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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 DAMODAR CITY IN SUVA

Laucala Bay Wed. 11th Dec., 2013

SUVA 1830 Hours

**Cabinet Ministers,**

**Your Excellencies,**

**The Directors of London Guarantee Corportation,**

**The Chief Executive of Damodar Group of Companies,**

**Distinguished Guests,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Bula vinaka and a very good evening to you all.

What a great pleasure to be here to celebrate the opening of the latest gem in Suva’s retail crown.

I understand that there have been a number of challenges along the way, but I congratulate the Damodar family for their perseverance and the successful completion of this project.

Damodar City will offer Fijians and visitors a top level shopping and entertainment experience, and I’m sure it’s bound to become one of Suva’s most popular destinations.

This means a big boost for the city and its people in terms of job creation and economic activity.

I’ve been told that this $30 million development will lead to the direct employment of around 600 people.

This is of course very welcome news to my Government.

In particular, though, this project will be a big boost to the Laucala Bay/Raiwai/Raiwaqa area.

It certainly supports my Government’s urban planning outlook by promoting development outside the main central business district. This lessens traffic flow downtown, spreads the load placed on our water, roads and sewrage utilities, and helps extend commerce to other parts of the city.

But, Ladies and Gentlemen, I also see Damodar City as part of a broader sweep of Suva’s rejuvenation.

We all know that over time Suva – one of the great capital cities of the Pacific – was allowed to fall into a sorry state.

Its overall condition conveyed a terrible message to both Fijians and visitors alike – a message of neglect and decay.

As a result, people lost respect for the place, making them less inclined to pay their rates or help keep it clean by not littering.

How could we ask investors to embark on new projects if we weren’t willing to play our part in the city’s upkeep?

Something clearly had to change and I’m very happy to say that it has. Suva is on course to be great again – to once more be a worthy host for new developments like Damodar City.

In fact, I for one think that Suva has never looked better (in a long time at least.) The city is coming alive again.

Driving about, you notice there’s a new buzz around the place.

Everyone here has witnessed the huge amount of work that is continuing around the clock on Suva’s roads, including just outside on Laucala Bay Road. What a difference this has already made, especially in downtown Suva, which has been completely transformed.

By now, most of us would have also visited the new seawall picnic park, taken a stroll down the restored Terry Walk or enjoyed a match at the world-class ANZ Stadium.

And who amongst us hasn’t stopped to admire the new look of our grand old lady – the Grand Pacific Hotel – which is set to reopen in 2014.

And all this is just the start. Next year will see a major works program continue around Suva.

This includes significant upgrades to the city’s markets and the restoration of the iconic clock tower, which will once more mark the hour with ringing chimes that will be heard throughout town.

But it’s not only Suva that we’ll be focusing on.

Around Fiji, our primary concern during the last few years has been on rural development by delivering essential services to ordinary people. While this important work will continue, next year we’re turning resources to the renewal of urban centres across the country with significant allocations in the 2014 Budget.

There will be a big push to upgrade markets in a number of towns and cities, as well as funding programs to encourage renewal projects by town councils.

We believe that you can’t ask others to invest in places where the Government isn’t willing to invest itself.

But if investors can see that we’re serious about upgrading infrastructure, beautifying our towns and cities and overall renewing our urban centres, it gives them the confidence to partner with us to help strengthen Fiji and make it great again.

The Damodar family – through their stake in London Guarantee Corporation and Damodar Events – is one such partner and a major investor in the Fijian economy.

While we of course place a big emphasis on foreign investment, I have to say that it’s always particularly satisfying to see Fijians investing in Fiji.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to stress once again that my Government values such investment greatly and is as determined as ever to continue to support projects like this one with consistent and transparent policies.

To other potential Fijian investors I say: now is the time to take advantage of such policies.

Now is the time to reap the rewards of a vastly better investment climate, take advantage of the Government’s generous investment incentives and create the jobs that we all know are needed.

Now is the time for those with the ability to do so to invest in the country’s future.

With those words, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is now my pleasure to officially open Damodar City for business.

Have a wonderful evening.

Vinaka vakalevu and Thank you.