure sports.

Uttarakhand and New Zealand also share a deep connection with their natural landscapes and mountain heritage, offering opportunities for collaboration in sustainable tourism and environmental conservation.

The High Commission of India remains committed to encouraging initiatives that strengthen our partnership through education,

innovation, cultural exchange and people-to-people connections. I request you all to follow us on social media and visit our website from time to time as we share a lot of information. Please download Bharatverse app which is a flagship initiative of the Ministry of External Affairs designed to engage members of the Indian diaspora and foreign nationals, particularly the youth, and strengthen their connection with India. This quiz sparks curiosity and encourages them to explore Indian heritage, art, culture, cuisine, history, people, and India's remarkable growth journey and global contributions. I encourage you to visit the newly launched website which provides information on the 19th Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas which will be organised in Kolkata from 7-9 January 2027.

As we look to the future, I hope our younger generations will continue to take pride in their heritage while embracing the opportunities and responsibilities of life in New Zealand.

On this special occasion, I extend my warm congratulations to Devbhoomi Charitable Trust, its trustees, office bearers, volunteers and the entire Uttarakhand community.

May your efforts continue to bring people together and inspire future generations.

Happy Uttarakhand State Foundation Day to you all.

Jai Hind! Thank you.

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