<u>Doorstop with Mr Ross Vasta MP, Member</u> for Bonner

MR ROSS VASTA MP, MEMBER FOR BONNER:

Well good morning everyone, it's great to have the Prime Minister here in the electorate of Bonner. And we are at Australian Innovative Systems, this Elena's great factory here and this company has gone from strength to strength and it's great to have the Prime Minister here to see firsthand the innovation in the water technologies. This is a great Australian company which employs local people as the local RNV here and is about to expand with the great announcements of the budget. So Prime Minister thank you for being here in the electorate of Bonner, we're grateful for you to come here. Budget has been an overwhelming success in the electorate of Bonner. Business's like this and the other businesses that you've seen like (inaudible) and Australian (inaudible), so Prime Minister thank you again for being here, keep up the good work and you're always welcome back in Queensland in the electorate of Bonner.

PRIME MINISTER:

Thanks Ross, thank you and thank you for your passion. For industries and particularly small businesses, small innovative entrepreneurial businesses. These are the enterprise, these are the businesses, these are the enterprises that are at the heart of Australia's economic future. Their commitment, their courage and determination, like Elena's to keep on innovating, to finding the new products that she can design and manufacture here in Australia and export around the world.

This is what it is all about. This is what innovation, enterprise investment is all about. And that is why our Budget is encouraging businesses like these. Because we are reducing the company tax rate for small to medium businesses. Already we've legislated for up to business of a turnover of up to \$50 million bringing it down to 27. 5 per cent and then going forward to 25 per cent. We want to do more and I have to tell you, we need to do more. Around the world, company taxes, business taxes are coming down. You heard Donald Trump proposing a 15 per cent company tax rate. We have got to be competitive.

Britain is going to 18 per cent, 17 per cent in fact is their target and only last night I was talking to the new President of France, Emmanuel Macron, and I congratulated him on his election and we talked about a whole range of issues, counter-terrorism, security but we also talked about economic issues. He is committed to bringing France's company tax rate down from 33 per cent down to 25 per cent. So you can see this is a global trend. So that's is why we are committed to making sure Australian businesses can compete. Now in order to compete, we want them to invest and so we have extended the instant asset write-off for plant and equipment up to \$20,000 up for another year for businesses with a turnover of under \$10 million. That is so important for all

of these businesses but of course it is especially important for their customers.

As Elena was talking about just a moment ago, so many swim schools are buying pumps and filtration systems. \$17,000, \$18,000 from her, this is a great incentive for them to upgrade. It is also very important for Barton's of course vehicles, so when they are buying a new truck or new car, new light van, obviously that is a very important part of the incentive. So that's our commitment.

Now as you have seen, Elena employs, and all these companies employ apprentices. Training is at the heart of our whole skills program. So we are abolishing the 457 visas, replacing them with a better targeted system for temporary skilled migration and also introducing a new training fund which we will ensure does more of what these companies are already doing, which is training new employees, training apprentices in order to provide — offer the skilled opportunities for Australians. We will always have skilled workers coming in from overseas where there are skilled gaps in Australia. But as far as possible, every job, every opportunity should be filled first by an Australian. That is our commitment, training is at the heart of it and we are putting additional resources behind training in this Budget.

So this budget of ours is one for growth, it's for investment, it's backing enterprise, it's backing innovation, it's backing the great Queensland companies we have just been with this morning.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister there are reports overnight that the intelligence Donald Trump shared with the Russian's wasn't even shared with Five Eyes allies, including Australia and New Zealand. Is that the case?

PRIME MINISTER:

I won't comment on intelligence sharing other than to say that we have a very close intelligence-sharing relationship with the United States and our other Five Eyes partners. It is as close as it possibly could be. But I won't comment on those allegations press...

JOURNALIST:

It's a very serious allegation though, that Russia has intelligence Australia doesn't, does that concern you?

