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**Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics, Public Service, Peoples Charter for Change and Progress, Information, iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Lands and Mineral Resources**

**SPEECH AT THE OPENING OF THE NEW HIGGINS WESTERN DEPOT**

**Higgins Main Office Wednesday, June 13th, 2013
NADI 11.00AM**

Cabinet Ministers;

Higgins Board Chairman, Sir Patrick Higgins;

Higgins Managing Director and C.E.O. ;

Higgins Staff;

Distinguished Guests;

My fellow Fijians.

Bula vinaka and a very good morning to you all.

As you all know, fixing Fiji’s roads is among my Government’s top priorities. So I’m delighted to be here this morning to open the Nadi depot for one of the overseas contractors undertaking this task – the Higgins company of New Zealand.

Fixing Fiji’s roads is in the hands of – Higgins in the West, Fulton Hogan and Highway Stabilisers in the Central Division and Blacktop in the North. All are New Zealand companies with strong reputations.

For their part, Higgins has hit the ground running. To fulfill its contract for the next four years, they have brought a large number of road maintenance vehicles into Fiji and established depots in Rakiraki, Tavua, Ba, Lautoka and Sigatoka, as well as here in Nadi.

I’m especially pleased to note the work that has been done so far has included re-opening or rebuilding roads into a string of isolated areas.

Vunatovau Village had its access restored after being closed for more than three years. And the roads to Yaloku Village, Rara Village and Navidili have also been opened again after extended closures.

Yes it’s taking time to attend to every job. The neglect, the inefficiency and corruption of previous years cannot be fixed overnight. But the work that was so badly needed has begun in earnest and we’re all starting to see the results. However we expect to see even greater results in the next few months.

My Government is committed to this massive project – in the West as well as in the rest of Fiji – because the state of our roads impacts the health of our entire economy and the life of every Fijian.

That’s why my Government announced the single largest spending initiative in Fiji’s history – $420-million dollars – to maintain, repair, upgrade and build roads and bridges. It’s one of the flagship policies of a comprehensive set of reforms to create jobs, grow the economy, and attract investment.

But it’s not just about the size of the price tag. It’s about being smart with the way we spend that money, making sure that the Fijian taxpayer is getting the absolute best return on their investment.

In the past, there were too many Goverement departments and statutory bodies that simply weren’t delivering good enough results. They lacked the necessary skills, technology and know-how to get the job done right.

Add to that the corruption, mismanagment and lack of tranparency that was all too common and it’s no wonder some of our key infrastructure and industries were in such a sorry state.

So my Government has pursued a consistent policy of outsourcing to or working with the private sector.

Working with the private sector brings in the specialized training, skills and knowledge that increases efficiency and improves results. It allows us to right size government, leading to a more streamlined and cost effective civil service. And it creates sustained employment.

Soon, my Government will also announce a new constitution, which will for the first time include a whole range of socio-economic rights. These include the right to reasonable access to transporation and the right to economic participation.

If we want to ensure that Fijians can fully enjoy these rights, we need good roads – so that people can transport their produce, their goods and their services, so that children can easily travel to school, and the sick can easily travel to the hospital.

These rights must be upheld no matter what, irrespective of which Government comes into power after the 2014 parliamentary elections and every election after that.

With those few words, it’s now my great pleasure to formally open the Nadi depot this morning to accommodate the Higgins staff and operations team and which will ensure that they deliver the best of what is expected of them. I congratulate the company on behalf of all Fijians.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.

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