

**PRIME MINISTER VOREQE BAINIMARAMA'S ADDRESS AT THE UNVEILING OF FIJI'S
50 YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE COMMEMORATIVE BANKNOTE AND COIN**

07/10/2020

Honourable Ministers;
Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps;
Members of Parliament;
Distinguished Guests;
My Fellow Fijians.

Bula vinaka and a very good evening to you all.

Let me begin by thanking the Reserve Bank of Fiji for the invitation to be the Chief Guest on this historic occasion, as we celebrate 50 years of Fijian Independence by unveiling a new 50-dollar commemorative banknote and 50 cent coin.

We come together this evening just three days removed from marking our golden jubilee as an independent nation. We'd been preparing for the occasion for over a year, with festivities planned everywhere, with something for every Fijian.

Meanwhile, it became clear early in the year that, whether in Fiji or anywhere in the world, 2020 would shape up to be a very different moment in history than we'd imagined — one defined by COVID-19.

With events cancelled, gatherings banned, and borders closed around the globe, there were few celebrations to be had. In Fiji, even though we are safe from the virus, something just doesn't sit well in hosting lavish celebrations as our people bear the burden of the global economic fall-out COVID-19 has created. And that's why we have scaled things down a bit for our FIJI-50 Celebrations. While the RFMF will indeed be parading at Albert Park this Saturday, we are encouraging everyone to watch the live broadcast of the event safely at home. We may be COVID-Contained, but large, unconstrained gatherings are simply not worth the risk.

But even in these trying times, nothing can rob us of our spirits, and our sense of patriotism, as we look back at all that Fiji has achieved in the past 50 years.

And nothing can take away our undying optimism as we look ahead, knowing that we are strong, that we are resilient, and that the best is yet to come.

My friends, that's what today is all about, and what this new currency represents — Fiji's rich past, but more importantly, our remarkably bright future.

9 October 1970 saw the end of Fiji's colonial period under British rule. Trumpets sounded over Albert Park as the Union Flag was officially lowered, ushering in a new era of Fijian independence — one free of the colonial governance that would prove to have longstanding social consequences in the decades that followed.

Just as we closed one chapter, we proudly began another. At the stroke of midnight, the world saw Fiji as a newest nation come into being on 10 October, 1970.

A jubilant, newly-independent Fiji went on to celebrate its first-ever Fiji Day, which saw the official hand-over of the Constitutional Instruments from His Royal Highness Prince Charles to then late former Prime Minister, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, at Albert Park. Then, at precisely 10 o'clock that morning, came the moment that would be engrained in the memories of Fijians for years to come: The very first raising of our noble banner blue.

And now, I'm proud to announce that this cherished moment in Fijian history has been immortalized on the front of a newly-designed \$50-dollar banknote.

With highlights of Fiji blue, bright yellow and the familiar orange of our 50-dollar bill, the commemorative polymer \$50-banknote is strikingly vibrant and colourful, adding to Fiji's already-beautiful collection of bills known around the world for their tropical flair.

You'll notice that an image of the Government building clocktower— with a transparent clock face that opens to the bill's back — is shown chiming 10 o'clock, the exact moment when our new flag was raised to the mast-head.

There are many more hidden "Easter eggs" in the design that I'll let you find for yourselves, but notice that no detail was left unnoticed by the Reserve Bank.

But while I will always appreciate history and the lessons it provides, I see the true Fiji when I turn to the back of the bill. Here we see our future: The children of Fiji who will inherit the nation we build for them today. Children who see each other not for their background, their ethnicity, or religion — but see each other equally as Fijians with the world at their feet.

We also have the honour of unveiling a commemorative Fiji-50 cent coin — one that is exceptional in its own right, as the first-ever coloured coin to be released in Fijian history.

It's truly a stunning piece to mark this milestone, and one that I'm confident will be treasured by Fijians for years to come.

I want every Fijian boy and girl to remember this Fiji Day for the rest of their lives.

Because even while it hasn't been the celebration we planned for, it is one that I hope we can learn from, and reflect on, for generations to come. One that our children and grand-children can look back on, and see how strong our nation has grown in the years since. See how we healed, how we came together, and how our 50th Anniversary marked the beginning of yet another new chapter: One of Fijian resilience.

That's why I'm proud to announce that we will be giving a specially packaged Fiji-50 cent coin to each and every child from years 1 to 13 in primary and secondary schools throughout the country. Starting tomorrow, the Reserve Bank, in co-ordination with the Ministry of Education, will work to distribute commemorative coins to schools over the next few weeks. It's my hope that these coins find a special place in the lives of Fijian children everywhere — sitting cherished on bookshelves, or stored among their prized possessions. Wherever they keep it, they can and should hold onto this commemorative coin. And 50 years on from this week, when our nation celebrates year 100, they will be able to proudly show-off their one-of-a-kind piece of Fijian history.

Ladies and Gentlemen, The Reserve Bank of Fiji is Fiji's central bank, charged with the independent duty of maintaining Fiji's monetary policy and integrity. That enormous responsibility demands professionalism and prudence from its management — and I would like to thank the Governor of the Reserve Bank, Mr Ariff Ali, for supplying that quality of leadership every day in his service to the Fijian people. He deserves a very special Vinaka Vakalevu this evening, as it has been his personal drive and creativity which has helped forever capture this half-century milestone of our nation's Independence.

I would also like to commend both the Reserve Bank and the banknote's printer, De La Rue, for jointly pledging to off-set carbon emissions from the production toward a local environmental project right here in Fiji. In doing so, you've shown a genuine commitment to our global climate preservation efforts.

So now, when we call on wealthy nations of the world to put their money where their mouth is in the global fight against climate change, we can say that Fiji has quite literally done the same!

With that, my friends, may this new \$50 banknote and 50 cent coin both symbolise our rich history and our renewed ambition for a brighter, more prosperous, and more inclusive Fijian future.

I now have the pleasure of officially unveiling the Fiji 50 commemorative banknote and coin.

Thank you, Vinaka Vakalevu, and God bless Fiji — on this Fiji Day and for the many to come.
