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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 EXTENSIONS TO VATUVONU SECONDARY SCHOOL**

**Vatuvonu Secondary Station Thurs. 24th April**

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**The management, Principal and staff of the Vatuvonu Secondary School.**

**Students and all our younger citizens,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

Ni Sa Bula Vinaka and a very good morning to you all.

I’m delighted to be here with you in the North to celebrate an important milestone in the history of this school – the opening of a new classroom block and computer laboratory.

I’m especially pleased about the computer lab, which will give many more of you access to computers and the world of opportunity they provide.

They are a symbol of the new Fiji we are striving to create – a clever country in which every Fijian child gets access to the latest technology, no matter where they live, to improve their knowledge and skills and expand their horizons.

As I keep saying: There has never been a more exciting time to be a Fijian. Because you are growing up with more opportunity in 2014 than any child has had in our nation’s history.

My Government has taken the pressure off your parents and is providing free schooling for the first time. They don’t have to pay your fees any longer here at high school. And if you want to go on to University, which I urge all of you to go to, to become a doctor or a teacher, or to a technical college to become a farmer or a carpenter or a mariner, we will pay for that too. You’ll be able to get a loan from the Government for this and pay us back when you start work.

But if you study hard and become one of the top 600 students, you will get a scholarship no matter who you are, what your parents do or are - that you do not have to pay back. We are also - under the Tertiary Education Scheme - providing living subsidies for those from low-income families.

It’s all about providing a better opportunity for you to gain the knowledge and skills you need to look after yourself and your own family when the time comes. But it’s also for the benefit of our nation- part of my Government’s vision to have a better-educated workforce to enable us to compete better against the rest of the world when we sell our goods and services.

As I also keep telling students all over Fiji: I want you all to think of yourselves as part of a team – Team Fiji – in which we all work together like a sporting team to put Fiji First.
And that means thinking like a team, everyone having a sense of belonging and of value. Because only when we start thinking as a team – as one nation, one Fiji – can we ever achieve our true potential.

We must stay united but we also must stay the distance, to never take our eyes off our long-term objective to make Fiji great. Because the truth is that none of this will happen overnight. We have set out on a journey together to create a fairer and more equal society. But there are no short cuts and it will be a long but pleasant journey, as long as we all work hard.

We must not allow the progress we have made together over the past few years to be reversed. So I urge all of you to embrace the vision of a new and better Fiji and dream big dreams for yourselves and our beloved nation.

Right now, I want you to work as hard as you can at school and take full advantage of the opportunities you’ve been given. And I am grateful to everyone who has had a hand in making your school better :

* the renovations to the Home Economics room and Science laboratory.
* The construction of the new Year 11 block
* and, of course, the computer lab.

We all know that any school is only as good as the community around it. So apart from the Government’s role in funding these renovations and additions, I want to pay tribute to the collaboration we’ve seen from the Seventh Day Adventist Church, the local community and the teachers and students themselves. This has allowed further improvements to be made to the girls and boys dormitory and to provide a clean supply of water to the school. It has been a great effort and I extend my congratulations to all of you.

Good schools are built gradually and that is what is happening here. At the moment, you have Years nine, ten and eleven. And the aim is to provide schooling up to Year 13 by 2016.

I’m confident that with the great team spirit this school and this community has already shown, you will achieve this objective and my Government will always be here to assist you.

It’s a great time to be a student at Vatuvonu and a great time for all of us to be Fijian. May God bless us all as we build our school and our nation. And with those words, Ladies and Gentlemen, I now have much pleasure in officially declaring these new facilities open.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.