PRIME MINISTER:

I can assure you that the relationship between Australia and the United States in terms of intelligence sharing is as close as it possibly could be. And we have no concerns about any other country having access — having privileged access to information we don't have.

JOURNALIST:

PM can you divulge whether [inaudible].

PRIME MINISTER:

I can, again, I am not going to comment on that, but I don't think that has even been suggested in the media. But, look, I know it is — intelligence matters and spies are always of great interest.

In my youth, I spent a bit of time in a trial involving an old MI5 agent. But I have to say as Prime Minister, protecting our national security in the national interest. I have to be circumspect and discreet on matters of national security. It is my highest priority. My job is not to feed speculative commentary in the media. My job is to ensure that Australians are safe. No government has invested more in national security in peace time than mine.

You saw the announcement of our naval shipbuilding plan earlier in the week. You have seen our commitment with the new Centre of Excellence to be built at the Western Sydney airport with Northrop Grumman, the big contractor who's expanding its Australian supply chain all the time. Our investment and support for the AFP, for ASIO, all of our intelligence and security services are at greater and greater heights all the time. Cybersecurity, a big issue over the last few days, you can see the priority and attention we give that.

So, my job as Prime Minister, and the Government's job, is to keep Australians safe. That means, sometimes, I will be more discreet than you would like me to be.

JOURNALIST:

What about laptop bans? You talked about the possibility of that? Is that because of IS?

PRIME MINISTER:

As you know, there have been some developments in terms of procedures the United States are taking. We have upgraded some of our security procedures out of some airports. We are constantly reviewing aviation security. It is a very dynamic area.

Again, the priority is to make sure that Australians and all of the travelling public are kept safe. We work very closely with our partners around the world in that respect. As and when any decisions to make changes regarding devices of one kind or another are made, they will be announced.

JOURNALIST:

Just on the laptop restrictions, did the US warn Australia, or did we receive intelligence from elsewhere?

PRIME MINISTER:

Again, I am not going to comment on sources of intelligence. But well done

asking!

JOURNALIST:

John Zakhariev in Bulgaria, have you been briefed about him. Is assistance being provided to him?

PRIME MINISTER:

Yes, the gentleman referred to that you've mention in Bulgaria is provided with consular support in the usual way. As all Australians are when they find themselves in legal difficulties, but again, I don't want to comment on that case or any other particular case. Again, I stress, as I always do, that when Australians are overseas, they must obey the laws of the country they are in. There is a limit to what we can do. We can provide some consular assistance but the law is the law and it is up to the legal system of the country you are visiting. So it is not something that we can change from here.

JOURNALIST:

In terms of Cross River Rail, is it fair to say the earliest you'd be able to get funding is 2019 and the states will be able to apply for the national rail fund?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, the states are able to apply and discuss these matters with us right now. Paul Fletcher, the Minister for Urban Infrastructure has been having extensive discussions with the Queensland government, and indeed the Brisbane city government. I have had discussions with the Queensland government and the city government.

We are certainly looking at Cross River Rail very carefully. In fact, we provided \$10 million to the State Government to enable them to do a proper business case, a business plan for Cross River Rail, particularly examining how it can operate, interact with the transport solution proposed by the Lord Mayor. It is very important that these projects are properly planned. There it is an enormous opportunity to make the government dollars work harder and achieve more. But to do that, you've got to plan it right, you have got to make sure that whenever possible you can capture some of the increase in land value occasioned by the construction of the new transport infrastructure. We have got to have a much more sophisticated and more of an investment approach to infrastructure in Australia. That's one of the big changes I have made as Prime Minister. We have got to make those scarce government dollars, and they are scarce, you have seen the challenges we face with our budget, we have got to make sure those dollars go further.

So yes, we're looking at it very closely.

JOURNALIST:

So the state says you have the business case. Is it fair to say you're not convinced this project stacks up?

PRIME MINISTER:

It is yet to be finalised. We do not have, there is not a final completed business case. There is a proposal.

