

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]

[Putting Australian Workers First](#)

The Turnbull Government will safeguard Australian jobs by abolishing the Subclass 457 Visa for foreign workers and creating a new temporary visa restricted to critical skills shortages.

This will ensure Australian workers are given the absolute first priority for jobs, while businesses will be able to temporarily access the critical skills they need to grow if skilled Australians workers are not available.

The Subclass 457 Visa will be abolished and replaced with the Temporary Skill Shortage Visa. The new visa will include mandatory criminal checks and tighter English language requirements.

The new Temporary Skill Shortage Visa programme will comprise two streams – Short Term and Medium Term – and will be underpinned by more focused occupation lists that are responsive to genuine skill needs and regional variations across Australia.

Short term visas will be issued for two years, while medium term visas will be issued only for more critical skills shortages and for up to four years.

Both streams will include mandatory labour market testing with limited exemptions; a new non-discriminatory workforce test; mandatory criminal history checks; a market salary rate assessment and a new two-year work experience requirement.

Additionally there will be tightened English language requirements for the Medium Term Stream.

The new visa will also include a strengthened training obligation for employers sponsoring foreign skilled workers to provide enhanced training outcomes for Australians in high-need industries and occupations.

These changes will give Australian job seekers more opportunity to find work while finding the right balance so businesses can prosper by acquiring the expertise they need.

Migration is an integral part of the Australian story and its success has helped us become the world's most successful multicultural nation.

There is no doubt foreign workers have played a significant role in the remarkable economic growth of the nation.

More than 100,000 workers from 30 countries helped build the Snowy Hydro Scheme while John Howard's decision to focus our permanent migration programme on bringing in skills has helped the nation enjoy more than two decades of continued economic growth.

This will continue but not at the expense of Australians finding work. Unlike Labor, the Turnbull government will always put Australian workers first.

Bill Shorten sold out Australian workers by allowing a record number of foreign workers into the country, many not filling critical skill shortages.

More than 110,000 foreign workers entered the country in 2013 under the then Labor government. Some were allowed to work in the fast food sector at the expense of young Australians who were looking for work.

That will not happen under this government. We are making it easier for Australians to find work and we have restored order to our borders so we can ensure foreign workers have an opportunity to arrive through the appropriate channels.

Implementation of the new visa will begin immediately, with full implementation to be completed by March 2018.

Full details on the new visa and an explanation of transitional arrangements for current 457 visa holders and applicants is available on the [Department's website](#).

The Government will announce further measures to strengthen the integrity of Australia's migration programme and visa systems in the near future.

[Interview with James Bennett, ABC AM](#)

SABRA LANE:

The Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull flies back into Sydney this morning after three days in India. Mr Turnbull had been talking up a joint Prime Ministerial commitment between himself and India's PM Narendra Modi to revive free trade talks as a key outcome from that visit. But Mr Turnbull now concedes that despite that a deal may never eventuate. The Prime Minister spoke with the ABC's South Asia correspondent James Bennett who started by asking why negotiations had broken down in the first place.

PRIME MINISTER:

Well look I don't think there's any point in getting into a blame game I mean the fact is that there hasn't been enough progress and so what we've agreed to do is to ensure that our negotiators get back to the table, that they identify the respective claims so we can see where they're close, where they're far apart or issues that they're not addressing and they will then report back to both Prime Ministers and that gives a focus on it and it may be that the conclusion will be that the parties are too far apart to enable a deal to be reached at this time.

JAMES BENNETT:

So that is a realistic prospect? You're open to the fact that a deal worth doing as you've said-

PRIME MINISTER:

Well it has to be a deal worth doing and, so it has got to be a deal worth doing but the important thing, that is that Prime Minister Modi and I have given our prime ministerial direction and leadership and impetus to ensure that the two sides will focus on the nitty-gritty of what the CECA, the free trade agreement would involve and then we can identify where if, where, you know, the parties are apart and see how we can bridge those gaps.

JAMES BENNETT:

Why then did Tony Abbott in 2014 declare that there was a deal that could be signed by the end of 2015?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well you would have to ask him that. The fact is that the Indian offers have not been adequate to date.

You know, look I don't want to get into the blame game, there's no point in that. I know that might be some interest for you perhaps and others.

Mr Modi and I want the matter to be resolved and look we have a great economic relationship and it's getting stronger all the time and it will grow whether or not there is a free trade agreement but it would obviously be enhanced if there was.

