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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**

**LAUNCH OF “TAKIMAI” AND OPENING OF SOUTH PACIFIC ELIXIR’S NEW FACTORY AND NURSERY IN LEVUKA**

**Robbies Lane 28 July, 2014
LEVUKA 10.30hrs**

**Na Turaga Na Tui Levuka,**

**Na Tui Wailevu,**

**Na Roko Takala,**

**Ratu Mai Bureta,**

**The Minister for Agriculture,**

**The Head of the Australian High Commission,**

**Members of the Community,**

**Distinguished Guests,**

**My Fellow Fijians.**

Bula Vinaka and a very good morning to you all.

I’m delighted to be with you this morning to officially launch “TakiMai,” a supplement drink that features Fijian grown kava, which is produced by South Pacific Elixirs at this new facility here in Levuka.

This project marks yet another achievement in the surge of rural and maritime development that has been taking place across Fiji. As your Prime Minister, I have committed my Government to ensuring that progress and development is not limited to the main island of Viti Levu and big towns and cities, and indeed I am very proud to see all the activity taking place around the country.

After assuming office, I insisted that government adhere to a number of fundamental, non-negotiable principles, which include the belief that no Fijian should ever be an outsider or second-class in the new Fiji. That no Fijian should ever be considered inferior because of his or her background, beliefs or where he was born.

These principles are now enshrined in the Fijian Constitution, which creates a common an equal citizenry for the first time in our nation’s history. In other words, all Fijians now enjoy a level playing field as they work to build better lives for themselves and their families.

However, while the Constitution offers the foundation for the new Fiji, it is up to us as a people to decide what we build on this foundation.

We must never forget that the notion of equality for all Fijians cannot be achieved if some Fijians enjoy better services and have more opportunities because of where they are born.

That’s why my Government has made rural and maritime development one of our most urgent priorities. I firmly believe that a person on Ovalau should have the same access to electricity and water as a person in Suva; that a person in Seaqaqa should have the same access to the Internet as a person in Labasa; that a person in Rabi should have the same access to basic health services as a person in Lautoka.

While there is still much work to be done, I and many Fijians are happy with the progress being made around the country as a direct result of my Government’s emphasis on action and results over words and promises.

Indeed, this has always been a defining feature of my administration. Look at the last two weeks alone: we have been to Taveuni to open a new hydro power plant, to Lautoka for a new market shed and classroom block, and to Namosi for a new solar project.

This is the perfect example of how lots of little projects are adding up to the big picture of our national development that is improving the lives of Fijians across the country.

Unfortunately, there are some politicians who are going around telling you not to be impressed, that rural development is the responsibility of any government. That any other government would be doing the same if it were in power.

I believe that Fijians can see this for the nonsense that it is. They know that my Government is different. We travel around the country to speak with ordinary people directly, we listen to your concerns, and we deliver results in a way that never happened before when politicians cared more about preserving their own privileged positions than they did about serving the Fijian people.

I am the Prime Minister for every Fijian and I consider it to be a great privilege to serve all of our people, from all backgrounds, and from all parts of the country.

Of course, part of leadership is understanding how this service is confined by limited resources and geography. This isn’t to say that we can’t achieve great things for Fiji, it just means that we have to be smart in the way we address challenges, creative in the way we employ resources, and holistic in the way we approach development.

The project here in Levuka is a great example of this. Not only does this new factory and nursery create much-needed jobs on the island, but “TakiMai” is also an innovative product that adds value to one of Fiji’s most famous crops, kava. This opens a new era of opportunity for kava farmers on the island, and hopefully with time, further afield.

Kava is one of our nation’s most cherished crops and Ovalau has long been known as one of Fiji’s premier kava-producing regions. Despite this, however, we have struggled over the years with exporting kava to overseas markets.

Many of you will remember a few years ago when Europe’s demand for kava created a boom in the industry. Unfortunately, in the rush to take advantage of this windfall, little consideration was given to quality control. Leaves and stems were mixed with the roots and look what happened.

There was no quality control. Governments must engender quality control and standards. This we are doing through the Ministry of Industry and Trade and the respective private sector stakeholders. This we are promoting through the ‘Buy Fijian’ and ‘Fijian Made’ initiative.

I’m pleased to see that South Pacific Elixirs is once again targeting overseas markets – in the United States, Australia and other countries. I share their enthusiasm for this product’s potential in these markets and I look forward to them working with local farmers to set a new benchmark for quality and consistency that will boost Fijian-grown kava’s reputation internationally. I look forward to them collaborating with our Ministries of Agriculture and Industry and Trade.

Through education and awareness efforts, SPE will help farmers increase the quality of the kava that they supply to all their markets – which we believe will create a ripple effect throughout the rest of the industry, opening doors to new export opportunities.

I am happy that my Government has been able to help SPE build relationships with local farmers on Ovalau as well as provide the project financial assistance through a grant of more than $130,000 under our National Export Strategy, through the Ministry of Industry and Trade, an initiative that has supported 54 projects totalling more than $9 million over the last seven years.

I look forward to them moving their entire operations to Fiji where the final product can be made in Fiji. There is no doubt that my Government would provide them with the appropriate initiatives to do so. After all it will not only help SPE take advantage of a bigger and better brand value but help create more jobs right from the growth of yaqona to the end product.

I take this opportunity to thank the Australian Government for its support of this project through the Market Development Facility. Their cooperation with SPE has been important in making this all possible.

In iTaukei, “Taki Mai” is a phrase used while drinking kava, which means “serve me now.” So without further delay, it is my pleasure to officially open this new factory and nursery and to wish SPE all the best in its future endeavours.

Thank You. Vinaka Vakalevu. And Taki Mai.

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