



Safdarjung's tomb, in New Delhi is lit up to mark India's presidency of G20. Photo / AP

## NZ in the box seat in 2023

The Covid-19 pandemic put paid to New Zealand's plans to host the Apec Leaders' meeting in 2021. It was successfully held virtually with Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern in the chair.

But Auckland will finally be on the Asia-Pacific agenda in 2023 – in person – when the Apec Business Advisory Council (Abac) hosts a meeting from February 12-14.

Around 200 participants including senior business leaders and officials from Apec's 21 economies are expected to attend. It is the first Apec meeting being chaired by the United States in its 2023 host year which will culminate in Apec Leaders' week in San Francisco from November 12.

Business representatives will be led by Dominic Ng, Chairman and CEO of East West Bank. Others include:

Michaela Browning, Vice-President and Head, Government and Public Policy for Asia-Pacific Google based in Australia; Janet De Silva President and CEO of the Toronto Region Board of Trade; Ning Gaoning (Frank) Chairman of Sinochem Holdings (China), Hu Houkun Deputy Chairman, Huawei and Rotating Chairman Huawei Technologies (China) and Wong Wai Meng, Chairman SGTech (Singapore).

New Zealand is represented by Anna Curzon, chief product officer at Xero; Malcolm Johns, incoming CEO for Genesis Energy and Rachel Taulele Co-Founder of Oho branding agency.

Apec (Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation) is the region's leading inter-governmental forum for economic co-operation. Twenty-one economies from the Asia Pacific region are members, representing over 70 per cent of NZ exports. Apec leaders meet annually to free up trade and investment, promote sustainable and inclusive economic growth, build the foundations for the digital economy and set the economic direction for the region.

Apec senior officials will meet in Auckland at the same time, ensuring the event will be a unique meeting point for government and business. The Abac agenda will focus on economic integration, sustainability and climate change and the digital economy, against the background of a difficult environment for global economy and trade.

The NZIBF's Stephen Jacobi, an alternate New Zealand Abac member, says the event takes on particular importance after three years of Covid disruption and at a time when New Zealand is actively seeking to develop further the economic relationship with the United States and other Asia Pacific economies.

"Recent economic times have been hard for many, and particularly so for business," says Jacobi. "This event will assist in helping chart a course out of current difficulties."

### NZ to chair CPTPP commission

Trade Minister Damien O'Connor says New Zealand will take over as Chair of the CPTPP from Singapore in 2023.

"This will provide an opportunity to further highlight our progressive approach to international trade as set out in our Trade for All agenda, as well as our commitment to open, trade and regional economic architecture," says O'Connor. "Continuing to build on our export growth is a key part of the Government's economic plan. Our two-way trade with the CPTPP bloc accounts for 27 per cent of our total trade, and growing this further will better secure the economic future of all New Zealanders."

"It is the world's premier open, multi-party free trade agreement, signed by 11 economies, which represent over 13 per cent of the world's GDP. Around \$20 billion a year of our exports go to CPTPP partners."



**Damien O'Connor**

# Time to lift our game in India

**M**ost commentators agree India is bouncing back strongly from the pandemic and is set to be one of the fastest growing economies in Asia. A huge domestic market, new investments in manufacturing and IT and advances in the digital economy are leading this new wave of growth.

India is also looking outwards, but on its terms – having passed up the opportunity to join the world's largest free trade agreement, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), it is negotiating bilateral deals with several economies including Australia, the UK, Canada and even the EU. New Zealand's own relations have been given a big lift by the visit of Foreign Minister Jaishankar in October, but two-way trade remains low. We need a new strategy and concerted action to take the relationship to a new level.

My own recent, first visit to India was an eye-opener. I was impressed by India's vitality and energy as well as its confidence in dealing externally. This was not a country slowly coming around from the after-throes of the pandemic, although Covid's impact was heavy to be sure – it seemed nearly everyone I met had a harrowing tale of loss. Rather, this is a country firmly focused on achieving its destiny as one of the world's leading economies. With growth likely to nudge seven per cent this year, India is looking to the talent and consumption base of its vast population and its rich and diverse geography to drive the next phase of its development.

New Zealand's relationship with India has trod water in recent years and all cannot be blamed on the pandemic. While the Indian community has never ceased to remind us of the significance of the country of their heritage, we have tried to engage India on our own terms. We

The time is right for a new approach to expand New Zealand's economic relationship with India, but more urgency is needed, says **Stephen Jacobi**.

successfully launched a free trade agreement (FTA) negotiation, which at first seemed promising and soon gave way to the larger prize of RCEP. That too ultimately floundered, at least for India, leaving us without much to hang on to. India is not interested in comprehensive FTAs which offer across-the-board market access including for what it regards as sensitive products. We're used to that of course, but India was not willing even to give a fig leaf of access for dairy and meat as the European Union did most recently.