(Phone rings)

I think that's me. There you go, it's off. Sorry about that. But I can say that state governments have tended to treat the Commonwealth government as an ATM; just a dispenser of cash. That is not the way it is working anymore. Obviously, we will continue to make grants but on big projects we expect to be more involved. Where we can make an investment, we will. I think we need to get better value out of our infrastructure investment than we have in the past. So you can see we are making direct investments.

For example, the Western Sydney airport is a good example, where we'll build the airport, a piece of infrastructure that has been talked about as long ago as Federation, I understand, well over a century. The Inland Rail between Melbourne and Brisbane will make a big difference, a very big, positive difference to the Queensland economy.

Imagine the significance of that; a new transport route linking Melbourne and Brisbane, coming through the Great Dividing Range, this is a big, huge project. We are committing \$8 billion to build that. What we need to be doing is investing more and treating these taxpayer dollars with more respect, so that we get the maximum output from it, rather than just treating the Commonwealth government like a cash dispenser machine. Which I regret to say, is how state governments have often described us.

JOURNALIST:

How would you describe your relationship with Annastacia Palaszczuk? The last we spoke to her about that, she said it was at an all-time low?

PRIME MINISTER:

I was a bit nonplussed by those remarks, because all of my interaction with her has been perfectly courteous. Both before she made those remarks and subsequently. So really she's ... I was surprised, surprised by those comments that she made.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister, figures released just today are set to show wage growth is at a record low, how confident then are you about those figures going up and [inaudible] help the budget return to surplus.

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, the budget returning to surplus is a key objective as you know. We have taken some tough decisions, including raising new taxes to ensure it does. But equally and more importantly, we want to make sure that more Australians are employed and more Australians are earning better wages, so that wages are

going up.

So, that is why our budget and our policies are all focussed to encourage businesses. You see Elena here and a number of the other employees we have spoken to this morning with Ross. They are going [inaudible]. They're investing and taking advantage of the incentives we provided both by reducing company tax and by the incentives for the instant asset write-off, research and development incentives right across the board. Everything we are doing is designed to encourage great businesses like these to invest more and employ more.

Now, the benefit of reducing company tax, the overwhelming bulk of that flows to workers. It will add, over time, \$750 a year — it's been estimated — to the wage package of the average Australian worker, our company tax plan. That's why governments around the world are doing it. France is just a good example, the new President-elect with a two-thirds majority and his commitment is to bring France's company tax down to 25%. France has had a tradition of being a very high-tax country compared to many others. But they recognise, just like the British recognise, the Americans recognise, that you have got to ensure that businesses have greater incentive to invest. Because if they do invest more they employ more and then workers benefits.

JOURNALIST:

The big four banks are asking for an expansion of the levy to foreign banks. Is that something you'd consider?

PRIME MINISTER:

No, what we are doing is delivering on the commitment we made in the Budget. So, I can understand why the big banks would want to delay that or resist it. But we need to proceed with this. It is vitally important to return the budget to balance. It is a fair commitment that we are asking the banks to make. It is consistent with levies in other jurisdictions, including in the United Kingdom.

You saw the CEO of one of the British banks making the observation just in the press today, that he thought it was a perfectly fair levy, given the immense support, extremely valuable support, that the big banks get from the Australian government and our very stable financial system, which prevails here in Australia. It is a very big finance advantage they have. What we are asking is they make a contribution. It is a fair contribution, recognised by the Australian people as fair. We look forward to that legislation being passed in the form it was presented in the budget as soon as possible.

JOURNALIST:

[Inaudible] the levy and fees being passed on to consumers. Are you confident that you or even us, will know if it is happened or not?

PRIME MINISTER:

We will certainly know what the banks do because they will have to declare

what changes they are making, if any. The ACCC is monitoring their conduct very carefully. They are certainly able to absorb this levy themselves.

