

Xi orders new PLA units to be combat ready

President Xi Jinping asked People's Liberation Army commanders on Tuesday to focus on strengthening their unit's combat capability following the establishment of 84 large units.

Xi, also chairman of the Central Military Commission, met commanders of these new units at the commission's headquarters in Beijing.

The new units must prepare themselves for combat and study wars. They should concentrate on improving their joint operation capabilities and technology level, Xi said.

The president also told the new forces to conduct more combat exercises and give priority to building "new-type" fighting capabilities.

In PLA terminology, new-type fighting capabilities generally refers to capabilities of engaging in electronic, information and space operations.

All 84 of the new units are at combined corps level, which means their commanders have or soon will be promoted to a rank of either major general in the Ground Force, Air Force and Rocket Force or rear admiral in the Navy. Though the PLA has not disclosed how these units were set up, it is likely that they were created through the regrouping of existing forces rather than recruiting new personnel, because the Chinese military is still engaged in cutting its troops by 300,000.

The units' emergence also indicates the PLA's structural shake-up has taken effect. At a Central Military Commission conference in December, Xi ordered the military's structure to be adjusted and optimized, calling for a smaller but capable and flexible military.

The establishment of the units is the latest move in a massive reform the PLA is undergoing. That unprecedented reform began in November 2015, when the Central Military Commission unveiled a blueprint for the PLA's development. The commission pledged to establish a leaner and more efficient command chain, to reduce the number of noncombatant personnel and departments and to build the PLA into a mightier force capable of winning modern wars.

Since then, the PLA has set up a headquarters for its Ground Force, founded a Strategic Support Force dedicated to electronic, information and space operations, and established a Rocket Force to replace the former Second Artillery Corps.

The previous four top PLA departments—staff, politics, logistics and armaments—were dismantled.

Radio interview with Ross Greenwood

ROSS GREENWOOD:

Let's now go to Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull who is online right now, many thanks for your time Prime Minister.

PRIME MINISTER:

Yeah great to be with you.

ROSS GREENWOOD:

Can I just say the headline of this: 'Putting Australian Workers First', it did resonate something of Donald Trump in his inauguration speech, basically saying it was time to put American workers first and America first, is that what you're trying to pick up?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well we're putting Australian workers first and Australian jobs first. And I think every national leader should seek to do that. Whether you're the Prime Minister of Australia or the President of the United States so it's a commitment to protecting our national interests.

And our migration programme Ross has got to work in our national interest. It's got to deliver, obviously the immigration that we need and the skills that we need when we don't have them here, but above all its got to serve our national interest.

ROSS GREENWOOD:

Okay the Government has been in power for three and a half years, why has it taken three and a half years for the Government to act upon this when what was quite clear for some time is that it wasn't acting in the national interest before this?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well Ross, the important thing is we are getting it done now. There is always, it's always the question when you do something good, make a good reform to say 'why didn't you do it last week or last month or last year' – we are getting on with it now-

ROSS GREENWOOD:

Well, two years ago-

PRIME MINISTER:

Well obviously, two years ago I wasn't Prime Minister but the important thing is that the work has been done, it's quite a detailed exercise, there has been a lot of consultation with industry naturally, Peter Dutton has done that, Michaelia Cash, the Employment Minister, have done that – so there has been a lot of work that has gone through our very thorough process and this is a reform that will deliver the outcome we need – Australian jobs for Australian workers, migration working in the national interest but still being able to ensure that where business cannot get the skills filled by Australians at a particular time then they have got mechanisms to bring those workers in on these temporary, the new, temporary visas.

ROSS GREENWOOD:

Okay. I have noticed that Cory Bernardi today says that you're being squeezed basically by the conservatives inside your party to take such tactics – is that correct?

PRIME MINISTER:

Absolutely not. Absolutely not correct. I mean, this is a long term policy development that has been going on for some time.

As Peter Dutton observed today there was a review done on this by John Azaria some time ago.

This is, this is a very detailed exercise. It is not about politics – it's about policy. It's not about playing Canberra press gallery games – it is about delivering more jobs for more Australians. It is putting Australians first.

The fact is that this 457 Visa lost all credibility under the Labor Party, under Bill Shorten.

