**HON PM BAINIMARAMA SPEECH AT FUNDRAISER FOR REDEVELOPMENT OF THE SHREE SANATAN DHARAM PRATINIDHI SABHA REWA BRANCH**

**8/5/2017**

Bula vinaka and a very good evening to you all.

I’m delighted to be here this evening, not only because we have such a wonderful performance lined up, but because we are all here to support such a great cause – to raise funds for the redevelopment of the Rewa Branch of the Shree Sanatan Dharam Pratinidhi Sabha.
I don’t want to take up too much of our time tonight, but I do want to speak briefly on my admiration and appreciation for our Sanatan community in Fiji. And give my full support for this redevelopment project so that this property can better serve our Sanatan community and help continue their good work to build a stronger, smarter and more caring Fiji.

Any young person in Fiji who has attended a Sanatan educational institution or spent time within your community knows full well that your contributions to Fiji have made our nation a better place to call home. You’ve worked alongside my Government to help us create a more knowledge based society, and you’ve showed time and time again that your community shares our belief that our work in education is what will truly define our future as a society and as a nation.

As your Prime Minister, I believe that the opportunities we provide our young people are the ultimate measure of our success. I believe that expanding access to high quality education is the greatest possible legacy we can leave for our children. And I believe that the policies that shape our development benefit our people on the basis of merit – on their positive contributions to our society. And I believe that every Fijian – regardless of our background, our beliefs, our status, where we live – deserves an equal role in the progress of our nation and an equal share in the prosperity we bring to our shores. It also means that as Fijians we should not discriminate against any of our fellow Fijians on the basis of their religion, ethnicity, race, province or social status. And we should all work together so that we appoint the best people irrespective of their background to deliver the best service to our people. That’s what my Government stands for. My Government under my leadership appoints people to positions whether as Ministers, CEO, board members or civil servants on merit. When we appoint people on merit, we will get the job done well. We will also ensure that all Fijians get the best outcome.
I know that belief – that vision for Fiji – is shared by your community. It can be seen in the good work you carry out all across our islands, and it can be seen in the comradery and compassion that you show each one of our people.

In the years to come, I look forward to continue working side by side with our Sanatnis in Fiji as we bring knowledge and opportunity into the lives of young Fijians. And I look forward to this redevelopment project, which will become a critical part of that mission.
I’ve looked over the plans you have in store for this Rewa branch, including the new temple, multipurpose hall, and Ashram. And I was particularly glad to see that you will also be constructing a museum that will tell the stories and the history of the Girmitya in Fiji. That story is one that I do not believe is told often enough. But I was very proud that last year we were able to give the history of the Girmitya the recognition it deserved when we commemorated the centennial of the arrival of the last Girmit ship, the Sutlej Five, from British India. My Government will ensure that the Girmitya story and the contribution of the Girmityas will be mainstreamed into our school curriculum and overall in our country’s history.
It was an emotional moment, and one that we will not forget. So I’m very glad that this property will soon be home to a museum that will honour the experience of the Girmitya in Fiji and enshrine such an important chapter in Fijian history.

Tonight I’d also like to give a very warm welcome to the talented Vishek Sharma and the Kirtan Group that are visiting us from California, and commend them for putting on this performance in support of this important redevelopment project.
Mr Sharma: welcome back home. Your being here speaks to the strength of the bonds that hold us together as Fijians – one nation and one people united in our effort to build a better Fiji.
We may be spread out across the world, but no distance – no matter how great – can diminish the love we have for this nation and for its people. Nor does that distance make us any less proud of Fiji or our shared identity as Fijians.

I can’t wait to see the performance Mr Sharma has in store for all of us. And I thank everyone here this evening for being here in support of this wonderful cause.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.