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STATE

Dutch Knighthood for distinguished son of Assam

THE HAGUE, May 4 – During the celebration of the Queen's birthday, it is a tradition to honour with royal awards a number of Dutch citizens for their outstanding performance and activities. On April 26, at a special presentation of the royal decorations, the relatively rare knighting of an Indian national by Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands took place.

On behalf of the Dutch Queen, the Mayor of Berkel en Rodenrijs, Ms. M. E. B. de Goeij-Smulders, conferred the Knighthood of the Order of Oranje Nassau (Ridder in de Orde van Oranje Nassau) to Wahid Saleh, Secretary of the Netherlands-India Association, which recently celebrated its 50th anniversary. It was given to him as a tribute to his commitment, devotion, and years of dedicated work promoting knowledge about and understanding between the peoples of India and the Netherlands of their culture, history, philosophy, religious and social structure of both these countries.

Mr. Saleh is an example of successful integration of a foreigner into the Dutch community. He has helped innumerable people of South Asian origin (mostly from India) with blending into Dutch society. He is involved with the work of several Surinami Hindustani organizations, as well as other cultural organizations, such as the Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam. This interest in such activities led him to be Cultural Coordinator of the Multicultural Milan Festival 2001 held at The Hague.

Unquestionably, Mr. Saleh is unique in the Netherlands in having a comprehensive overview of Dutch-Indian relations and many details of the presence of Indian community in the Netherlands. He lends his vast knowledge as a service to the Dutch multi-cultural society on an honorary basis. For example, he authored the book, *Indiawijzer*, a reference guide on Indian culture in the Netherlands, which gives a complete overview of all the organizations and institutions in the Netherlands that are directly or indirectly involved with India. The income from the 1st edition (1992) of this publication was given to the Netherlands-India Association. A second and a revised edition was published in 1999 (416 pages).

Mr. Saleh was formerly Secretary of the Federation of International Cultural and Friendship Associations in the Netherlands and Vice President of the Foundation for Critical Choices for India. Mr. Saleh was also a national coordinator of the First Convention of Overseas Indians held in New York in 1989. He was a member of the advisory committee of the European Regional Conference of the First International Convention of Overseas Indians held in London in 1989. In 1998, on behalf of the Indian community in the Netherlands, the Mayor of Zoetermeer and the Ambassador of India presented Mr. Saleh with The Golden Jubilee Community Service Award.

Mr. Saleh, who hails from Assam, has lived in the Netherlands since 1968. He is by profession an IT-specialist. He is married to a Dutch national and has two grown up children. Normally these awards are granted only to the Dutch nationals. So far known Mr. Saleh is the first Indian national to be awarded the Knighthood.

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