Additional conditions were put on it after the Coalition came into Government in 2013, so the situation was improved under Tony Abbott's prime ministership and continuing, but what we needed to do was to have a root and branch reform and that is what we have delivered today.

ROSS GREENWOOD:

Is this an acknowledgement that many Australian families right now are struggling because of the casualisation of the Australian workforce? And the truth is that there are many families even now we know in mortgage stress simply because they cannot get the hours that they could've got perhaps two or three years ago.

PRIME MINISTER:

Well Ross, you are right that underemployment, people not being able to work the hours that they need is a big problem. Now we have added hundreds of thousands of jobs over the time.

We have wound back, over the time of the Coalition Government, we have wound

back the number of 457 visa workers in Australia from about 110,000 at the time the government changed in late 2013 to 95,000 today, because basically the 457s were a four-year visa and they could be renewed so they very often ended up in a permanent migration-

ROSS GREENWOOD:

Because once a person was here for five years, they could apply for Australian Citizenship?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well they, they could certainly apply for permanent residence, yes, and citizenship and so forth. So the new arrangement, you come here on the, there is a short term skilled shortage visa which is two years and can only be renewed once. So it's two plus two and then you've got to go home. And you can apply again from home, I suppose, well you can.

And then there is a medium term visa which will be four years and the list of occupations on the medium term visa is much shorter – it's not 600 plus as it was on the 457s, it is less than 200 – and it will be, both it and the short term visas list will be updated regularly and reviewed regularly. The short term one every six months and the medium term one every 12 months to make sure that it reflects the skills shortages that exist in the country, you know, in Australia at the moment.

ROSS GREENWOOD:

You mentioned that there were 95,000 people on these 457 Visas in Australia right now-

PRIME MINISTER:

Yes, right now, there are yep.

ROSS GREENWOOD:

Have you got a target as to what you would like to see them reduced to?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, Ross, the answer is that we want to have, where a skill, where a vacancy arises, we want it to be filled by an Australian. If, however that is a position where the employer cannot find an Australian to fill that job and the skill is on the list then they are able to bring in somebody from overseas under the new arrangements. But they've got to be able to demonstrate that they've tested the market and that they cannot find an Australian.

What happened was, Labor made it – look I don't want to get into a political partisan thing but just being frank about it – Labor made this a rort, I mean, Bill Shorten had people coming out here on 457s to flip burgers at McDonalds. Now, I'm sorry, you know? I'm not-

ROSS GREENWOOD:

But wasn't that a sign of the time though Prime Minister, when we had a mining boom and we had people running off to the mines to make their fortunes, there was a shortage of burger flippers in Australia?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, no, that was not the case.

Can I tell you two thirds of the people that came in under Labor's time ended up in Sydney and Melbourne and less than 10 per cent of the additional people that came on 457s in Labor's last term in government, less than 10 per cent were involved in the mining or mining construction sectors.

So this argument that Shorten says that he was responding to the mining construction boom is not right. The facts are there.

These were not mining engineers and you know, sort of metallurgists and geologists or anything like that. This became a rort and it basically displaced a lot of Australians from entry level jobs.

I mean, under Labor and under the 457 scheme as it stands you don't even have to demonstrate that you've had work experience. Now one of the things we are doing-

ROSS GREENWOOD:

Or indeed that you haven't had a criminal check as you come into the country.

PRIME MINISTER:

Correct.

So these are the changes that we making. I mean fundamental changes.

You've got to have at least two years of relevant work experience that makes sense doesn't it?

You're going to have to demonstrate that you've got competent English and for the medium term we are raising the level of English required.

You've got to demonstrate that you've got a, you know, your criminal history check and its got to be supported by a certificate from the police from wherever you're coming.

Now these are all really important changes that protect the integrity of the migration system, ensure that the people who come here are the right people, they've got the right skills that are needed and they're not displacing Australians from jobs, particularly those entry level jobs which are so important for young Aussies to get into the workforce.

ROSS GREENWOOD:

Okay. You're a big supporter of technology, you've been there in your past as well. Mike Cannon-Brookes the boss of Atlassian, one of the real leaders in technology in Australia is a big supporter of 457 Visas and he says that his business would not be able to be based in Australia without the skills and the technology that comes from people from overseas. Do you think his business and others like that would be affected by this decision today?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well if the skill, if the skills that he needs cannot be filled by Australians then the new system will enable it to be filled from people from overseas.