JAMES BENNETT:

Can India really replicate the Chinese economic rise?

PRIME MINISTER:

India is obviously not a country where the government is able to direct investment and production in the way China is. On the other hand, China opened up its market to direct investment, it opened up to trade many years ago. Now India, that is relatively recently but nonetheless from a trade point of view India has had a historically a much more protectionist tradition. Now Mr Modi is changing that but obviously these changes tend to have a period of evolution, they don't turn on a dime.

[ENDS]

[Indian Giant to Expand in Australia](#)

One of the world's largest conglomerates has agreed to expand its operations in Australia, after a visit by the Prime Minister, The Hon. Malcolm Turnbull MP.

Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) announced today it will open a new TCS Innovation Lab in Australia, after a one-on-one meeting between Prime Minister Turnbull and the CEO and Managing Director of TCS, Rajesh Gopinathan.

The Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull toured the TCS headquarters in Mumbai yesterday as part of his three day visit to India.

The new facility in Australia will operate as a collaborative space for TCS and its industry partners, employing the best Australian talent, and

utilising the company's vast network of expertise in innovation.

It will complement the Turnbull Government's Innovation and Science agenda, delivering crucial investment across a range of sectors, including financial services, aviation and retail.

TCS says it will spend the next six months reviewing suitable locations for the lab.

The facility will enable Australia to benefit from the research being carried out by the company – and the technological breakthroughs being made – at a network of TCS Innovation Labs worldwide.

Currently, there are nine such labs: in the UK (Peterborough), North America (Cincinnati) and India (Pune, Hyderabad, Chennai, Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore, and Kolkata).

The announcement reflects the Turnbull Government's commitment to invest in science, technology, engineering and mathematics in Australia.

This is an excellent outcome for Australian jobs and innovation.

CEO and Managing Director of Tata Consultancy Services, Rajesh Gopinathan said "TCS has a long history of innovation working with our clients across Australia. I am delighted to take this partnership to a new level in pursuit of Prime Minister Turnbull's Science & Innovation Agenda."

The Tata Group is India's largest conglomerate, and operates across a range of industries including automotive, steel, energy and consumer goods. Some of its brands include Jaguar, Land Rover and Tetley Tea.

Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) employs 378 000 people worldwide, including 3000 in Australia. It provides IT services, consulting and business solutions. Its clients include Qantas, Westpac and AGL.

[Interview with David Speers, Sky News](#)

DAVID SPEERS:

Prime Minister thanks for talking to Sky News. Now you've said that India is evolving into an economic superpower and that its military and strategic power will come with that. What does that mean for the regional status quo? How do you think India is going to use this power?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well India is committed to the rule of law, it's the world's largest democracy, a very successful democracy. India will be a force for stability

in the region. Its values are the same as ours, it believes that international affairs should be governed by international law, disputes where they arise should be settled peacefully and in accordance with –

DAVID SPEERS:

So having a third power in a region – are we talking here along the lines of the power that China and the United States have got in the region? Is that a good thing for Australia?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well the answer is yes. I believe India has, India's values are very deeply ingrained. This is a democracy and, India is an extraordinary, an extraordinary phenomenon. I mean this a nation that hadn't existed as a nation prior to 1947. It's extraordinarily diverse, there are 22 languages, at least 22 languages, 11 scripts. It hasn't had the same history of political unity, for example as China has which goes back, in China's case thousands of years. So the fact that India has been so successful as a nation, as a democracy is an extraordinary achievement in itself.

DAVID SPEERS:

Now, big part of your visit here has been to push the trade agenda. On the free trade agreement negotiations though, as you've acknowledged, the Indian bureaucracy perhaps hasn't been as enthusiastic as you would have liked. What about the Australian bureaucracy though? Do we even have a chief negotiator for the India free trade agreement at the moment?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well the negotiations are being conducted by the, you know the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade –

DAVID SPEERS:

But do they have a chief negotiator?

PRIME MINISTER:

We do and we will be bringing the negotiators back to the table. The critical point here David is that India has a long tradition of protectionism. It would be probably too strong to say it was a closed economy but it was, very big barriers to foreign investment, to foreign trade. So that was its culture. So China, although not a democracy and a communist state opened up to foreign trade and investment much earlier than India did, at least 20 years before, and so that's when I say India is evolving, it is evolving but old habits and attitudes are ingrained. And so what PM Modi and I are doing is making sure that both sides get together, put their respective claims on the table.

