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Embassy's 5th Annual Sexy and Savvy Survey

By Avinash Gavai

Foreign diplomats are generally circumspect and guarded creatures, only really cutting loose when they send those encrypted dispatches back to headquarters.

Nevertheless, there is a veritable *crème de la crème* of the Ottawa diplomatic corps that are widely appreciated and recognized. And the 5th edition of the Diplomatic Survey reveals who these movers and shakers are when it comes to both style and substance.

For over a month, *Embassy* solicited the esteemed opinions of Ottawa foreign diplomatic corps, locally-engaged staff, parliamentarians and their staff, Canadian civil servants and others to gauge which emissaries and spouses had that elusive X-factor.

This year's results show a tectonic shift in the world of Ottawa diplomacy, a reflection of the numerous changes in the make-up of diplomatic personnel in the capital, and perhaps also of changing perceptions.

Australian High Commissioner **Justin Brown** has won the Sexiest Male category, moving upwards from his runners-up position last year. Mr. Brown has carved out his own unique niche in Canada, making many women swoon with his no-nonsense demeanour and sardonic humour.

"This is embarrassing," he joked. "I think your methodology might need some work because there is clearly something there that is producing a rogue outcome."

He was considerably more pleased at having figured in the Most Well-Connected category, where he was a runner-up.

"I've been here for nearly three years, and this is my second time living here, so I think it reflects the fact that I have made a real effort to get to know the country and know a lot of Canadians. I'm pleased about this outcome," he said, with a particular stress on "this."

Close on his heels in the very competitive Sexiest Male category were ambassadors **Ihor Ostash** of Ukraine and **Georges De La Roche Plihal** of Guatemala. Mr. Ostash noted that his "sexiness is due to the Canadian winter," since it allows him to engage in sports such as skiing and skating "that force him to be in good shape." His sentiment should encourage others to take solace in Canada's long winter season.

In the meantime, the lovely Honduran Ambassador **Sofia Lastenia Cerrato Rodriguez** made her debut entry in the survey. And what a stunning debut it was. In addition to being named Sexiest Female ambassador, she also won the Female Best Hair category, and is considered one of the Best Dressed female heads of mission.

Ms. Cerrato Rodriguez said she was flattered to be chosen by her peers, but didn't let the cat out of the bag when it came to her hair product choices and tailoring. Instead she chose to thank her family.

"My kids keeps me running every day, so I think I get a lot of healthy exercise from that," she said with a chuckle. "They are very proud of their mom."

The other female diplomat who figured prominently was Haiti's Chargé d'Affaires **Natalie Gissel-Menos**. In the face of unimaginable tragedy and suffering caused by the 2010 earthquake in her county, she has been a paragon of dignity and poise. In addition to being voted as one of Ottawa's sexiest female head diplomats, she is also regarded as one of the Hardest Working, coming in at second place.

"Indeed, the past year was a challenge for all the Haitian heads of mission around the world," she wrote in an email. "And in spite of it all, I considered my work here in Canada was probably made easier thanks to the great collaboration of the Government of Canada, particularly DFAIT, CIDA, the magnificent colleagues of the diplomatic corps and, of course, the support of the media."

Tragedy has also managed to shine a light into the ways of Ottawa's Hardest Working ambassador, who this year happens to be Japan's **Kaoru Ishikawa**. After wowing the glitterati with his fluent French and singing prowess, Mr. Ishikawa has shown how tenacious and tireless a worker he is. In the aftermath of Japan's earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disasters, he has been at the vanguard of efforts in Canada to alleviate the suffering at home.

A modest man, Mr. Ishikawa did not wish to speak on his new accolade. However, his speechwriter and press liaison officer Jung-Suk Ryu said the ambassador "has a very strong reputation in many circles as being hardworking. It's his real passion to make sure that Japan has a presence in Canada."

Panamanian Ambassador **Francisco Carlo Escobar** has also made his presence felt with his thick, slick-backed hair, which is considered the best in town.

"Oh you know, I'm very surprised, I do whatever I can with whatever hair I have," said Mr. Pedreschi, who semi-jokingly added "that careful brushing and cutting" led to his follicular grandeur. He has good company in his wife **Pily Castro Caceres**, who has won in the Sexiest Spouse department.

