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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**

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**SPEECH AT THE LAUNCH OF THE OF MALAWIYA SEMI AUTOMATED HONEY EXTRACTION PLANT PROJECT**

**Naikabula Fri. 5th Sept., 2014**

**LAUTOKA 1700 Hours**

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It gives me great pleasure to be here today to launch the Fiji’s First Sem Automated Honey Extraction Plant, the first of its kind in the west and in Fiji. I acknowledge the humble yet hard work that the Malawiya family has done to contribute to the honey industry over the decades. I also thank their willingness to work with the local communities around them to share the sweet rewards of honey.

The honey industry is one of the key business activities in Fiji under our small business category with high growth potential. Despite being small, it is a thriving industry.

Beekeeping has many advantages, particularly for Fiji. Its contribution to our health and well-being is worth noting. Beekeeping requires relatively low technology and little land, the basics are easy to master, and set-up costs are low. It provides quick return on investment, and it is environmentally sound. It promotes greater food crop yields through bee pollination. Most bee products have a long shelf life. Beekeeping provides employment and builds self-esteem for all groups of people, including women and young people.

Conducted surveys reveal that Fiji has a potential for 50,000 beehives, which would give a return of around $5 million annually. With this huge potential, the government in co-operation with the private sector, and specifically with small holder farmers can address the current problems and constraints which are affecting the advancement of the bee industry in Fiji. Let me assure you, that the government has the political will and determination to assist the bee industry, because it is in line with its commitment to promote economic activities, employment and increase the incomes of rural people. My government is committed to increase the economic well-being of the population of our Nation by increasing the income earning opportunities of the disadvantaged in our communities.

 I note that Mr Malawiya had pursued this project with government from 2010 and it has finally realized itself today. This is also the case with Tikina Vitogo Youth Beekeepers as the initiative of involving landowners in economic participation was piloted with them from 2010. It has begun to reap it benefits in honey harvestations, while slow, the youths of Tikina Vitogo have achieved a total sum of $13,119 (thirteen thousand one hundred & nineteen thousand dollars)over 5 (five)harvests. The journey can be long and winding however its fruits are as sweet as the taste of honey.

In all cases, Government must be seen as a true partner to the people and a service provider in their everyday lives. My government has strengthened this cause in working with community projects and individuals under binding agreements and partner in the progress of small rural based businesses. My Government is committed in capacity building, in developing rural communities who do not have the business acumen through basic and progressive training and market contracts to ensure continuity and consistency at all levels. Support also exists for individual businesses that can play the role of market catalyst to provide an outlet for small rural business holders as we have witnessed here today.

My government believes that small and micro–enterprises offers the greatest opportunity for creating employment in the medium term. These enterprises have enormous potential to lift living standards in rural areas through self-employment, particularly for women and youths. Honey production presents opportunities for both import substitution and export. Currently, we have about 1300 beekeepers, expanding from the two mainlands of Viti levu and Vanua levu to Lau and Kadavu provinces.

Our Constitution that has now been hailed across the world as a liberal and progressive document is one that enshrines unprecedented socio-economic rights. Today, these rights are being practiced liberally by Mr Malawiya, the communities of the Tikina Vitogo and other government funded income generating projects which are guided and assisted by this government to practice a basic human right that will contribute to the improvement of their livelihood. My government through its programmes is committed to creating enabling environments of investment for communities, individuals and their market sources through sound policies to allow them to practice their constitutional right to economic participation.

This means that any Government, now and in the future, whether under my leadership or someone else's, must always fulfill these obligations.

May I remind us of the theme of this year’s Budget is "Building a Smarter Fiji". To be smart in the modern world requires investing in our future. It means investing in their individual futures. I am proud to say that the total investments’ made by my government which amounted to **$194,820 (one hundred and ninety four thousand, eight hundred and twenty dollars)** for both the Tikina of Vitogo and Mr Malawiya’s Honey Extraction Plant. This partnership is exemplary future business, a way forward in which landowners can work harmoniously together with other existing SMEs and contribute effectively to economic growth within their own localities that will allow them to shape their future together.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I now officially launch the Malawiya’s Semi Automated Honey Extraction Plant.

Thank you – vinaka vakalevu

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