

**Commodore J. V. Bainimarama, CF(Mil), OSt.J, MSD, jssc, psc**

**Prime Minister of Fiji and Minister for Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics, the Public Service, People’s Charter and Change and Progress, Information, iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Lands and Mineral Resources**

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**OPENING OF REWA DISTRICT SCHOOL EDUCATION FACILITIES**

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**Rewa District School Fri 16th August, 2013**

**REWA 1500 Hours**

Invited Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

And Students of Rewa District School.

**Bula Vinaka and a very good afternoon to you all.**

I’m delighted to be here to open these new facilities at the Rewa District School. And I’m especially grateful to the people of Rewa for bringing this occasion forward so that I could join you today. Vinaka vakalevu.

School openings are always very special occasions for me.

Because as your Prime Minister, nothing is more important to me than ensuring that our young people receive the best possible education to give them a head start in life.

My Government is making it a priority to upgrade school facilities wherever we can and this is our latest project. Please join me in thanking the Engineers of the RFMF for their effort in building these new facilities. (pause for applause)

Nearly 70 years ago, the people of Rewa made an important commitment to the education of their young people when they established this school back in 1945.

They led the way for many other communities in Fiji in acknowledging that with education, comes opportunity. And as we can see all around us, that commitment continues to this day.

I want to pay tribute to everyone here who has worked to improve the life of this School over the years. It is the heart of the community. And for successive generations, it has produced some of Fiji’s finest citizens.

You’ll have all heard me saying that we are building a new and better Fiji. Well, education is the cornerstone of our nation’s future. And each and every one of our students is a building block of the new Fiji that we are striving to achieve – one based on equality and merit.

We want to give them opportunity to acquire knowledge, gain new skills and prepare them for the challenges of a modern world that is much more competitive than it was for previous generations.

Just as no-one owes us a living as individuals, no-one owes Fiji a living. As a nation, we all have to work harder and be smarter, to see opportunities when they arise and seize them.

The role of Government is to provide young people with as many opportunities as we can – not only with schools like this but with skills training after they leave school to best equip them for the workforce.

Some of you students will have the ambition to go to university. Work hard to pursue that dream.

The right to education and the ambition to pursue it is not something that should depend on a family’s ability to pay tuition fees. My Government believes that education should be readily available to all Fijians, wherever they live and whatever their circumstances.

We are here to help poorer students who previously couldn’t fulfil that dream with our new 2.2-million dollar Tertiary Education Loan Scheme.

I am currently looking at revamping the current loan and scholarship schemes so that any Fijian who wants a tertiary education can get one. So no Fijian student who gains university entrance will be prevented from taking up their place because they can’t afford it.

Indeed, our new Constitution, which will be unveiled soon, will make education a right, not just for primary and secondary school students but those who want to pursue higher education. Yes, it’s an ambitious objective in a developing country with scarce resources. But we believe in the vision of a clever country as the only way to improve living standards for everyone. And we want to give smart, young Fijians the best possible opportunity to take the nation forward with them.

Of course, aside from becoming teachers, doctors and a whole range of other professional roles, there are lots of other worthwhile jobs for people who don’t go on to university.

Fiji badly needs more skilled trades people, and I happen to believe that a plumber or an electrician is as important to the country as a doctor or any other professional.

That is why the Government has embarked on a major program with the Fiji National University to train a new generation of trades people.

The same goes for farmers, who are the backbone of our country and need better training in farming methods to achieve our vision of Fiji becoming self sufficient in food production.

A few months ago, I launched a new program – also through the Fiji National University – to train a new generation of farmers. Many of the young people in the first intake come from poor families. So it was very inspirational to see them embrace the opportunity they’d been given. Their enthusiasm proves that poverty doesn’t have to be a barrier to success.

So I urge you all to strive to fulfil your dreams through better education and grasp the opportunities that my Government is providing.

Of course, your journey is in the here and now. And I want to thank everyone who has had a hand in the construction and establishment of these new facilities.

The Rewa District School draws its pupils from fifteen communities, including the villages of Nadoi, Nabua, Lomanikoro, Drekena, Nasigatoka, Vunuku, Tavuya, Narocivo and Nasilai.

Everyone here knows that any school is only as good as the community around it and the support it gets from teachers, parents, local businesses and the students themselves.

Today, we re-dedicate ourselves as a school and as a community to the service of our young people – to give them the best possible education for the benefit of both the people of Rewa and every Fijian.

To the staff here, I say: Be good role models. Fire the imaginations of your pupils. Encourage them to constantly ask questions. Open up a world of possibilities for them in the new Fiji and beyond our shores. Encourage them to be good citizens. Teach them well and care for them, especially the more vulnerable.

To the students here, I say: Care for each other. Respect your teachers and listen to their advice. Don’t hesitate to ask questions. Make good use of the new buildings and facilities. Keep them in good order for yourselves and future generations here. Take pride in your school and strive to develop a school spirit, of teamwork and healthy competition in the classroom and on the sports field.

You are part of nearly seven decades of history and can be justly proud of that tradition and your role in shaping the school’s fortunes into the future.

To the School Management, parents, guardians and the community of Rewa, you can be justly proud of your achievement. Because the improvements being made at this school are an important part of building our nation, of providing opportunities and fulfilling dreams.

We all need to work together as Fijians, to be more considerate of each other as citizens, to see ourselves as equals, to treat people on their merits instead of which family they happen to come from. And we also need to be more patriotic, to take pride in being Fijian, which is what we now all are.

Once again, thank you for your efforts and your contribution to education and the nation as a whole. May God bless you all and especially the students and staff of the Rewa District School.

I now have great pleasure in officially declaring the new school facilities open.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.

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