Again, I would refer you to what Mr Duffy, the new head of the Clyesdale Bank in in the UK, he used to work for the NAB of course, observations he's made about the British experience. So this is a very conventional approach, this has been gone about, designed in a very conventional manner and the banks are well able to absorb it. But if they seek to jack up interest rates or charges on the basis of this, the ACCC will be watching them very carefully. Yes, it's six basis points, 0.06% on their liabilities. That is much less, for example, than a 25 basis point increase in interest rates, which you often see from time to time, 25 basis point movement. So they are well able to afford this. It is \$1.5 billion a year, against \$33 billion of after tax profits. The big Australian banks are the most profitable banks in the world, in the world. With a very high return on equity. They are certainly well able to afford it, given the benefit that they receive from the government, from the taxpayer, from our financial system, which is recognised as having a huge value. This is a reasonable request, requirement, I should say, to make of them in order to bring the budget back into balance, which we will do by 2020/21.

We are forecasting a return to surplus of \$7.4 billion. That is vital because as we have seen with the reminder with little Bella, the youngest member of Elena's family business, it's very important that we live within our means and don't throw a mountain of debt on to the shoulders of our children and grandchildren.

Thank you all very much.

[ENDS]

Radio interview with Bianca, Terry & Bob 97.3FM Brisbane

HOST:

Welcome to Brisbane, the Prime Minister of Australia, Malcolm Turnbull. Good morning Prime Minister.

PRIME MINISTER:

Good morning, how are you?

HOST:

Very intrigued to know -

HOST:

How do we know it's not an impersonator?

HOST:

It could be, is that really you?

HOST:

Is it really you, Malcolm?

PRIME MINISTER:

It is really me.

HOST:

Do you know Donald Trump?

(Laughter)

PRIME MINISTER:

I do, I do I met him in New York only the other day.

HOST:

Yeah we saw a few photos.

PRIME MINISTER:

It was a great meeting — beg your pardon?

HOST:

We saw a few photos.

PRIME MINISTER:

Yes. You know it was great to meet, Lucy and I were thrilled to meet President Trump and Melania, they were very, very welcoming and very warm. But it was amazing to meet some of the old veterans you know who had served in the Australian and US Navy's in the Battle of the Coral Sea 75 years ago. They were there in their early 90's.

HOST:

Wow.

PRIME MINISTER:

In this old World War ll aircraft carrier, the Intrepid and they had turned the tide of war in the Pacific in 1942 when they were teenagers. So it was amazing.

HOST:

You're lucky that you get to meet those people.

HOST:

Travel is great yeah -

PRIME MINISTER:

I was very honoured, yeah. Very honoured.

HOST:

Travel's great but of course the highlight is a warm up to come and do a walk around Brisbane this morning. Now John Howard was famous for walking round in his Wallabies jersey, can't remember when he played for the Wallabies. Tony Abbott doesn't mind a bike ride or a budgie smuggler in the water. Is there a legacy of your morning exercise routine that you're going to leave for us?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, you know I normally walk along, through the gardens and across the bridge, across the river and then down through -

HOST:

Kangaroo Point?

PRIME MINISTER:

Through that beautiful sort of longer with bougainvillea on it.

HOST:

Oh the arbor.

PRIME MINISTER:

This morning I actually did some exercise in the hotel, so I didn't get out this morning. But look it's a beautiful, beautiful city to walk around along the river, along the south bank, it's fantastic.

HOST:

We love our Brisbane.

PRIME MINISTER:

It's really great, and it's getting better. It's getting I think, more pedestrian friendly all the time. More places to walk, so I'm a very big fan, as is Lucy.

HOST:

You should try the city cycles, that's a whole other story.

(Laughter)

PRIME MINISTER:

All the cycling, what — the sort of men-in-lycra, you think that's a good look?

HOST:

Yes, Abbott's done enough of showing off what that can do, so don't worry about it.

HOST:

In the next little while Prime Minister we're going to build a big casino down complex along North Quay, are you good on the punt? Have you got a game? If I had to play a game of poker against you would I win, or would you take my money?

