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

**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 THE FIJI BOWLS DINNER**

**Pearl Resort Fri. 4th July, 2014**

**DEUBA 1930 Hours**

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Bula Vinaka and a very good evening to you all.

It’s a pleasure to be here with you to help support Bowls Fiji in their bid for Gold at the 20th Commonwealth Games.

This is not an evening for long speeches or politics. Tonight we’re gathered together for a single purpose: to raise money to send our bowlers to Glasgow.

Our mission is particularly urgent as the competition is only a few weeks away. Normally, preparations would have been made well in advance, but the Commonwealth’s decision to invite Fiji to the Games came only in March, excluding our rugby and netball teams and giving our other athletes very little time to prepare.

This means that we need to make an extra effort to rally behind them by digging deep and giving them all the support we can.

And even more so in the case of lawn bowling, which has a harder time attracting big corporate sponsors than sports like rugby, football or netball.

On that note, I would like to acknowledge the sponsors present tonight and thank you for your continued support of the national team.

The good news is that Fiji boasts world-class bowling teams and is considered a serious medal contender. If we can get our bowlers to the Games, they have a real shot at bringing us home Gold.

I’m sure most of you are already aware of Fiji’s impressive track record in this sport – Silver at the World Championship in 2008, Gold at the 2009 Pacific Games, Gold and Bronze at the 2012 Asia Pacific Games.

It’s another case of Fiji punching way above its weight on the world stage. With success at the Games, Bowls Fiji is in a solid position to move to the next level in the international rankings, where Ratish Lal, Litia Tikoisuva and Radhika Prasad have already stamped their mark in the singles.

To the bowlers, my message is simple: we’ll get you there. All you have to do is bowl hard and do us proud.

I would also like to send a message to all of the 42 athletes and officials travelling to the Games: Fiji stands behind you. We pay tribute to your achievement, your dedication to the long hours of training that brought you this far, your determination and your will to win. Good luck and safe travels.

With those few words, Ladies and Gentlemen, it’s now time to put our money where our mouths are, literally. (Smile) I hope you all have an enjoyable evening.

Vinaka Vakalevu. Thank you.

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