"I can't believe with so many beautiful women and spouses in the diplomatic corps that you would pick me," she said, adding that it "must be the genes and my very good metabolism," in reference to her slender physique.

Joining Mr. Pedreschi in the style department is Mr. de la Roche. Guatemala's chief envoy may not have his Latin American colleague's hair, but he more than makes up for it in flair and chic sophistication. This year he has achieved the honour of being Ottawa's Best Dressed Male diplomat, and is also considered one of the sexiest.

"It's all in the aftershave, my Old Spice perhaps," he joked, while adding a tad more seriously, "The kids and my wife are the inspiration to put the best foot forward. I allow my wife to match the colours of my suits and ties. Behind every good suit is a wife!"

The main bridge of continuity to last year's survey was US Ambassador **David Jacobson**, who has yet again been voted as Most Influential and ambassador with the Best Inside Scoop. He has also won in the Most Well-Connected section.

"As you know, it takes a team to get the job done, and we have an extraordinary team of diplomats here at the

US Embassy," said a humble Mr. Jacobson in an email. His wife **Julie Jacobson** has also joined ranks as the Most Effective Spouse, with her fond husband stating that she is "best diplomatic asset the United States has in Canada."

Another new entry this year is India, with High Commissioner **SM Gavai** being voted as the third Most Influential diplomat in Ottawa and tying Russia's **Georgiy Mamedov** for second in the Best Inside Scoop Section. It has been during Mr. Gavai's tenure that Mr. Harper toured India, while trade talks have been launched, a nuclear co-operation agreement signed and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has visited as a member of the G20 and on a bilateral capacity.

"I don't attribute it to any special personal quality, but it's about India, it is on everybody's radar and it is increasing in importance, so it's about the country I represent—not about me," he said.

His wife **Rina Gavai**, who came in at second place in the Most Effective Spouse category, said that "both my husband and I have worked really hard to promote our country, we are humbled that that our colleagues in the diplomatic community have noticed these efforts."

One individual who has been noticed for completely different reasons is Libyan Ambassador **Abdulrahman Abutata**. He has been voted this year's Most Discreet envoy, a quality that probably comes more out of necessity than choice for Colonel Muammar Gaddafi's man in Canada. Mr Abutata has not been seen in any public functions since the Arab Spring took a hold in his home country.

Taiwan is also punching above its weight class yet again with the Taipei Economics and Cultural Office voted as throwing the Best Receptions. Representative **David Lee** points out that Taiwan's sensitive position in geopolitical affairs—where only 23 sovereign states recognize it officially—means extra effort has to be expended. Much of this effort goes into entertainment and food, the key to anyone's heart.

"We actually go inside the kitchen to taste the food and also work closely with the chefs," said Mr. Lee, who also made a notable appearance in the Hardest Working and Best Dressed Male categories. "Because I think people expect to get an oriental flavour when they come for our functions, and we manage to give it to them in a difficult environment."

Other diplomats spread their appeal by tickling the funny bone. In this regard, German Ambassador **Georg Witschel** comes out on top, winning the title of ambassador with the Best Sense of Humour. He responded to this honour in a typically un-Teutonic fashion.

"We Germans are known for our good beer, not good humour," he said, punchlining with an audible guffaw "I, on the other hand am for good beer AND good humour!"

In the parliamentary class, new Liberal interim leader **Bob Rae** emerged a clear favorite, being named the MP Best Connected to the Diplomatic Scene. NDP MP **Peter Stoffer** dropped a spot this year to third place, but was still as chipper as a songbird.

"I love interacting with diplomats, they are fun, and they are nice folks," he said. "I haven't met a diplomat yet that I haven't liked; I'm dead serious."

Somewhat predictably, the diplomatic contingent in Canada considers Prime Minister **Stephen Harper** to be most important person to know, especially in light of his much vaunted majority status now. His main political rival, **Jack Layton** is in third, just behind new Foreign Minister **John Baird**. Mr Layton's expected move into his official Opposition residence at Stornoway—at the heart of Ottawa's diplomatic zone in Rockcliffe

Park—later this summer may yet change the score on this one.