PRIME MINISTER:

I think you'd probably beat me. Look I must tell you, we're talking about walks. I must tell you a story about Wallaby jumpers.

HOST:

Okay yeah.

PRIME MINISTER:

Some time ago, not long after I'd become Prime Minister I was in Canberra and it was a cold morning. I got up - Lucy was there - and I pulled on a football jumper out of drawer in our bedroom.

HOST:

Yeah.

PRIME MINISTER:

And it actually was a Wallaby's jumper. And I was walking along and Daisy our daughter called us on Facetime. And so she was talking to Lucy and then Lucy turned the phone so she could see me. And there I was with my Wallaby jumper and Daisy said: "Oh my god. You are the Prime Minister".

(Laughter)

HOST:

That's what it takes.

(Laughter)

HOST:
Because you're in your Wallaby's jumper!
(Laughter)
PRIME MINISTER:
Walking around Lake Burley Griffin in a Wallaby's jumper so —
HOST:
I love that you're up to date and you're doing the whole Facetime thing. I think it's great. Listen Malcolm, we quite often do this. Oh do I call you Prime Minister? What do I call you?
PRIME MINISTER:
Malcolm is fine.
HOST:
Okay.
PRIME MINISTER:
Everyone else does.
HOST:
Oh, okay.
HOST:
The Honourable Malcolm.
HOST:
The honourable Prime Minister. We do this thing called a minute with Bianca and its rapid-fire questions and you just give rapid-fire answers. You just say the first thing that comes to your mind when I ask you a question.
VOICEOVER:
Bianca, Terry and Bob's minute with Malcolm.
HOST:
Are you ready to go Prime Minister?
PRIME MINISTER:
I'm ready.
HOST:

I still think it's an impersonator. Anyway let's go. Let's go. Okay Malcolm, let's start it. Have you had your heart broken? PRIME MINISTER: Yes. HOST: Has Lucy ever had a spray tan? PRIME MINISTER: No. **HOST:** What's the first thing you do on your day off being Prime Minister? PRIME MINISTER: Sleep. HOST: (Laughter) Glad you're not the only one. Are you on Instagram? PRIME MINISTER: Yes, I am. **HOST:** Oh! Okay, have you got as many followers as grumpy cat? Don't answer that. What's on your bucket list to do before you die? PRIME MINISTER: Just spend lots more time with my grandkids and Lucy. HOST: Do you ever feel like getting in your car-PRIME MINISTER: That's the main thing. **HOST:** Do you ever feel like getting in your car and just driving away?

(Laughter)
PRIME MINISTER:
Never. No, I love this job and I'm a very, very happy Prime Minister.
HOST:
Okay sunsets or sunrise?
PRIME MINISTER:
Sunrise I think, yeah sunrise.
HOST:
Do you ever Netflix and chill with Lucy?
PRIME MINISTER:
Yes, yes we do. Yep.
HOST:
Good to know.
HOST:
What do you watch? House of Cards?
(Laughter)
PRIME MINISTER:
We have watched House of Cards, actually we haven't watched much on Netflix lately, but we do watch things on Netflix. We've watched a bit on iTunes.
It's interesting isn't it the way that so much of the entertainment that you see on television nowadays is over the top — you know, I mean over the top as in over the internet.
HOST:
Yeah.
HOST:
Absolutely.
PRIME MINISTER:

iTunes or Netflix and other applications like that. Such a huge change in the

television business.

HOST:

Oh no it's totally turned it upside down. Netflix and Stan and all of those. Tell us, one last question I'm going to sneak in. When you interviewed Donald Trump, the elephant in the room, did you stare at his hair?

(Laughter)

HOST:

Come on! Be honest!

PRIME MINISTER:

No, lots of eye contact. No hair contact.

HOST:

I'm so glad you did because I'd just be staring at that hair. It's got a mind of its own. What's the last thing you cooked?

PRIME MINISTER:

The last thing I cooked was some pasta on the weekend. It was just some spaghetti with, you know, tomato sauce.

