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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 LAUNCH OF MULTI -STORY BUILDING PROJECT IN SUVA**

**Grand Pacific Hotel Wed. 10th Sept.,2014**

**SUVA 1900 Hours**

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**The Director and Members of the Sharma Design Group,**

**Distinguished Guests,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Bula vinaka and a very Good Evening to you all.

What a thrill it is to be here at the new Grand Pacific Hotel to launch another grand construction project that will link the old with the new and cement Suva’s place as the most dynamic Pacific island capital.

We gather tonight in one of the jewels of Suva – a historic building dating back to 1914 but one that was allowed to tarnish and, indeed, was a rat-invested shell for much of the past three decades.

It stood here during that period as a sad reminder that our capital and our country had stagnated. That instead of moving forward confidently, Fiji was locked in a cycle of competing interests, of division, that had robbed us of the ability to think big.

Well, I’m here to tell you that those days are over. And there’s no better symbol of that than the GPH. Now restored to its former glory and more. The pride of our capital and the pride of our nation.

Across the park over there is another sign that our nation is on the move, the restoration of Government Buildings to house the new Parliament that will be elected by the Fijian people in seven day’s time.

On top of that building, the clock that had stopped for so long that no-one can really remember when it did, is now working again. And a British engineer is up in the tower fixing the chimes, that some of you will have already heard in the testing phase, ringing out over Suva again for the first time in a generation.

This is another hugely symbolic development. Because that clock – from the 1930s - was also a sign that our nation’s development had stopped in its tracks. And now it is going again, recording the passing hours as we finally transform ourselves into the capital we have always wanted to be. The nation we have always wanted to be. The way the world should be.

Tonight, I’m delighted to be with you as we conjure up another vision – a building in the heart of Suva that will be the tallest in Fiji and the tallest in the South Pacific.

On the corner of Forster and Pratt Street, the Sharma Design Group, through their subsidiary Frontier Investments, plans to erect a structure 30 stories high.

I’m told that this complex will house a hotel, apartments and a spa. I’m assured that it will meet all the required building and regulatory approvals and become a landmark.

The Sharma Group tells me that 350 new jobs will be created in the construction phase and at least 150 when the building is completed. So this is not only a project to capture the imagination but create employment and boost the wider economy.

This project is a vote of confidence in Fiji, by Fijians, and a testament to the general confidence that my Government has instilled in the business community with our reform program over the past eight years.

Ladies and Gentlemen, our economy grew by 4.6 per cent in 2013 and we are expecting a similar performance this year. It is the only the third most sustained period of economic growth in Fiji’s history and a remarkable achievement under the circumstances. It eclipses that of our bigger neighbours, New Zealand and Australia and has only been made possible by the growth-friendly and investor-friendly policy settings of my Government.

It is vitally important that these policy settings continue. *FijiFirst* is the only political party contesting this election that has anything like a credible economic policy. The rest pluck figures from the air, make wild guesses or in the case of one party, promises to slash VAT by 5 per cent without ever detailing how the revenue shortfall of $300-million would be made up.

Indeed, it is alarming how little focus has been given to the economy in this campaign. As someone once said when asked what would decide an American election: *“it’s the economy, stupid”.* It is the most important issue in Fiji as well, yet no-one wants to talk about it because they have no idea where to take us. To grow the economy, attract investment and generate the jobs that Fijians need to improve their standard of living.

*FijiFirst,* on the other hand, has a clear vision and a plan to build on our achievements thus far. It is credible, it is realistic and it is achievable. And alone of the political parties contesting this election, we are worthy of the trust of the investor community and the entire Fijian population to take Fiji forward.

So Fiji is on the move, we are reaping the benefits of having reset the national compass and our future prospects are limited only by our imaginations. But ONLY if we stay on course, remain united as a nation and stay focussed on the wonderful opportunities that lie ahead.

Ladies and Gentlemen, with a week to the election, it is decision time. The time to choose. The time to take sides and stand up for a united, prosperous Fiji.

Because make no mistake. Every voter is facing a stark choice next Wednesday. To join me in continuing to move forward together as a nation, hand in hand, to keep building a stronger and better Fiji. Or to go backwards, to heed the voices of division that have kept our nation weak and, indeed, are intent on plunging us into another dark age.

I’m very disappointed that some of the forces who were responsible for much of the trauma we suffered in 1987 and 2000 have re-emerged from the shadows in this election campaign. Indeed some days I’ve wondered if anything has really changed, that feeling of being caught in a time warp.

It doesn’t last for long because I gain so much strength when I meet our people face to face, the wonderful diversity of those in the crowds at our meetings and their passion to join me in taking our nation forward.

I’m especially inspired by our young people, their idealism, their obvious desire to seize the opportunities they have been given, with our free schooling and tertiary loans.

When I look out at their faces shining with youthfulness and hope, it invariably triggers a wave of emotion in me, a determination to finish the job of finally providing them with the future they deserve.

I say to you all tonight: We must choose the path of unity, of ethnic and religious tolerance. And of love. For each other and the nation we are building together. We must drown out the voices of division and negativity with a chorus of unity and hope. We must turn our backs on the message of division and hatred. Which is why I seek your support to keep moving our beloved nation forward. To vote for *FijiFirst* because above all else, we put Fiji first.

Like many of you, I have been shocked by some of the threats that have been made in this campaign, not only against individuals but entire ethnic groups. It is simply not acceptable for any Fijian to threaten to kill another Fijian because of what he or she may have said in the way of a political opinion. And yet that is what is happening on certain blogs and on Facebook.

It is not acceptable for any Fijian to say that our 45 troops being held in Syria – our loved ones – deserved what happened to them and should even be executed. And yet that is what is happening on certain blogs.

It is not acceptable for any Fijian to threaten violence against Indo-Fijians or any group for that matter if their particular political party doesn’t win the election next week. And yet that is what is happening on certain blogs. And I am convinced that every decent thinking Fijian will agree with me that these forces must be stopped.

Let me make this quite clear to the nation so there is no doubt in the minds of everyone.

The Commander of the RFMF and the Police Commissioner agree with me that the full brunt of the security forces and the full brunt of the law will descend on any person or persons who cause trouble or who try to stir up trouble before, during and after the election period.

To all Fijians, irrespective of their background, I say: you will be safe now and into the future. So do not be concerned about the threats that are being made by these troublemakers, however upsetting they may be.

I promise that every Fijian living under my Government will be able to go about their daily lives in peace and sleep soundly in their beds at night, no matter who they are or where they come from. I will not tolerate a climate of intimidation and fear.

And to the business community I say. We will do everything required to keep the peace. Suva will not be allowed to burn as it did in 2000 in one of the most disgraceful episodes in our nation’s history. You can be sure of it because we will make sure of it.

The game has changed. Under my Government, Fiji has moved on – a nation of equal opportunity and fairness and justice for all. A nation in which no-one will be left behind. These are the ugly remnants of the forces of division that we have confined to the dustbin of history. They have no place in the new Fiji. They are finished.

So I urge all of you here tonight and every Fijian. Embrace the future with confidence. We are dreaming big dreams. We are reaching for the sky. As I keep telling everyone and especially our young people. There has never been a better time to be a Fijian. May God Bless us all in our efforts to become a better nation. May God Bless Fiji.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.