The traffic isn't all one way here. New Zealand, for reasons which are not entirely rational, is equally unwilling to make concessions on immigration, even though India offers the solution to most of our labour shortage problem. New Zealand's FTA strategy has served us well across a range of markets and should not be abandoned lightly. That strategy is just not one that will work for India. While an FTA will always be of interest to us and should not be taken off the table, we need to rethink the way we approach this important partner. That approach has to be based on understanding how New Zealand can play a role in India's continuing development story.

As I prepared for my visit by speaking with knowledgeable people including in the Indian diaspora, two themes very quickly became prominent – technology and young people. Technology is driving change in India as everywhere and India is at the



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Stephen Jacobi

forefront of emerging IT industries. The "India stack" is a case in point – it combines open software, digital identities and a digital payment sys-

tem that reaches a substantial part of the Indian population.

New Zealand's niche technologies could well find a home in the rich Indian technological eco-system. Agricultural technologies could have special relevance in a country aiming to grow its agricultural output, with which New Zealand need not compete directly. There are commercially relevant, win-win avenues to explore here.

Young people are India's future and also their present – their education is top of mind for Indian families. New Zealand education has a patchy history of involvement in the Indian market and needs to do much better to match the efforts of competitors. Our immigration settings and labyrinthine visa processes also need to be addressed.

Young Indians are also wanting work and life experience – we could do no better than establish an Indian young professionals scheme to bring talented individuals for internships and work experiences in New Zealand.

Fortunately, moves are under way to take a more strategic approach to our partnership with India. The India NZ Business Council is rallying the business side. The frequency of Ministerial visits is picking up and the High Commission in Delhi is engaging with agencies there on developing new thinking in advance of officials' meetings in New Zealand later this year. This is all good. But is it fast enough? India's development waits for no-one and certainly not New Zealand.

We do need new strategy. We also need a plan, more action and more feet on the ground to catch the new Indian wave.

● *Stephen Jacobi is the Executive Director of the New Zealand International Business Forum (NZIBF)*

# Pandemic era lessons from the Big Apple

continued from B4

corporate governance – has risen to prominence over the past few years. But recently it has become politicised in parts of the US. Its association with liberalism has seen a backlash among some Republican officials who have described ESG policies as 'woke'.

Acronym politics aside, there was a lot of talk in New York that US investors, customers and employees are continuing to focus on whether businesses are authentic about their purpose and leadership, and whether they are doing what they say they are doing when it comes to society and the environment.

This is more important than ever as Gen Z (those born between the late 1990s and early 2010s) become more prominent in the workforce. Many are choosing not to engage with businesses or even apply for jobs with

employers that have a perceived negative impact on the environment, or an organisation that lacks diversity. If a business can explain why its activities are important not just for commercial differentiation but also for the planet and society, it will be a valuable competitive differentiator.

### America doesn't have time for short popties!

Kirsten and Craig Nevill-Manning, former Facebook and Google executives who are among our most successful offshore New Zealanders, hosted a reception for the delegation at their spectacular multi-level Brooklyn apartment complete with a stainless-steel slide to traverse the floors.

There, a panel of New York-based Kiwis spoke about the many New Zealand businesses that are doing great things in the US – but stressed that we continue to be too demure

for an American audience. To get cut-through in a crowded market that moves quickly, businesses must be prepared to share their unique points of difference and accomplishments as loudly as their competitors do.

The expat community in New York is small but tight-knit. Those that we met on the ground are keen to welcome more to the city and pass on their deep experience and advice to others so that New Zealand businesses can hit Manhattan running and make their mark on the city that never sleeps.

### Good news for tourism and business

Despite being closed to visitors for two years, New Zealand continues to have a lot of friends offshore. Everyone who spoke to the delegation had fond things to say about our country and those who have not yet been inn-

ately like us and have a desire to visit – even if they couldn't pinpoint exactly why.

There was an expectation from business delegates and those we spoke to that the direct flight between Auckland and New York will have a role in shaping how NZ's economy and future opportunities evolve.

One US-based investor likened New York to a "multiverse" since there is so much going on in such a diverse city. He said the need to transit when travelling from the east coast of the US to New Zealand previously put a lot of people off coming to Aotearoa, and the air link will now "connect Middle-earth with the multiverse", bringing immense opportunity along with greater capital, entrepreneurship, and talent.

● *Tim McCready was a guest of Air New Zealand on the direct flight to New York.*