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

**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 OPENING OF ICE PLANT**

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**Nuku Wed. 13th Mar.,2013
RABI 0900 Hours**

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The Minister for Provincial Development;

Permanent Secretaries;

The chairman of the Rabi Island Council;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good morning, Kam na mauri and Bula vinaka to you all.

It’s great to be in Rabi on my latest tour of the Northern Division. I’m pleased to say that I have a very full program here because there are several exciting initiatives that are part of the Government’s overall commitment to deliver better services to ordinary Fijians.

I’m here to listen to your concerns and see the progress being made in the Government’s service delivery program across a broad front. As I’ve said many times before, it’s not good enough to make hollow promises. We must deliver and we are.

I have just come overnight from Labasa, where I opened a new Government Service Centre, and before that, from Bua, where I opened a new Health Clinic.

It’s about empowering ordinary people by giving them the basic things they need. As your Prime Minister, I see this as the Government’s most important job.

Here with you today, I have the great pleasure of opening a new Ice Plant for local fishermEn, as well as officially announcing an exciting new fish farming initiative. Both of these will benefit the local economy in Rabi and the lives of ordinary people.

The ice plant is a joint venture between Government and the Overseas Fishery Co-operation agency of Japan, which provided $140,000 for the Ice machine. Government has contributed $120,000 for its transportation, installation, and maintenance.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of those involved - including the Resident Representative for the Japanese agency, the Rabi Council of Leaders, and the Fisheries Department. Your hard work has made this possible.

The New Rabi facility will become the 19th Fisheries Station in Fiji with an Ice Plant – a vitally important piece of equipment, as any commercial fisherman will tell you.

Without it, those working in the industry – a vital one for Fiji – simply aren’t able to keep their catch fresh long enough to bring it to market.

As things stand, any person on Rabi who wants to fish commercially has to travel as far as Savusavu for ice. This new machine, therefore, will drastically reduce travel times and the cost of doing business and give fishermen on Rabi a better chance to make a decent living from their trade.

It will affect how they fish, where they fish, and how they conduct their business.

Simply put, it allows them time to deliver high quality, fresh fish to market.

Let’s take a local example – the way fishermen in Rabi have traditionally handled the Deepwater Snapper they’ve caught for generations. In the past, the fish had to be consumed almost immediately and fishermen had little chance to sell them in any commercial quantity. Now their catch can be preserved here for 6 to 8 days and still be brought fresh to market.

This is a huge breakthrough that will transform the livelihoods of these fishermen, enable them to position themselves more competitively and earn them more income.

All told, this Ice Plant will benefit as many as 250 fishermen from Rabi and the surrounding area, including Buca Bay, Kioa and Tunuloa.

The Fisheries Station here is more than just an ice plant. It provides a range of support services to assist local fishermen with the information they need to maximize their income opportunities.

I am pleased to note that there are several fisheries programs currently underway in this area, including pearl culture, seaweed farming and fresh water pond culture.

Of course, part of making our local fishermen better fishermen is making them responsible fishermen. One of our main concerns is the sustainability of our marine resources. Over-exploitation, illegal fishing activities and destructive methods of fishing are causing some of our species to be over-fished.

I urge all of you to make conservation a top priority, not only for yourselves but for future generations.

My second task this morning is to announce a new fish farming initiative here in Rabi. I would like to acknowledge the efforts of the community and Fisheries officials, who - during the past 2 weeks - have dug, by hand, the first of 10 fish ponds that will be stocked with juvenile Tilapia.

Fish farming opens up some exciting opportunities for our rural communities. To start with, Tilapia farming will be done at the semi-commercial and subsistence level. But, in the future, there is the potential to go commercial, given the right investment. This would provide our people with a fresh strand of income.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the proper management of our fishing resources must take into account the needs of small scale fishermen like those in Rabi. As a Government, we are here to assist you and to help you grow your access to wider markets.

I wish to thank the various stakeholders for their participation in this project and it is now my pleasure to officially open the new Rabi Ice Plant.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.

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