But what Mike's going to have to do – and look he is a very patriotic Australian, he will do this – what he's got to do is demonstrate that he's tested the market, that he can't find Australians to do the work and I know that he will be doing everything he can to make sure that there are young Australians getting the skills, getting the training to do the work that he needs.

And we will make sure, and we'll make more announcements about this in the budget, but there will be a very significant training component in all of this to make sure that Australians get the training to do the jobs.

At the end of the day, look, migration, Ross, we are a migration nation. We're the most successful multicultural society in the world. We are proud of our migration record, our migration system but it has got to serve our national interest. And the fundamental requirement that we have, and every other country has is to protect our own citizens. Our Australians for Australian jobs.

Now where an Aussie can't fill the job because there isn't anyone with the skills required then the system will enable someone to be brought in.

So this is going to restore integrity to the system, it's going to deliver for business but it's going to also ensure that where the job can be filled by an Australian it will be.

ROSS GREENWOOD:

OK, you've cracked down on 457 Visas. Kate Carnell, the Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman says most of the rorts are happening in student visas or those on holiday visas or backpacker visas. Is that something also that you will now crack down upon?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, if by what you mean is rorts is people you know not being paid in accordance with the law-

ROSS GREENWOOD:

Oh, truck drivers who are basically known as steerers because they drive

trucks on our highways in dangerous fashion-

PRIME MINISTER:

Ross, what you're talking about there is breaches of the law and the Department of Immigration, the Department of Employment and, of course, you know, law enforcement agencies in the states and territories have all got a role to play in ensuring that the law is complied with.

And as you know we have cracked down on people being underpaid in a number of fast food convenience store chains. So there is a law enforcement role here.

But the fundamental problem we've got, we've had with the 457s is that there has not been a sufficient effort to protect Australian jobs. The list of occupations was far too long. I mean, as you know it included, I mean, for example-

ROSS GREENWOOD:

Radio journalists for goodness' sake!

PRIME MINISTER:

Well radio journalists, that's right. I would have thought-

ROSS GREENWOOD:

Flying instructors were there.

PRIME MINISTER:

Yes. Actor, can't get an actor apparently. Singer, apparently there's no Australian singers. Potter or ceramic artistic-

ROSS GREENWOOD:

Historians.

PRIME MINISTER:

I mean yes.

ROSS GREENWOOD:

Astonishing. Now Prime Minister wasn't on the list, I had a look Malcolm Turnbull I must admit. Just look, a final one for you.

PRIME MINISTER:

Park ranger, apparently you can't get a park ranger in Australia according to this list the Labor Party presumably-

ROSS GREENWOOD:

A betting agency manager. Anyway, we'll leave that aside.

I notice that your colleague Warren Entsch has called on the former Prime Minister Tony Abbott to quit Parliament if he cannot stop criticizing the Government. Is Warren Entsch right?

PRIME MINISTER:

Oh look I won't buy into that other than to say that every member of the Government, of the party room, has got a lot to talk about in terms of our achievements. I mean you think about it. Just think about what-

ROSS GREENWOOD:

So is Tony Abbott right in his criticisms? He was on the Ray Hadley programme on this network just the other day – he was critical of your Government, I mean, and yet he's a member of that Government. Is he right to offer those criticisms in the public forum?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I'm not sure what criticism you're referring to but I just say this to you – there's a lot of things that every member of my party room can point to the achievements that we have made.

We've secured tax cuts for middle income Australians.

We've secured tax cuts for small and medium companies.

We've secured the passage of the industrial legislation – restoration to Building and Construction Commission.

Restoring the rule of law to the union, to unions.

I mean these are big achievements and there are many others.

ROSS GREENWOOD:

He did indicate that he thinks that maybe that Bill Shorten is likely to be the next Prime Minister the way things are going.

PRIME MINISTER:

Well you know something, that's why it's really important for all of, every member of the Coalition Party to focus on the achievements of the Government, our agenda.

We have got more through the Senate – we've got more of our agenda delivered since the election than we did in the previous three years with the previous Senate.

So yes we've got a one seat majority in the House of Representatives and we certainly don't have anything like a majority in the Senate as you know but nonetheless we keep on getting things done.

We delivered our child care reforms. They'd been held up for years. We've delivered them.

