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**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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SPEECH AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF A TELECENTRE

– BA METHODIST HIGH SCHOOL

Ba Methodist High School  **Wednesday. 20th March, 2013**

**Ba 0950 Hours**

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The Attorney General;

Distinguished Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Bula vinaka and a very good morning to you all.

It’s a great pleasure to be in the West today as we open yet another of the Government’s Telecentres at Ba Methodist High School. Vinaka vakalevu for your warm welcome.

Yesterday, we all shared the excitement of the arrival of the first Fiji Airways Airbus A330. These are the planes that will take Fijians to the world and bring the world to Fiji.

But what I find equally exciting is that you don’t have to travel at all these days to be connected to the world.

You can be connected right here on a computer via the Internet. And you can broaden your horizons without leaving Ba at all.

I’m personally very proud of these Telecentres. They are a key element of my Government’s promise to provide a world of difference for ordinary Fijians. Why? Because we are providing free access for the first time to one of the great advances of the modern age.

It wasn’t long ago that computers and the Internet were only for wealthier people in our town and cities. The opportunity to benefit from the information revolution was for them, not for ordinary people.

Not anymore. My Government is bridging that divide – the digital divide. More Fijians now have access to the Internet than ever before. And every time I open another one of these facilities, hundreds more Fijians join that revolution.

As I keep saying wherever I go, I owe it to you as your Prime Minister to not only promise better services – as previously leaders did - but to provide them.

As a government, we deliver. We empower ordinary Fijians. We give you the basic things you need to improve your lives and the lives of your families.

This includes better roads, better access to electricity and water and better access to telecommunications, which is why we are all here today.

My Government has brought about a telecommunications revolution in Fiji. We liberalised the Industry and introduced genuine competition for the first time.

That is why so many Fijians now enjoy the convenience of mobile telephones and cheaper calls. And we want that revolution to continue.

Today, we’re celebrating another important step forward. We’re giving ordinary Fijians in Ba access to all aspects of the telecommunications revolution that is transforming people’s lives the world over.

From today, this Centre will provide free internet and data access for hundreds of people in the surrounding area.

It will be used by schoolchildren during school hours and by the rest of the community after hours and on weekends.

To our schoolchildren here today, I say:

Make the most of this opportunity to gain knowledge and broaden your horizons. You can immediately be part of a bigger world, a world of knowledge and of contact with people in other places.

To your Parents, I say: Encourage your children to be part of that wider world. And use this place for your own benefit. You are never too old to learn.

To Teachers:

This radically increases the number of teaching tools at your disposal. Use them to prepare our children for a life that is only as limited as their imagination.

To all of you:

This Centre will become a game changer in your daily lives. You can come here to type your CV or a letter. You can scan any document, save it on a computer and send it over the Internet without having to go to town to photocopy it. You can also get photocopies and documents printed here.

And you can get instant access – through web chat services such as Skype – to your loved ones in Fiji and overseas.

Imagine how much this means to Fijians with family members spread out all over the world.

There is someone here to help you so please don’t worry if it all sounds too hard. Like anything new, you will get used to it.

Before we started this program, Fiji lagged behind the rest of the world in accessing the latest telecommunications technology.

By the end of this year, 60-thousand more Fijians – including five thousand students – will have access to the Internet at more than 20 community Telecentres all over Fiji.

My Government is connecting Fijians to the world as part of its commitment to deliver services to ordinary people everywhere in Fiji.

They are no longer isolated, no longer starved of information. They are now empowered.

I now have the greatest pleasure in declaring the Ba Methodist High School Telecentre open.

-ENDS-