Now you see from our point of view, we are an open market already. We have free trade agreements, free access –

DAVID SPEERS:

Which means we probably don't have a lot to offer India? The one thing they do want is greater access to our labour market, for more Indians to be able to come and work in Australia. I understand this has been raised with you by business leaders you've been meeting here. Are you willing to offer anything on that?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well we already have a skills based temporary migration program. As you know, there are many Indians working in Australia on 457 visas or after they've studied, studied at an Australian university – they're entitled, depending on the degree to do, entitled to work for a period. So there's already a lot of Indian temporary skilled workers in Australia –

DAVID SPEERS:

So you're not willing to go beyond what we do already?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well we already provide very substantial access and our temporary migration program is geared to the demands of our economy so we are not putting artificial restraints on it and we're certainly not discriminating but having said that, if a job is able to be done by an Australian it should be done by an Australian. Now that's, that is, every nation is entitled to take that point of view and we certainly do.

DAVID SPEERS:

Now Prime Minister, during this visit you've had to keep up to date on what's been going on with some, well, increasingly concerning international developments. Can I ask you about North Korea firstly? President Donald Trump has tweeted: "North Korea is looking for trouble if China decides to help that would be great, if not we will solve the problem without them, U.S.A."

What do you take that to mean?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I'll leave that for the American President to –

DAVID SPEERS:

But you're an ally –

PRIME MINISTER:

Expand on –

DAVID SPEERS:

Prime Minister, a strong ally. This is an issue that matters to Australia.

PRIME MINISTER:

It does and the obligation I believe is on China as North Korea's closest ally, as its neighbour, as its most significant economic partner to enforce the UN sanctions and to bring the pressure to bear on North Korea that only China can to ensure that the regime stops this dangerous and reckless conduct-

DAVID SPEERS:

It's not doing that already, China?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well it is not, clearly not doing enough. So the Chinese side would say that they have imposed some sanctions but the reality is that the regime is threatening peace and stability in the region and in the world and so the Chinese are the parties with the greatest leverage over North Korea. That's a fact. So it is vitally important I believe for China to use its influence to ensure North Korea stops this conduct.

DAVID SPEERS:

The other issue is Syria, now going back a week when this chemical weapons attack first happened you called for an independent international investigation but then a few days later when the US launched its missile strike on Syria you were convinced that Assad was responsible. What convinced you?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well basically the intelligence, and I'm not disclosing any secrets here, the Americans made it very public – it is very clear that the chemical attack was undertaken by the Assad regime.

DAVID SPEERS:

So you were shown intelligence?

PRIME MINISTER:

I'm not going to go into what I was shown.

DAVID SPEERS:

No I don't want you to, but you were shown some evidence?

PRIME MINISTER:

It is a matter of – I am not going to go into intelligence that I have been shown but it is –

DAVID SPEERS:

I'm not asking you to do that.

PRIME MINISTER:

A matter of public knowledge, David, that the United States have made it very clear that the, and it is not frankly, it is not seriously contested by anybody that this was an attack undertaken by the Assad regime and the American response was swift and it was just.

DAVID SPEERS:

Well others though are still saying there needs to be an independent investigation. Is that still your view or not?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I'm sure there will be an investigation and there should be because obviously it's important to know who the individuals were involved, the more we can find out about it the better because individual actors need to be held to account.

DAVID SPEERS:

The point –

PRIME MINISTER:

But it was clear, it is clear the attack was conducted by the Assad regime.

DAVID SPEERS:

The point I am making though is you went from, your initial reaction, we need an investigation to then, coinciding with the missile strikes, saying it is definitely Assad, he's committed a war crime. I am not asking you to tell us what intelligence you might have seen, but there was clear cut evidence you saw?

PRIME MINISTER:

I can say that the matter, I am not going to go into intelligence that I have seen or not seen, I can say to you however, as the US has made public and has been widely acknowledged, this was an attack that was undertaken by the Assad regime and the American response was appropriate, it was just and it was swift.

