

Rear Admiral Hon. J.V. Bainimarama, CF (Mil), OSt.J, MSD, jssc, psc

**Prime Minister of Fiji and Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Sugar Industry**

**SPEECH AT THE LAUNCH OF THE MOMI BAY RESORT**

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**Momi Bay Thurs. 13 Nov, 2014**

**NADI 1200 Hours**

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**Honourable Cabinet Ministers,**

**The Chairman and Directors of the Fiji National Provident Fund,**

**Turaga na Tui Nalolo and the Vanua of Nalolo,**

**The Marriot Hotels Vice President for Hotel Development, Asia Pacific,**

**Representatives of Fletcher Buildings Limited,**

**Distinguished Guests,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

Cola Vina and very good afternoon to you all.

I’m delighted to be with you all today in this wonderful setting to officially launch the Momi Bay redevelopment project. Or perhaps I should say re-launch the Momi Bay development.

It’s a cause for great celebration because a project that ground to a halt seven years ago – effectively killed off by mismanagement, to say the least - has been resuscitated.

We are breathing new life into the partially-built complex that had come to resemble a ghost town. And all is now on track for a spectacular opening in two years’ time.

The Marriott Resort at Momi Bay is destined to become one of the brightest jewels in the crown of the Fijian Tourism Industry.

And the entire project is set to significantly boost the Fijian economy, which is already growing by four per cent a year in a sustained burst that we have only witnessed twice before in our post-Independence history.

This project will generate more than 400 new jobs during the construction phase and another 500 when the Resort opens for business.

On top of that will come the flow on benefits in the wider economy – the sub-contractors, the Fijian-made fittings and fixtures, the opportunities for garment and other manufacturers, Fijian grown food, beverage suppliers, transport operators, tour operators, duty free and other shopping, Fijian Made handicrafts and souvenirs, local entertainers… the list goes on.

Ladies and Gentlemen, finally a happy ending is in sight to a sorry saga over the past seven years that has proved to be very costly for a great many people and for Fiji’s reputation.

When the original New Zealand developer left the scene many suppliers including contractors suffered heavy losses. But it also meant a loss for most Fijians because of the substantial investment in this project of the FNPF, our national superannuation fund.

My Government in 2010 as you know stepped in to set in train a number of reforms and initiatives in and for FNPF. These not only increased transparency, brought about improved practices based on international standards, curbed spiralling costs and losses but also meant the implementation of a number of legal reforms that rescued our nation’s only compulsory superannuation fund. The rescue not only stopped FNPF from going broke but brought success through growth and sustainability to secure the interests of its members – the ordinary Fijians.

What a difference the past four years have made – the GPH finally completed and now the undisputed jewel in the crown of our capital, Natadola revived, and now the ghosts of Momi gone and replaced by a hive of construction activity.

We have closed a chapter in which the Momi Bay project – like the GPH – had come to symbolise Fiji’s arrested development.

It damaged the confidence of ordinary Fijians in the FNPF and its ability to effectively manage their retirement savings.

It damaged the confidence of the Momi landowners and other members of the Momi community, who saw a project started and then abandoned, with all the false promises and disruption to their way of life.

It damaged international confidence in Fiji and our ability to finish what had started. And perhaps worst of all, it damaged our confidence in ourselves. It must never happen again.

Today, we draw a line under that failure and celebrate a remarkable turnaround in the fortunes of this project, just as we celebrate the revival of the fortunes of our nation – a booming economy and our new and vibrant democracy.

In 2016, the new five star Resort – 250 guest rooms including some spectacular over-water bungalows – will open for business, here in Momi. It will be operated by one of the world’s most prestigious accommodation groups – Marriott.

We warmly welcome Marriot International to Fiji for the first time, as well as the access we will have to the 45 million members of the Marriott Rewards Program. We are confident that in this magnificent location, happiness will find Marriot guests, just as it finds every visitor to Fiji.

We have learned many lessons from the Momi Bay experience and one of the most important is for the FNPF and other Fijian institutions to work with quality partners. Partners with the credibility, financial strength and expertise to add value to our projects and join us in building our economy. To build the new Fiji.

We have much pleasure in inviting Marriott to join our other partners in the Tourism Industry – our biggest revenue earner and the industry on which the fortunes of so many Fijians depend.

Marriott has traded for more than 85 years and has more than 4,000 hotels under management under its various brands. And its presence is especially strong in some important markets for Fiji.

We welcome Fletcher as a construction partner, a listed New Zealand conglomerate.

And, of course, Vanua Nalolo, the landowning unit and the wider community of Momi which has supported this project and whose members stand to benefit from it now and into the future. Vinaka vakalevu to you all, not the least for your patience over the years.

I am sure that you are all looking forward to greeting your first guests and giving them a special Momi welcome.

And so Ladies and Gentlemen, we have the site up and running again, we have world-class partners, we have the enthusiastic support of the locals and we have *“go”* on one of the most exciting resort developments in Fiji.

Of course, there’s a lot of excitement around right now. Next week, we get to host the Leaders of the two most populous nations on earth here in Fiji - Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India next Wednesday and President Xi Jinping of China two days later. And then, of course, there’s also the National Budget next Friday, in which we announce our spending plans for 2015.

Fiji is the centre of attention. Fiji is on the move. As I keep saying, there has never been a better time to be Fijian. And here today is more proof – a truly world class resort that we can all be proud of, kick-started again, just as we have done with our beloved nation.

Ladies, Gentlemen, I now have the greatest pleasure to launch the re-development of the Momi project.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.

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