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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**

**SPEECH AT THE OPENING OF NEW NAVUA HOSPITAL**

**Namelimeli 31 July, 2014
NAVUA 1000 Hours**

Cabinet Ministers;

Your Excellency the Chinese Ambassador;

Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

Donor Agencies,

Distinguished Guests;

My fellow Fijians.

Bula Vinaka and a very good morning to you all.

I’m delighted to be here today for this wonderful occasion as we open the new Navua Hospital.

A healthy Fiji means a better Fiji and so nothing is more important to my Government than improving healthcare for people around the country. And today marks a huge step in the right direction. It’s a major milestone in our efforts to lift the standard of the medical services we offer, particularly outside of big city centres.

This new hospital will dramatically improve the lives of the people of Navua by giving them access to a world-class health facility that is no longer subject to the whims of mother nature.

I will never forget visiting the old Navua Hospital just after the Navua River had burst its banks to see the whole place flooded and the urgent rush to evacuate sick patients out of harms way. At that moment I remember thinking that the opening of this new hospital couldn’t come soon enough.

Although this was a new experience for me, for the people of Navua this was just the latest case of a nightmare scenario that had struck many times before.

But I imagine that the biggest frustration for them was why for decades nothing was done to fix it. Since the eighties, past government turned a deaf ear to the cries of the people here.

No more. The suffering and upset that flood waters have caused patients and their families is finally a thing of the past.

The new hospital has been placed on high ground where the rising storm waters will not be able to reach.

The new facility houses twenty beds – including both outpatient and inpatient quarters – and will have the ability to tend to 150 patients a day. It’s equipped with the latest technology, as well as an ambulance for emergency situations.

It’s also complete with staff quarters, a back-up generator, public showers, a mortuary and incinerator and a water tower.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today also marks yet another milestone in Fiji’s relationship with the People’s Republic of China, which has made this project possible with a contribution of **$11-million**. In fact, this is the second such milestone we have celebrated recently. Two weeks ago, I was in Taveuni to launch work on the $15-million Somosomo Hydro-electric Power Plant, also funded by the Chinese Government.

China has always been a friend of Fiji but in recent years has shown itself to be a great friend – one willing to stand by our side in challenging times, be supportive, and respect our sovereign right to choose our own path.

Once again, Your Excellency, I would like you to convey to your Government and the Chinese people our warmest thanks. For this project and your support generally.

This is an opportune time to reflect on the contribution made to health care in Fiji over the years by a succession of international partners.

Some of these projects have been large – like the construction of this hospitable in Navua. Others have been smaller but no less dramatic, whether it’s visiting teams of cardiac surgeons mending our people’s hearts or cosmetic surgeons correcting a harelip and putting a smile on a child’s face.

Some of the top medical professionals in their fields have given their time free of charge over the years to assist ordinary Fijians – some from our traditional friends like Australia, New Zealand, India and the US, others from much further afield like Israel.

In fact, just this past Sunday I opened a medical Symposium between the Ministry of Health and Apollo Hospitals of India that is giving Fiji access to some of the best medical minds in the world – in Cardiac Sciences, Neurosciences, Orthopaedics, Oncology, Renal Transplant and Critical Care.

I cannot stress enough how important these partnerships have been and will continue to be for the well-being of our people, and how grateful we are for this help.

As I have said on a number of occasions before, even the most medically advanced countries like the United States, Britain and Australia struggle to adequately meet their peoples’ health care needs. Indeed, the pressure on health care systems around the globe has never been greater as people are living longer and demanding better care.

So it comes as no surprise that in Fiji we face an even bigger challenge to provide the staff, equipment and facilities necessary to meet the growing demand for health services, of tangible and forward looking investments in human and capital resources.

In the ideal world, unlimited resources would be available to pay for all this. But I have always been honest with the Fijian people, including telling them the truth about what we can and cannot do in the health care arena.

Even though we’ve started from behind the mark, we’ve still managed to make significant progress over the past six years.

We have created 696 new jobs for doctors in the Ministry of Health and 1,510 new positions for nurses. We’ve also increased the number of medical professionals being trained in Fiji and overseas.

And Cabinet has just approved another 553 positions for ancillary workers in the system – cleaners, hospital orderlies.

But medical service delivery does not only relate to the ratio of doctors to patients. One of the most fundamental reforms that my Government is committed to achieving is improving the attitude of medical staff towards their patients.

We need better levels of compassion, empathy and sensitivity shown by our caregivers and I can assure the Fijian people that this is one of my Government’s top priorities. Whenever a patient visits a hospital or clinic they should feel like the doctors and nurses are fully vested in their health and recovery. Nothing less is acceptable.

Of course, we have also invested millions of dollars in new medical equipment. And all over the country, we have set up new health care clinics to make basic services available closer to home, particularly for those living in rural and maritime areas.

These facilities must be clean, well maintained and welcoming – to make patients feel confident in the services they are receiving.

A major part of this investment in capital works has been improving the co-ordination between the relevant stakeholders – such as the Ministries of Works, Finance and Health, as well as the private sector– to prioritise these projects and make sure that work progresses quickly.

All told, no other government has ever made the level and manner of investment that we have made and are still making to deliver a better standard of health care in Fiji.

We are always seeking imaginative ways to overcome the problems we face – to enable us to meet an acceptable standard of health care for a country of our size and means.

With those words, I would like to once again thank the Chinese Embassy and the Chinese Government for their very generous support of this project.

I would also like to thank the Mataqali Naikorokoro of Namelimeli Village for making the land available for the new hospital. And to all those of have had a hand in the work.

It is now my pleasure to officially declare the new Navua Hospital open.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.

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