HOST:

I love it. Malcolm does a spag bol.

PRIME MINISTER:

Yeah. Actually I love making passata, you know where you roast a whole tray of tomatoes and —

HOST:

Yum.

PRIME MINISTER:

With some garlic, if you like garlic, and some salt and olive oil and when they're all roasted, then put them through a mouli and mush them up. You have a beautiful tomato sauce. You can use some, and what we do it we use some and generally freeze some, do it in bulk. Freeze some and you can make a really lovely tasty pasta dish very quickly.

HOST:

I love that the Prime Minister food-preps for the rest of the week!

HOST:

Makes his own passata. Yeah.

(Laughter)

PRIME MINISTER:

I love passata, yeah it's great. Good for you too, all of those tomatoes.

HOST:

I should warn you Prime Minister, we have hung out with a Masterchef this week.

A couple of listener questions coming right here, just very quick ones. What colour are Bill Shorten's eyes.

PRIME MINISTER:

(Laughter)

I don't know. I don't know, you'd have to -

HOST:

Not paying attention.

PRIME MINISTER:

I'll endeavor to peer, to look into them, next time I see him.

HOST:

Gaze lovingly.

HOST:

Apparently — we tried to Google it — apparently blue and piercing as it turns out.

This is actually quite a serious one; at the moment there is a lot of stuff about the girl they're calling Cocaine Cassie in Columbia. But it's about when young people get into to trouble overseas. You've got Schapelle Corby coming back. How much can you actually do? At which point do you pick up the phone and talk to another country.

PRIME MINISTER:

Well the answer is the first thing is, when you're overseas, obey the laws of the country you're in., I'll say that again. When you're overseas, obey the laws of the country you're in. You know, they're often very different to Australia and often much harsher than Australia, particularly with respect to drugs. So that is the absolutely vital message.

Secondly, take advice from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website, the Smartraveller website. Always make sure you're up to date on that. They go to a lot of trouble to provide updated advice on security and other matters.

Now as to what we do. Well, we provide consular assistance, but if people break the law in other countries, they will face the legal process there. Just like foreigners who break the law in Australia, face legal process here. Do we contact other Governments? Yes we do. Our consular officials do that and we, you know, we've often made representations, particularly when Australians are subject to sentenced to or threatened with a death penalty. You know, there have been a number of cases of that. But the fundamental message guys —

HOST:

Don't stuff up in the first place.

PRIME MINISTER:

Yeah, if you're going overseas, respect the laws of the country you're in. Recognise that they are, you know, it's not Australia. When you leave Australia, you're under the jurisdiction of another country.

HOST:

Thank you for giving us that very long answer.

(Laughter)

PRIME MINISTER:

I'm sorry about that!

HOST:

No! But you're the Prime Minister, that's your job.

PRIME MINISTER:

But it's an important point and a lot of people forget it and overlook it and get into a lot of trouble. You know we do everything we can to help them, but you know, if you break the law somewhere else, you're subject to the laws of that other place.

HOST:

Alright let's ask a really serious question. Will you still be in town for Paniyiri?

(Laughter)

HOST:

It's this weekend, it's the big Greek festival.

PRIME MINISTER:

No I won't, I'm in Queensland all week, for the rest of the week here. I'm

here in Brisbane today, I'm going up to Rockhampton tomorrow and then to Emerald. But I'll be back in New South Wales by the weekend.

HOST:

You're so busy.

HOST:

Never mind, never mind.

HOST:

Such a busy life.

HOST:

That means Bianca will have to Zorba dance by herself Prime Minister, she was going to hit you up but you got out of town in time.

PRIME MINISTER:

I'm sure I would only cramp your style, Bianca. You're better off Zorba dancing by yourself.

HOST:

I think you're a very cool Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull. Thank you so much for your time, thanks for chatting with us exclusively this morning. It's been lovely, thanks for having fun with us.

PRIME MINISTER:

Okay, it's great to be with you.

