# Kanbar Hossein-Bor becomes UK’s first refugee appointed as High Commissioner to Fiji



This week, Kanbar Hossein-Bor made history as he was appointed the UK's High Commissioner to Fiji, becoming the first refugee to reach such a rank in the United Kingdom's diplomatic service. His journey began in 1987 when he fled Iran with his mother, escaping the upheaval that followed the Iranian Revolution. Arriving in the UK, he faced not only the challenge of adapting to a new culture but also the burden of overcoming preconceived notions related to his identity.

Hossein-Bor’s appointment is not just a personal achievement but a significant moment for the UK. In his role, he aims to strengthen the historical ties between the UK and Fiji, particularly as Fiji grapples with severe climate challenges. “One thing I really want to convey through my own journey is that enormous sense of gratitude I have to the British people,” he remarked, “who have taken a first-generation immigrant and welcomed them.” This sentiment reflects a broader desire to alter the narrative surrounding refugees and asylum seekers, which often portrays them as mere beneficiaries of state support rather than contributors to society.

His own life experiences underscore this ambition. Born into a prominent Balochi family straddling the borders of Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, Kanbar's journey to the UK at the age of six was marked by hardship and uncertainty. Traveling on "blue UN travel documents," he arrived in Southampton, where the kindness of a teacher during a school trip left an indelible mark on him. This episode, he recalls, was pivotal in shaping his outlook on the importance of embracing diversity and inclusion.

After overcoming language barriers, he excelled academically, eventually studying law at prestigious institutions like Warwick and Cambridge. His career spans roles as a barrister and various diplomatic positions, including serving as head of the human rights team in Iraq during a turbulent period marked by the US surge in 2007. His linguistic skills in Balochi, Arabic, and Farsi complement his thorough understanding of international relations, allowing him to navigate complex political landscapes.

Reflecting on the historical context of his achievement, he draws parallels between his career and the legacies of figures such as Sir Robert Sandeman, a colonial administrator whose policies impacted the Balochi tribes of his ancestry. “To be his administrative successor in the same building reflects how the UK has changed," he stated, "and how I’m an instrument of change.” This acknowledgment highlights the transformative journey of British diplomacy and its growing inclusivity over time, with contemporary figures of colour, including the current Foreign Secretary David Lammy and former Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, reshaping what it means to represent British interests.

In his diplomatic capacity, Hossein-Bor has actively participated in international dialogues, advocating for human rights and media freedom, and emphasising the importance of collective action against threats to democracy. His previous roles have equipped him to lead UK delegations at critical international conferences, reinforcing the UK's commitment to fostering global partnerships.

As he embarks on this new chapter in Fiji, Hossein-Bor expresses hope that his story will challenge stereotypes about British identity and inspire others from diverse backgrounds to pursue their ambitions. His belief that "the UK probably has the best story out there" regarding race and migration is a testament to his commitment to public service and societal contribution.

The Foreign Office has publicly expressed pride in Hossein-Bor's appointment, with officials noting that his story embodies the meritocratic values of the diplomatic service. As he prepares for his customary audience with King Charles, the significance of his journey resonates far beyond his personal achievements, symbolising a broader narrative of hope, resilience, and change within the UK's diplomatic landscape.

### Reference Map

1: Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
2: Paragraph 1
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4: Paragraph 5
5: Paragraph 3
6: Paragraph 4
7: Paragraph 5

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/15/diplomat-makes-history-as-first-refugee-to-become-a-uk-high-commissioner> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/15/diplomat-makes-history-as-first-refugee-to-become-a-uk-high-commissioner> - Kanbar Hossein-Bor, a 44-year-old diplomat who fled Iran in 1987, has been appointed as the UK's High Commissioner to Fiji, marking the first time a refugee has achieved this rank. He aims to strengthen the UK's historic bond with Fiji and address climate challenges. Hossein-Bor emphasizes the importance of giving back to the country that welcomed him and hopes to challenge stereotypes about British identity and inspire others. He speaks Balochi, Arabic, and Farsi, and has served in various diplomatic roles, including in Iraq and Liberia.
3. <https://www.oecd-events.org/global-forum-on-democracy/en/speaker/2195e14b-b08b-ef11-8473-6045bd89bd6e/kanbar-hossein-bor> - Kanbar Hossein-Bor is a senior British diplomat and international lawyer currently serving as Deputy Director Democratic Governance and Media Freedom Co-ordinator for the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. He has held various posts, including Deputy High Commissioner in Bangladesh, head of the international law team in the Netherlands, head of the human rights team in Iraq, and briefly as Head of Mission in Liberia during the Ebola crisis. He has led UK delegations in multilateral conferences and meetings in Vienna, Geneva, Kampala, and New York.
4. <https://blogs.fcdo.gov.uk/kanbarhoseeinbor/2020/12/09/> - Kanbar Hossein-Bor, Coordinator of the Global Campaign for Media Freedom, discusses the challenges to media freedom worldwide, highlighting the over 1,000 journalists and media workers killed in the last decade. He emphasizes the vital role of journalists in society and the importance of defending media freedom to ensure transparency and accountability. The blog underscores the need for collective action to protect journalists and uphold the principles of free speech and democracy.
5. <https://www.gov.uk/government/people/kanbar-hossein-bor> - Kanbar Hossein-Bor is the UK Deputy High Commissioner to Bangladesh. Prior to this appointment, he held positions in the Netherlands as the UK agent to the International Court of Justice, in Iraq as the head of the human rights team, in Libya as the head of the Libya team, and in Liberia, where he was briefly deployed as Head of Mission during the Ebola crisis. Before joining the Foreign Office as a lawyer, he practiced constitutional and criminal law as a barrister and is a Lord Denning and Kennedy Scholar with Lincoln’s Inn. He speaks Balochi, Farsi, and Arabic.
6. <https://worldfellows.yale.edu/podcast/2016-world-fellow-kanbar-hossein-bor/> - Kanbar Hossein-Bor, a 2016 Yale World Fellow, discusses his journey from a child refugee in Iran to becoming a British diplomat. He shares insights into his experiences in various diplomatic roles, including his work in the Netherlands, Iraq, Libya, and Liberia. The podcast highlights his commitment to promoting democracy, media freedom, and human rights, as well as his dedication to fostering international cooperation and understanding.
7. <https://asiannetwork.yale.edu/news/2016-world-fellows-meet-kanbar-hossein-bor> - Kanbar Hossein-Bor, a senior British diplomat and international lawyer, is introduced as a 2016 Yale World Fellow. He has held various diplomatic positions, including Deputy High Commissioner in Bangladesh, head of the international law team in the Netherlands, head of the human rights team in Iraq, and briefly as Head of Mission in Liberia during the Ebola crisis. He has led UK delegations in multilateral conferences and meetings in Vienna, Geneva, Kampala, and New York. Before joining the Foreign Office as a lawyer, he practiced constitutional and criminal law as a barrister and is a Lord Denning and Kennedy Scholar with Lincoln’s Inn. He speaks Balochi, Farsi, and Arabic.