We've delivered the reforms to the vocational education sector.

So you know one big reform after another, getting them through the Senate.

How many people said we'd never get any changes to company tax through? You know how important that is, how important it is for businesses to be competitive. We've got more than half of Australian employees work for businesses, small business or small and medium companies that are now going to have a tax cut as a result of those reforms. They'll have more money to invest, they'll have more incentive to employ.

These are big reforms that are driving economic growth.

And look at what we've done on energy. We've secured Snowy Hydro 2.0. Making sure that gas is available at peaking times in the summer.

My Government is delivering and so there's a lot to be proud of, a lot to talk about and obviously a lot more to do.

ROSS GREENWOOD:

Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, we appreciate your time on the programme this evening.

PRIME MINISTER:

Thanks Ross, great to be with you.

[ENDS]

[Press Conference with the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection, The Hon. Peter Dutton MP](#)

PRIME MINISTER:

Good afternoon. Today we are announcing that we are abolishing the 457 Visas. We are ensuring that Australian jobs and Australian values are first, placed first.

Australia is the most successful multicultural society in the world. We are truly an immigration nation. Today and in years past. Snowy Mountains scheme built by 100,000 workers who came, many of them, from war shattered Europe.

So, we have and we always will be an immigration nation, but we must ensure that the foundation of that success is maintained and the foundation is that our migration system is seen to work in the national interest. It is seen to deliver for Australians. It is seen to ensure that Australian jobs are filled by Australians wherever possible. And that foreign workers are brought into Australia in order to fill critical skill gaps and not brought in simply because an employer finds it easier to recruit a foreign worker than go to the trouble of hiring an Australian.

Now, the Labor Party, of course, consisted of Olympic champions in the issuance of 457 Visas. Bill Shorten, the gold medal winner among them all. During his time the number of 457s increased by two-thirds, during the last term of the Labor Government.

And less than 10% of that increase went to the mining sector. So, this wasn't about the mining boom and the need to bring in new skilled workers. These were people, working as labourers, working flipping burgers.

The fact is that Bill Shorten likes to talk about Australian jobs, but whenever he's had the opportunity in government to protect them, he's failed them. So we are bringing the 457 Visa class to an end. It's lost its credibility. We will replace it with two new temporary skills visas. The Minister will go into some more detail on them. They will be very different.

Firstly, there will be a two-year visa stream, with a broader list of occupations, reduced, I might say, from the current list by over 200. So, this is a very substantial reduction in the list of skills that qualify for these visas. There will be a two-year visa. That will require, as will a second visa for four-years, two-years work experience, prior work experience – that is not the case at the moment. It will require in the case of the four-year visa a higher standard of English. It will require a full, a proper police record, a criminal check, which is not the case at the moment. It will require in almost all cases, the majority of cases, mandatory labour market testing. Again, a very significant change.

Now, these new visas will ensure that Australian businesses have access to the workers from overseas they need to fill real skill gaps, but not otherwise, and that Australians, wherever possible, where vacancies are there, where job opportunities are there, Australians will be able to fill them.

This is critically important. Believe me, we should not underestimate either our success as a multicultural society or the fact that our success is built on a foundation of confidence by the Australian people that it is their government and their government alone that determines in the national interest who comes here and the terms on which they come and how long they stay.

Now, whether it is on border protection and Labor's shameful record on people smuggling – recall 50,000 unauthorised arrivals, over 1,200 deaths at sea – that was Labor's record on the borders. They failed to keep our borders secure, and they failed to manage a 457 system, a temporary migration system

in the national interest. We are changing that.

The 457 Visa is abolished.

It will be replaced by a new system that will be manifestly, rigorously, resolutely conducted in the national interest to put Australians and Australian jobs first. That's our commitment. Australian jobs, Australian values.

Minister?

MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION:

Prime Minister, thank you very much.

I will just go into a little bit of detail but the abolition of the 457 Visa programme obviously is an attempt to clean-up Labor's mess. Labor presided over a policy which got out-of-control by their own admission.

What we are doing is making some significant changes in abolishing the programme, but introducing a temporary skills shortage visa through two streams – one a short-term, one medium-term – and by doing that, we restore integrity to this visa programme.