[ENDS]

<u>Sichuan native offers solutions to</u> <u>Denmark's oyster crisis</u>



丹麦驻华大使馆 V

5月14日 17:57 来自 微博 weibo.com



史上最全丹麦挖蚝宝典,有本事挖出个吉尼斯纪录来!

The official Weibo account of the Danish embassy in Beijing on Sunday forwarded a report by the Chengdu Business Daily about a woman from Sichuan who managed to dig up around 150 kilograms of giant oysters along the Danish coast. [Photo: Weibo.com]

The official Weibo account of the Danish embassy in Beijing on Sunday forwarded a report by the Chengdu Business Daily about a woman from Sichuan who managed to dig up around 150 kilograms of giant oysters along the Danish coast.

The Sichuan native, Bian Miaomiao, subsequently put on a massive oyster fry for her family and friends in Denmark, where she has lived with her husband in the past seven years.

Embassy staff was interviewed by Chengdu Business Daily and said they support Bian's oyster fry, as well as welcome more Sichuan people to travel to Denmark and help solve an oyster crisis in the country.

Giant oysters, a much-loved commodity in China, are said to be overrunning Denmark's beaches, causing concern among local fishermen.

Data from China's Zhiyan organization showed Chinese people consumed some 4.5 million tons of oysters in 2015, an annual rise of some 5%.

The Danish embassy in Beijing says it is willing to begin sending their oyster reserves to China, provided they get interested local parties involved.

China, ASEAN expected to build closer ties



A one-day forum on China-ASEAN relations organized by Beijing Review, Mission of China to ASEAN and the Pangoal Institution, runs on May 15, in Beijing. [Photo provided to China.org.cn]

Once the combustible center for strife and conflicts, countries allied in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are now fostering a path of peace and prosperity under the framework of multilateral cooperation, among which their partnerships with China are much accentuated.

Dr. AKP Mochtan, deputy secretary general of ASEAN, described the relationship between China and ASEAN as a "red string of fate", a Chinese metaphor for the knot tied by married couples.

"This is not a marriage proposal [in the context of bilateral relations. Nevertheless], it is actually what I believe we have shared and how we are connected," he said.

He made his keynote speech when addressing the "Communication, Cooperation and Common Development Seminar on ASEAN Community Building and China-ASEAN Relations", jointly hosted by the weekly magazine Beijing Review, Mission of China to ASEAN and Beijing-based think tank Pangoal Institution.

China and ASEAN are embracing a promising future with good momentum. Trade between China and Southeast Asia reached US\$455.44 billion in 2016 and China

has been ASEAN's biggest trade partner since 2009. With a mild fluctuation of bilateral trade and investment last year, China and ASEAN are ushering in an era of cultural cooperation and people-to-people exchanges.

In ASEAN, there are 37 cities connected with 52 Chinese cities by means of 5,000 flights. Likewise, about 20 million visitors from China have chosen ASEAN countries as their holiday destinations, an increase of 60.5 percent from two years ago. Meanwhile, the number of ASEAN visitors to China has grown 60 percent to a current 10 million a year.

"I would rather work with a friend in the dark than be alone in the light," Mochtan added.

His remark was echoed by Li Yafang, president of the Beijing Review.

"China and ASEAN are friendly neighbors linked by seas and mountains," Li said, adding that "[ASEAN] countries are the major members of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)...and there is an invisible red string of bond [between the two sides] in the jungle."

"China is seeking multilateral cooperation with others, tackling challenges together with ASEAN to achieve common development and prosperity to become a community of common destiny, and contributing to exchanges and cooperation. This is why we are coming today," she said.

This year marked the 50th anniversary of the establishment of ASEAN with an involvement of six countries now grown to 10, namely, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, Singapore, Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia. It has evolved into a mechanism of "ASEAN plus six" with the additional participation of China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and India, under the framework of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.

