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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, i-Taukei Affairs, Provincial Development, Sugar Industry, Lands and Mineral Resources**

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**OPENING OF TELECENTRE AT LOMAWAI SECONDARY SCHOOL**

Lomawai Secondary School Wed. 16th Sept., 2013

NADROGA 1400 Hours

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**Staff and Students of Lomawai Secondary;**

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

My Fellow Fijians,

Bula vinaka and a very good afternoon to you all.

It’s a great pleasure to be with you in Lomawai for a Telecentre opening with a difference.

Unlike the others I opened recently in Vanua Levu, this Telecentre has been operational for almost 12 months.

My apologies to the people of Lomawai. I’ve been meaning to carry out this official opening since last November but one thing or another has obliged me to postpone.

Yet in many ways, the delay has made this an even more important occasion than usual.

Because this is a day not so much for launching a new Telecentre but celebrating the success of an existing one and the entire Telecentre program.

I’m delighted to announce that of all the 15 Telecentres so far operating in Fiji, this one here in Lomawai is the most successful.

Yes, the Lomawai Secondary School Telecentre is the most highly utilised of them all – with an average of nine users per opening hour.

That means nine users an hour - or around 600 a fortnight – have had a new world opened up to them.

It is a world of knowledge, of unprecedented access to information, a means of talking to family and friends around the world and of using the full range of telecommunications services that the Government is providing here.

Before this centre started eleven months ago, the number of people with ready and free access to a computer with internet in this area – and especially our schoolchildren - was virtually zero.

What a difference a year makes. What a difference our Telecentres have made for ordinary Fijians.

There are 380 students at this school and a total population in the surrounding area in excess of two-thousand.

It is a wonderful success story and I think we all owe it to ourselves to give the people of Lomawai a huge round of applause. Vinaka!

(pause)

I also have the latest Telecentre access figures for the whole country. As of yesterday, Fijians have used these centres 38,451 times.

So we are fifteen hundred away from passing the 40-thousand mark. It’s another wonderful milestone and a remarkable testament to the way in which ordinary Fijians have embraced this initiative.

It’s certainly one of the things I’m most proud of as your Prime Minister. And I would like to pay tribute today to everyone who has been involved in making this initiative the success that it is.

As I say, there are now 15 of these centres around the country and I’ve made 15 opening speeches saying why they are so important.

But this is the first occasion on which ordinary people themselves can explain why they are so important.

I would certainly ask the media covering this event not to take my word for it. Ask the people themselves how their lives have been transformed.

How the Internet has made a difference in terms of acquiring knowledge. How chat services like Skype have made it easier to keep in touch with your loved ones within Fiji and overseas. How much easier it has been to copy or scan important documents.

All these things used to require a trip to Sigatoka or Nadi. And you would have to pay for them. Now the Government has brought these services to you for free.

And having given you the opportunity, you have seized it. You have embraced the digital age and all the possibilities that it offers. You have crossed the horizon into a new world of knowledge. And I promise that my Government will not rest until every Fijian – no matter where they live - has the same opportunity.

Because this is one of the main building blocks of the vision we have for a new and better Fiji.

You are going to hear a lot more from me in the coming weeks and months about the need for Fiji to become a smarter country.

We are going to invest a lot more in the education of our young people, who - as we all know - are the future of our great country and who carry our hopes on their shoulders for even better days ahead.

We have a vision of a smarter Fiji taking a leadership role in our region and being at the forefront of the effort to improve the lives of all the people in our region. And that means a smarter population, Fijians who are better educated and better informed.

Everything we do is designed to achieve that vision - whether it’s training our young people to be trades people or farmers, giving people better access to scholarships or in this instance, giving ordinary Fijians better access to information.

Our new Constitution specifically states that our young people are entitled to primary, secondary and tertiary education.

It’s an ambitious provision. But I don’t want any child in Fiji to be held back because his or her parents can’t afford a better education.

Fiji can never be judged to be a fair country, let alone a smart country, if even one child is left behind. That is why we have been reviewing our education funding programs to provide a helping hand to those Fijians who most need it.

We want to empower you by giving you things you need to improve your lives and those of your families. And that includes access to communications and a whole range of basic rights laid out in the new Constitution – the right to earn a proper living, to get adequate food and clean water – rights that can never be taken away.

It is the blueprint for our future - a future in which every Fijian finally gets an equal opportunity to get on in life and on which we will hold the first genuinely democratic election in our history next year. I urge all of you who are turning 18 before that election to register for it and have your say.

We are investing in you as young people with initiatives like this. I want you to dream of a better future for yourselves and your country.

Work hard at your studies. Take advantage of the opportunities you’re being given to acquire knowledge and skills. Together, we can all make a difference as we build a better Fiji.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.

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