At the moment the existing 457 Visa programme is conducted for a period of 4-years, but essentially it is open-ended, and it results, in many cases, in a migration outcome, that is somebody going into permanent residency and becoming a citizen, which is a significant part of the attraction to using the 457 Visa.

What we propose is that under the Temporary Skills Shortage Visa short-term stream there will be a two-year visa, with the options of two-years, but there would not be permanent residency outcomes at the end of that.

In relation to the medium-term stream, which as the Prime Minister pointed out, is targeted at higher skills, a much shorter skills list, that will be for a period of four years, can be applied for onshore or offshore, and it's a significant tightening of the way in which that programme operates.

The other significant aspect is the work experience, which doesn't apply now and also some mandated arrangements in relation to market testing. So, at the moment quite an open process, which doesn't put any onus really in practical terms on the person applying for the 457 Visa. We significantly tighten up those arrangements as well.

This is about putting Australians first for Australian jobs and it is about making sure that where those jobs can't be filled, particularly in regional areas, that there is the ability to bring in that overseas worker into that job that can't be filled by an Australian worker.

So, this is a significant announcement and I'm very pleased that the Prime Minister and I have been working on this for some time, and I think this will make a big difference to young Australians, in particular, who would have

been bewildered by Bill Shorten's announcement at the time of the arrangement with McDonalds and the other fast food outlets, that displaced young Australian workers out of work and put foreign workers into those jobs. So, it does make a big change and I think it will be welcomed by all Australians.

JOURNALIST:

What happens to those currently in Australia on 457 Visas now?

MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION:

For those people that are here on a 457 Visa at the moment, there will be a grandfathering arrangement. They will continue under the conditions of that visa.

JOURNALIST:

Mr Turnbull or Mr Dutton, with the four-year visa, the new one that you're bringing in, does that, people on that enabled to apply for permanent residency at the end of it? And on both of the new classes of visa, are you saying there are 200 fewer occupations they will be applicable for than currently?

MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION:

Yes to the first part, Phil.

The second answer is that it is reduced by 200 – the number of classifications in the short-term and it goes back even further so, it is even tighter for the medium-term one, and as I say, it is a 4-year as opposed to two, the prospect of permanent residency out of it, and typically that might apply, for example, to high-skilled health workers, but certainly people of higher skills would be applying under that 4-year or that medium-term.

JOURNALIST:

So how many categories will the four-year visa apply to?

PRIME MINISTER:

183.

JOURNALIST:

What will the labour market testing entail? And will the application fees remain the same? I think it is about \$1,060 at the moment for the applicant. Will that remain the same or will that be increased?

MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION:

In relation to the advertising, the advertising will be required, whereas it is not at the moment. The fee is \$1,150 for the – I will just get the actual figure for you – \$1,150 for the first short-term category, and the medium-

term is \$2,400.

JOURNALIST:

Mr Turnbull, what numbers, what difference will this make on the estimates in terms of people coming in, say, over the next four years? And, secondly, have you run this past major employer groups and what's their reaction?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, let me deal with the numbers first, and then Peter can elaborate.

At the moment there are around 95,000 457 Visa holders in Australia. That's the current figure and of course, they were issued, some of them, a very long time ago. As Peter said, they were issued in the first instance for four years, and can be rolled over onshore. So, they often do end up as being a permanent migration outcome.

Now, we are changing that, so, as you know, the two-year visa, up to two years, the short-term visa, can be renewed for two years onshore, and then the holder would have to go offshore, if they wanted to, if their employer wanted them to apply again. And the four-year visa is more focused on strategic skill gaps that are more longer term. These skills-

JOURNALIST:

So do you have the estimates?

PRIME MINISTER:

Sorry?

JOURNALIST:

Do you have the estimates?

PRIME MINISTER:

Let me just go on.

Because we are narrowing significantly the number of occupations and we are increasing the qualifications that visa applicants need to have, it is our expectation that all other things being equal you will see a material reduction over time of people working on these temporary visas, but, Michelle, it depends upon all other things being equal, and, which, they are not. It depends on the demands of the economy, emerging skill gaps, changes in the economy.

So, the fact is that the migration programme should only operate in our national interest. This is all about Australia's interest. This is about jobs for Australians. It is about growing the Australian economy, so that Australian families can realise their dreams, that Australian businesses can invest and employ and get ahead. That is what it's all about. So, this

rigorous focus, this laser-like focus on our national interest will ensure that where skill gaps arise and can't be filled by Australians, then foreign workers can come in, but not otherwise.

MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION:

Michelle, I'll just go to the second part of your question in relation to employer groups. We have had some discussions with employer groups. It comes off the back, remember, of the John Azarius review done to have a look at this whole space, and we have picked up many of the recommendations that he made in that review. I will let the groups speak for themselves. But by and large, there's acceptance and welcoming of many components of what we've announced today.

JOURNALIST:

One of the problems in this space has been the unwillingness of young Australians, particularly in areas of high unemployment, to take the jobs that people on 457s are prepared to do. MPs have talked about job snobs in that case-

PRIME MINISTER:

Not this MP.

JOURNALIST:

What are you doing on that side of the equation? Is there a need to also make changes to the welfare system to force people to take those jobs that otherwise 457 Visa holders would take?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well can I say to you that all of the whole welfare system is designed to provide real incentives for employment in every respect, and we have produced innovative measures, like the PaTH Programme, you know, the Prepare-Trial-Hire Programme. It is a fundamental focus of all of our reforms in welfare to fulfil that great observation of John Howard – that the best form of welfare is a job.

JOURNALIST:

Pauline Hanson has already claimed credit for this, saying that the tough talk and the decision to ban 457s is because of One Nation's rhetoric. What is your response to that?

PRIME MINISTER:

This is a decision of my Government, and it is a decision of the Government and as Peter said it's followed on from a very careful examination of many of these issues by the John Azarius. This has been a careful exercise in policy development, and we're announcing the conclusions today.

JOURNALIST:

When we have the next mining and construction boom, will resources companies be able to quickly hire workers again or are they going to be looking at shortages?

PRIME MINISTER:

The new arrangements are focused on skill shortages and skill gaps and of course if there was, as I said earlier in answer to a question from Michelle Grattan, if new economic circumstances change, and they will of course, and new skill gaps or greater skill gaps emerge, then this has the flexibility to meet that. It is a very responsive approach, but the fundamental difference is, it is focused relentlessly on the national interest and on ensuring that temporary migration visas are not a passport for foreigners to take up jobs that could and should be filled by Australians. Australian jobs for Australians first. That's the focus, that's what this will deliver.

JOURNALIST:

The 457 system is based on, based solely on filling skill shortages so aren't you just changing the name?

MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION:

Under Labor's programme, so their 457 programme existed to people in the employment categories – for example of potters, of driving instructors, of auctioneers, even workplace relations advisers you might be surprised to hear – so we have clamped down on that considerably.

And the whole focus here is as the Prime Minister says, firstly to, put Australians into jobs. If there is a skills shortage and the job can't be filled, then we look at what the purpose of the programme was originally designed to do and that is provide that person for that job. But the way in which it was used and abused by Labor, as the Prime Minister pointed out before, meant that number of 457 holders blew out to 110,000 when Bill Shorten was last in government and we have steadily reduced that down to 95,000. And we have in addition to the announcements today put in place extra measures which have already tightened up the use of 457 Visas. And if we need to do more we will.

JOURNALIST:

Minister, there was an independent report in government on this back in 2014, it said it shouldn't be the business that does the labour market testing and so we have to set the market, we need to get a 457, it should be an independent agency that does that. Are you going to implement that recommendation?

MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION:

No. We are going to work with the companies to make sure that they understand that they need to advertise, they need to demonstrate it, and they will, or

they will be in breach – if they are in breach, they won't be sponsoring, then the next applicant or the next position that they need to be filled.

There also will be a particular focus on companies that have an unnecessarily high proportion of 457 or foreign workers in jobs as well. So there will be a number of ways in which we can clamp down, as I say, we've already implemented some of that which has seen the numbers drop now down to sub-100,000, compared to the 110,000 under Labor.

JOURNALIST:

Just want to take you to North Korea – can you tell the Australian people whether they should be interested in what's happening on the North Korean peninsula? Are you concerned? Is it your advice that North Korea may reach a stage where its missiles could be delivered to Australia?

PRIME MINISTER:

The North Korea regime is a reckless and dangerous threat to peace and stability in our region and, indeed, in the world.