"The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road of the BRI proposed by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013 signals a splendid chapter in China's broadened openness," said Yu Hongjun, honorary president of the Academic Committee of the Pangoal Institution and former vice minister of the International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC).

"It is being wrongly suggested that an emerging power like China will definitely not escape from the historic pattern of overall rule, which is supposed to lead the country to be a new hegemon in the world," said Yu.

"China's BRI is a peaceful cooperation plan with mutual benefits," he stressed.

According to Yu, there is still room for improvement to achieve even better cooperation. Disturbed by a number of complicated reasons, the trade between China and ASEAN, which has dropped slightly, has, nevertheless, challenged the two sides with targeted trade volume expected to hit US\$1 trillion by 2020.

However, despite disputes and differences at times, experts in the forum

generally agreed that the cooperation between China and ASEAN should be deepened while tackling technological innovation bringing a potential dramatic transformation of the world.

A fundamental change is taking place by the sweeping dominance of social media that is reshaping the way of mass communication and challenging the loss of readership of the media with traditional contents, said Dato Danny Lee Chian Siong, chairman of the Association for Regional Connectivity.

However, despite such challenges, it has also opened a window for opportunities where Facebook and WeChat can play their roles in boosting the diversity of ASEAN countries, he added.

Wang Xiaohui, editor-in-chief of China.org.cn, said, the relation between China and ASEAN dates back many hundreds of years, so the journalists, who may get the chance to represent the friendship carried on in hearts, languages, lives, as well as cultures of the peoples concerned, can tell the stories by using the platform of new media for future information flows on smart phones.

US, UK still top Chinese study sites



A survey of 6,217 students who plan to study abroad, or their parents, found that the United States remains the top choice, with 50 percent preferring the US, up from 46 percent last year. [File Photo]

US President Donald Trump's arrival in the White House and Brexit in the

United Kingdom have not lessened the appeal of these countries among Chinese students choosing an overseas education destination, according to a new report.

A survey of 6,217 students who plan to study abroad, or their parents, found that the United States remains the top choice, with 50 percent preferring the U.S., up from 46 percent last year.

It is the third consecutive year the country ranked No. 1 in the annual Report on Chinese Students' Overseas Study, the latest of which was released on Tuesday.

The UK, which voted to leave the European Union last year, was the second-most popular destination, as it has been for three years.

The survey, by Vision Overseas Consulting Co and Kantar Millward Brown, was conducted in over 40 cities in February and March.

Some of Trump's policies, including visa restrictions, are thought to have influenced international students and prospective immigrants. In a survey by five US higher education associations in February — covering around 250 U.S. colleges and universities — 38 percent reported a drop in foreign applications for the fall 2017 term — Middle Eastern students down the most — The Atlantic reported on Saturday.

Although China was not directly affected by the travel ban, 25 percent of universities saw undergraduate applications from China decline and 32 percent had fewer Chinese graduate student applications, the report said.

According to the Ministry of Education, over 540,000 Chinese students were studying in the U.S. last year, making it one of the largest source countries for international students.

"We have noticed the influence of Trump's policy and conducted an internal survey of our clients months ago," said Sun Tao, executive president of Vision Overseas Consulting.

"We did feel the concerns and worries of parents, but many of them stick to their choices in the U.S."

In the survey, 51 percent of respondents said international political events did not affect their choices, and only 7 percent said they would change their choices of overseas study countries, Sun said.

The education level, overall national power and national culture have been the main factors in Chinese students' and their parents' choice of destination countries, the survey added.

"In addition, the full effect of the proposed U.S. visa restrictions have not become clearer, but they will raise the threshold for immigrants to stay and work in U.S.," said Yu Zhongqiu, deputy head of Vision Overseas Consulting.

He added that the proposed restrictions require immigration applicants to

have an annual income no less than \$110,000, "quite difficult for new graduates to meet".

In the survey, 73 percent planned to work in China after graduation, compared with only 57 percent last year.

"More students than before go overseas to broaden their vision and enrich their experiences, and intend to return home," Yu said.