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And the survey says...

Hardest Working Ambassador

1. Japanese Ambassador Kaoru Ishikawa: **13%**
- T2. Haitian Chargé d'Affaires Natalie Gissel-Menos: **9.4%**
- T2. Taiwanese representative David Lee: **9.4%**

Most Influential Ambassador

1. US Ambassador David Jacobson: **42%**
2. Israeli Ambassador Miriam Ziv: **8%**
3. Indian High Commissioner SM Gavai: **6%**

Most Discreet Ambassador

1. Libyan Ambassador Abdulrahman Abututa: **15%**
2. Chinese Ambassador Zhang Junsai: **10%**
3. Hungarian Ambassador Laszlo Pordany: **8%**

Most Well-Connected Ambassador

1. US Ambassador David Jacobson: **27%**
2. Australian High Commissioner Justin Brown: **8%**
3. Israeli Ambassador Miriam Ziv: **6%**

Ambassador with Best Sense of Humour

1. German Ambassador Georg Witschel: **17%**
2. Russian Ambassador Georgiy Mamedov: **11%**
3. Ukrainian Ambassador Ihor Ostash: **8%**

Ambassador with Best Inside Scoop

1. US Ambassador David Jacobson: **21%**
- T2. Indian High Commissioner SM Gavai: **7%**
- T2. Russian Ambassador Georgiy Mamedov: **7%**

Best Dressed Male Ambassador

1. Guatemalan Ambassador Georges de la Roche Plihal: **14%**
2. Taiwanese representative David Lee: **11%**
3. Mexican Ambassador Francisco Barrio: **8.3%**

Best Dressed Female Ambassador

1. Norwegian Ambassador Else Berit Eikeland: **17%**
2. Honduran Ambassador Sofia Lastenia Cerrato Rodriguez: **13%**
- T3. Haitian Chargé d'Affaires Natalie Gissel-Menos: **9%**
- T3: Nigerian Ambassador Nana Foumakoye: **9%**

Sexiest Male Ambassador

1. Australian High Commissioner Justin Brown: **17%**
2. Ukrainian Ambassador Ihor Ostash: **13%**
3. Guatemalan Ambassador Georges de la Roche Plihal: **10%**

Sexiest Female Ambassador

1. Honduran Ambassador Sofia Lastenia Cerrato Rodriguez: **38%**
2. Jamaican High Commissioner Sheila Sealy-Monteith: **17%**
3. Haitian Chargé d'Affaires Natalie Gissel-Menos: **13%**

Male Ambassador with Best Hair

1. Panamanian Ambassador Francisco Escobar: **15%**
2. Danish Ambassador Erik Vilstrup Lorenzen: **12%**
3. Mexican Ambassador Francisco Barrio: **9%**

Female Ambassador with Best Hair

1. Honduran Ambassador Sofia Lastenia Cerrato Rodriguez: **30%**
2. Cuban Ambassador Teresita Vicente: **17%**
3. Bosnian Ambassador Biljana Gutic-Bjelica: **13%**

Sexiest Ambassador's Spouse

1. Pily Castro Caceres, wife of the Panamanian ambassador: **38%**
2. Maria Angelica Olmedo de Bothamley, wife of the Argentine ambassador: **29%**

Most Effective Ambassador's Spouse

1. Julie Jacobson, wife of the US ambassador: **29%**
2. Rina Gavai, wife of the Indian high commissioner: **17%**

Embassy with the Best Receptions

1. Taipei Economic and Cultural Office: **25%**
2. Mexican Embassy: **13%**
3. Irish Embassy: **10%**

Most Media Savvy Embassy

1. Japanese Embassy: **18%**
2. EU Delegation: **11%**
3. Russian Embassy: **9%**

MP Best Connected to the Diplomatic Scene

1. Liberal interim leader Bob Rae: **24%**
2. Foreign Minister John Baird: **14%**
3. NDP MP Peter Stoffer: **11%**

Most Important MP to Know

1. Prime Minister Stephen Harper: **24%**
2. Foreign Minister John Baird: **22%**
3. NDP Leader Jack Layton: **11%**

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