DAVID SPEERS:

Now what has it achieved, that missile strike?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well it has served to send a very clear message to the Assad regime that the United States will not tolerate the Assad regime using chemical weapons against its own people, in breach of international law, in breach of its own

undertakings, in fact, as you know, to dispose of its chemical weapons stockpile. Also, at a more tactical level, it has prevented that airfield being used, or the aeroplanes and the infrastructure of that airfield being used to deliver chemical weapons again. It sends a very strong message but it was very carefully calibrated. You see, the balance here is providing the strong response, the calibrated response that sends the message, prevents a repeat, but obviously then invites all parties to, as the President said, reach a resolution.

DAVID SPEERS:

The reality is Syria continues, and even from that airfield, continues to use conventional weapons to bomb its own people. Putin hasn't shifted his position on, his support for Assad either. I mean, it hasn't really changed the game in Syria much has it?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, that is what you assert. Time will tell. This is a very complex, some would say, almost an intractable political and military conflict in Syria, but a solution has to be found. It has defied a solution for too long, too many people have died in Syria. And it is up to the nations of the world, as the President said, civilised nations of the world to reach a resolution to ensure a resolution is reached in Syria. This has gone on for too long.

DAVID SPEERS:

And you've said this week it can't include Bashar al-Assad, the political solution. Have you given much thought to who should be in power?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, David, the answer, let me make two points here. Bashar al-Assad's conduct, brutal conduct was one of the factors that started the conflict in the first place, right? So his continued oppression of his people, this chemical attack, surely disqualifies him from any role in a political settlement, this is both a moral statement and a practical statement. I'm echoing what has been said by the American Administration.

DAVID SPEERS:

So if not him?

PRIME MINISTER:

Having said that there are various parties, various interest groups, ethnic groups, religious groups in Syria. It's a very complex environment and clearly in any settlement everybody will need to feel that they are being represented or acknowledged in the outcome so that is why it's a very complex problem.

DAVID SPEERS:

Finally, you're heading back home to a few weeks in lead up to the budget. I know you don't want to get into too much pre-budget speculation.

PRIME MINISTER:

No I don't want to get into any actually.

DAVID SPEERS:

But, as you know –

PRIME MINISTER:

It is your melancholy duty to invite me to engage in it.

DAVID SPEERS:

Correct. In fact, there is quite a debate going on amongst your own colleagues, forget us journalists, about the idea of not raiding superannuation but diverting contributions to superannuation into some sort of account to build up a first home deposit. You had previously said 'thoroughly bad idea'. Has your position changed?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I'm not going to, as I said earlier when I was invited to comment on this, I'm not going to get involved in pre-budget speculation. It is less than a month away and it is, all of these issues are very important. I would just make one observation on housing and again I've said it many dozens of times before – housing affordability, or the unaffordability of housing, particularly for new home buyers is a major challenge especially in our two biggest cities, Sydney and Melbourne, where there's been really strong house price inflation, growth in house prices. This has been a consequence of there being inadequate supply. This demand, we've had strong population growth, strong demand but at the same time we haven't had enough dwellings being built over a long period of time. This is not an issue that has come up over the last year. So what is happening is you are seeing more supply coming on and that is very good but there is a lot to catch up. But, believe me, I mean the Governor of the Reserve Bank, Phil Lowe said this the other day – the fundamental reason why housing prices have shot up so much in Sydney and Melbourne but less so in the rest of Australia, in fact in some markets they've actually gone the other way, has been because of this imbalance between supply and demand.

DAVID SPEERS:

And letting people use their superannuation deposits to buy a house, that might have the adverse impact some suspect?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well this is all part of the pre-budget debate and I'm watching it all but as far as what is going to be in the budget that is a matter for budget night.

DAVID SPEERS:

But on principle itself, superannuation should be locked up for retirement – do you agree with that in principle?

PRIME MINISTER:

The purpose of superannuation is to provide for retirement, that's the objective, the legislative objective of superannuation is to provide for retirement that's the whole purpose of it and that's the way the whole system is set up in the first place.

DAVID SPEERS:

Good system?

PRIME MINISTER:

I believe yes it is. Particularly since the reforms we made last year, it has become, the super system has become, its fairer, its more flexible and I think the reforms we made last year, I know they were controversial in some quarters but they have made a very significant improvement in the availability of super, particularly for women and for people on lower incomes and people who have had disruptive periods of employment, but also, it's a very important part of ensuring Australians when they retire have the resources to have a dignified and comfortable retirement.

DAVID SPEERS:

Prime Minister, thank you for your time. Safe travels home.

PRIME MINISTER:

Thank you very much.

[ENDS]