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## **Inaugural South Asian Heritage Month Kicks-off with Tribute to Groundbreaking 'Firsts'**

TORONTO, May 2, 2002 /CNW/ - Members of the public, elected officials, community groups and the legal profession are tonight joining the South Asian

Heritage Foundation at a reception to celebrate the first-ever South Asian Heritage Month in Ontario and to honour the achievements and contributions of

prominent South Asians. The event organized by the South Asian Heritage Foundation, at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre at 8 p.m., kicks-off month-long celebrations for the community.

The Government of Ontario passed a Private Member's Bill, introduced by Raminder Gill, M.P.P. for Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale, proclaiming the

month of May as South Asian Heritage Month, and May 5th as South Asian Arrival Day. The legislation received Royal Assent on December 14, 2001. Deputy

Premier of Ontario and Minister of Education, the Honourable Elizabeth Witmer, will be the keynote speaker.

"South Asian Heritage Act, 2001, is recognition by the Ontario Legislature of the contributions that South Asian immigrants have made and continue to make to the development and general welfare of Ontario," said Harry Mann, President of the South Asian Lawyers' Association, at the event.

Special guests and speakers such as accomplished broadcaster and journalist Suhana Meharchand, are paying tribute to several members of the South Asian community for their groundbreaking achievements in various economic sectors, for their advocacy and volunteerism to advance human rights and assist with the integration of the South Asian community into the province of Ontario and the pursuit of justice in the law and the legal profession.

A brochure titled Firsts chronicling the first South Asian lawyers, judges, law professors, legislators in Ontario, and more, is being introduced at the event. Several of these 'firsts' will be in attendance including Law

Society Treasurer, Professor Vern Krishna, Q.C., who is the first South Asian to serve as a Bencher, and Treasurer of the Law Society of Upper Canada and

Mr. Syed Mumtaz Ali, the first known South Asian lawyer in Ontario. "The Law Society is pleased to help celebrate this milestone for the

South Asian community, one of the largest and fastest growing communities in Ontario," said Treasurer Krishna. "We are also pleased to help pay tribute to

the achievements made by South Asians in law and the legal profession. This brochure - Firsts - outlines some of these groundbreaking steps."

"On a more personal level, I am extremely proud and honoured to be one of the 'firsts' noted in this brochure amongst so many wonderful and talented

members of the South Asian community who have achieved these great accomplishments and laid the groundwork for continued achievement by the next

generation," continued Treasurer Krishna. "We offer our sincerest congratulations to the South Asian community on the inaugural proclamation of

South Asian Heritage Month, and our best wishes to continued strides in the future."

Editor's Note: See attached fact sheet for a list of South Asian 'firsts' in law and the legal profession.

Fact Sheet

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### **'Firsts' by South Asians in Law and the Legal Profession in Ontario**

**The following is a historical compilation of South Asian men and women whose advocacy and volunteerism have resulted in the advancement of human**

**rights and assisted with the integration of the South Asian community into the province of Ontario(\*).**

- Professor Vern Krishna, Q.C., FCGA, First Bencher of the Law Society of Upper Canada-1991 and First Treasurer of the Law Society of Upper Canada-2001

- Mr. Syed Mumtaz Ali, First male South Asian lawyer called to the Bar-1962

- Ms. Iva Sareen, First female South Asian lawyer called to the Bar-1979

- The Honourable Mr. Ayres Victor Couto, Q.C., First Judicial Appointment to the Ontario Court of Justice-1984

- The Honourable Madam Justice Sheila Ray, First female Judicial Appointment-1992

- The Honourable Mr. Justice Russell Juriansz, First Federal Judicial Appointment to the Ontario Superior Court of Justice-1998

- Dr. Surya Prakash Sinha and Dr. Lakshman Marasinghe, First Law Professors-1970
- Dr. Emily Carasco, First female Law Professor-1980
- Dr. Bhausahab Ubale, First Human Rights Commissioner, Ontario Human Rights Commission-1979
- Mr. Raj Anand, First Chief Commissioner, Ontario Human Rights Commission-1988
- Mr. T. Sher Singh, C.M., LL.B., LL.D., First Order of Canada-2002
- His Worship Justice of the Peace Inderpaul Singh Chandhoke, First Justice of the Peace-1979
- Her Worship Justice of the Peace Meena Nadkarni, First female Justice of the Peace-1986

#### First Legislators

- Mr. Gurbax Singh Malhi, Federal Member of Parliament and Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Labour, Mr. Murad Velshi, Member of Provincial Parliament, and Mr. Raminder Gill, Member of Provincial Parliament

#### **Notable Accomplishments by South Asian Women of the Bar**

- Ms. P.A. Neena Gupta, co-founder of the Visible Minority Women's group of the OBA (formerly CBAO)
- Ms. Kamaljit Kaur Mundi, one of the founding members of the South Asian Professionals' Networking Association
- Ms. Soma Ray-Ellis, the first South Asian woman to clerk for the Superior Court of Ontario

#### **Notable Accomplishments by South Asian Men of the Bar**

- Mr. Christopher Ajith Amerasinghe, Q.C., one of the persons responsible for establishing the Crimes Against Humanity and War Crimes Section in the Department of Justice
- Mr. Khalid Baksh, co-counsel for the Coalition of Muslim Organizations and appeared before the House of Commons Committee on Justice and Human Rights and the Special Senate Committee on The Subject Matter of Bill C-36
- The Honourable Justice Minoor Khoorshed, one of four South Asian judges to have been appointed in Ontario
- Mr. Dhaman Persaud Kisson, has been a sessional lecturer at the Faculty of Law of Queen's University since 1990, and is currently on the Youth Drug Court Program (51 Division).
- Mr. Stindar K. Lal, Q.C., played a significant role in the development of the new Police Services Act and the establishment of the Race Relations and Policing Committee
- Mr. Jegan N. Mohan, founder Secretary and Legal Advisor to the Tamil Eelam Society of Canada, co-founder and lawyer for the Canadian Foundation for Tamil Refugees and Rehabilitation, Trustee of the Hindu Temple Society of Canada, and serves on the Legal Aid Ontario Scarborough Area Committee

**- Mr. Mark M. Persaud, Department of Justice Prosecutor, Founder and Chairman of the Canadian International Peace Project, the Secretary of**

**the South Asian Lawyers' Association and Co-Secretary of the Canadian Association of Black Lawyers**

(\*)Note: This information is based on current available research. We regret any errors and/or omissions.

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