That's why we have joined with other nations, including our ally the United States, to put pressure on North Korea to stop its dangerous and reckless conduct. But the real obligation, the heaviest obligation is on China because China is the nation that has the greatest leverage over North Korea. It has the greatest obligation and responsibility to bring North Korea back into a realm of at least responsibility in terms of its engagement with its neighbours.

The North Korean regime is a threat to the peace of the region. It is a threat to all of its neighbours in the region, and if it were able to obtain, develop a missile that could travel as far as the United States with a warhead, or as far as Australia, then it obviously could threaten Australia and indeed, the United States. But as Vice President Pence said, the strategic patience has come to an end, and so what we're now looking forward to is action from China.

Clearly the United States and China are speaking very closely about this and we welcome that.

In all of my engagements with Chinese leaders over the years I have always stressed the responsibility of China to take action with respect to North Korea's conduct.

Now, the Chinese often express frustration with North Korea, and disappointment. But the fact is that they have the overwhelming leverage over the North Korea regime. So, the eyes of the world are now on Beijing, and Beijing has to step up and bring this reckless threat to the peace and stability of our region to an end.

JOURNALIST:

What would you like to see China do? For example, should they restrict oil

imports to North Korea? And how will Australia respond if there is another nuclear test?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, can I say that China should do whatever it takes to – and it has many avenues and it has enormous leverage over North Korea, as everyone understands. It has obviously the longest border, the most important, by far, economic relationship. It has the ability, if it chooses, to exercise it to bring, to pull North Korea back into at least the position where it is not threatening to rain down devastation on its neighbours, which is what they've been doing.

The onus really is on China. It is a fact that China has the greatest influence over North Korea, and the time has come for the Chinese Government to exercise it.

JOURNALIST:

Just to come back to Chris's questions though, what would be your message to Australians? I know over Easter family and friends wanted to ask me about North Korea. They're quite worried by the reports. What's your message on it?

PRIME MINISTER:

My message is to Australians that their Government, my Government, is committed to ensuring that the North Korean regime acts responsibly.

Now, we don't have the leverage that China does. We obviously don't have the military might that the United States does. But what we are able to do is to provide the solidarity and the influence we can in international forums and in our direct engagement with other nations.

I had the Chinese Premier Li Keqiang here only a little while ago. And this issue I raised with him as I've raised with the President Xi Jinping.

So we add our voice to the voice of many other nations in the region, supporting the efforts to bring this reckless conduct to an end.

That is our commitment and I believe now the conversations, the engagement between China and the United States is such that I am optimistic, but not unduly so, I'm optimistic that a resolution can be found because as Vice President Pence said in a statement I think that will concentrate the minds of all involved – the strategic patience has come to an end.

JOURNALIST:

You've got a meeting tomorrow with the gas majors. Will it be the same message as last month where you're threatening export controls unless they can free up more for domestic supply? Or is there some other approach you're going to take tomorrow in that meeting?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, we will be looking forward to the meeting with the gas producers tomorrow. As you know, we have ensured that there is a guarantee of gas for peaking power purposes, in the forthcoming summer. So that's been a very important achievement. But it is absolutely vital that Australian industries, Australian businesses, Australian families, have the gas they need at a price they can afford.

It is not acceptable for Australia to be, shortly, the world's largest exporter of LNG and, yet, to have a gas shortage on the east coast in its domestic market. That is clearly unacceptable.

And I'll be continuing the discussions and the industry knows exactly where I stand and where my Government stands – we will defend the energy security of Australians and gas supply, reliable and affordable supply, is a key part of that.

So, I look forward to further discussions with the industry. We've made a lot of progress already, made a lot of progress already. But there is more to come.

And on that note, thank you, all, very much.

[ENDS]

[Let's have the TV debates. It's what democracy needs and what the British people deserve – Corbyn](#)

Jeremy Corbyn MP, Leader of the Labour Party,

responding to reports that the Prime Minister will reject any TV debates, said:

“Elections and democracy are about public debate. So it's rather strange that only a couple of hours after calling for a General Election, the Prime Minister is saying she's not going to take part in TV debates.

“I say to Theresa May, who said this election was about leadership: come on and show some. Let's have the debates. It's what democracy needs and what the British people deserve.”

Ends

MoU on CCP supervision with Reserve Bank and Financial Markets Authority of New Zealand

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