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Department of Immigration and Border Protection

High Court Challenge

More than 33,000 asylum seekers already in Australia could be able to apply for permanent visas if a new High Court challenge succeeds – thwarting ongoing attempts by the Government to ensure no boat arrivals can stay permanently.

The latest challenge, brought on behalf of a Rohingya man is one of three now before the High Court, but has the much broader potential impact of paving the way for all asylum seekers in a similar situation already in Australia to make a claim for a permanent protection visa. The other two cases, one brought on behalf of an Ethiopian boy, and another on behalf of a Pakistani man, would mean around 4,000 asylum seekers who had previously had a ministerial “bar” lifted to allow them to claim asylum could now claim permanent protection. If the Senate disallows a last-minute regulation made by the Minister after Parliament rose last year – as would appear likely after it returns in the February – that would also pave the way for 4,000 or so to claim permanent protection. If it also succeeds it

could mean around 33,000 asylum seekers who have already arrived in Australia by boat could make valid claim for a permanent protection visa.

Immigration minister Scott Morrison insists the government has a “thumping mandate” to restore temporary protection visas. “This government will not give an inch when it comes to protecting our borders and will take every step necessary to ensure that people who have arrived illegally by boat are not rewarded with permanent visas,” he said. But the government has struggled to implement the policy to deny permanent protection to all asylum seekers.

First the Labor Party and the Green Party combined in the Senate to overturn legislation reinstating temporary protection visas, then the Minister responded by freezing protection visas for the financial year at the number that had already been issued. The executive director of the Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre, David Manne, said the new regulation “fundamentally changed the circumstances in which a protection visa can be granted”. All three High Court challenges to the Morrison regulation are due for an upcoming directions hearing.

www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/13/high-court-challenge-could-enable-asylum-seekers-to-stay-in-australia/print

New rules put asylum seekers on notice to behave

Immigration Minister Scott Morrison will personally cancel the visas of undesirable residents from now on, denying them any right of appeal. He has identified asylum seekers congregating in large numbers in apartments as the type of “antisocial” behaviour that could see them thrown into detention under a new code of conduct for more than 20,000 irregular immigrants living in the community on bridging visas.

Under previous arrangements, anyone on a bridging visa alleged to have broken the law and facing criminal proceedings was returned to detention while the matter made its way through the courts, but the new code greatly widens the types of behaviour that can lead to the penalty. These include “antisocial and disruptive activities that are inconsiderate, disrespectful or they threaten the peaceful enjoyment of other members of the community”. Mr Morrison will personally oversee the cancellation of people’s visas on character grounds – a decision that is not open to AAT review. The minister’s move came as another case emerged of the AAT allowing a Vietnamese man to remain in Australia. Disobeying road rules, failing to comply with an instruction to undertake health treatment, or refusing to co-operate with officials as they review their refugee claims are also deemed to be breaches of the code.

“Currently there’s no provision to really manage that behaviour”. People on bridging visas have extremely limited work rights and receive less than \$250 a week in welfare payments. They can wait up to five years to have their refugee status determined under the “no advantage test”. As a result, many can be crammed into accommodation to help save money.

The new code, and the example cited by Mr Morrison of antisocial behaviour, was attacked by the opposition, with Labor's immigration spokesman, Richard Marles, saying "If people are breaking the law, there should be consequences. But one of the key standards in Australia is the standard of fairness. A situation where you don't break the law but you have simply upset someone and, without being tested, a person is put in detention or even sent off shore is concerning. That is not fair".

"Mr Morrison has asked the department to ensure that consideration of all visa cancellations and refusals based on character grounds are referred to him".

<http://www.smh.com.au/national/scott-morrison-new-rules-put-asylum-seekers-on-notice-to-behave-201331220-2zqyx.html>

<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/victoria/immigration-minister-scott-morrison-to-personally-decide-visa-cancellations/story-fni0fit3-1226800975967>

To the lifeboats

Asylum seekers intercepted on unseaworthy boats could be sent back to Indonesia on large lifeboats in an escalation of the Abbott government's "turn-back" policy. Fairfax Media has learnt the government is buying up to 16 hard-hulled lifeboats – similar to those carried by cruise ships and oil tankers – to which asylum seekers can be transferred and returned to Indonesia if their vessels are unseaworthy.

The revelations came as Indonesian police said Australia had turned back two asylum seeker boats in recent weeks, prompting Jakarta again to voice its condemnation of the policy. Defence sources said the purchase of lifeboats was designed to thwart people-smugglers' tactic of using the most rickety fishing vessels and sabotaging them at sea, leaving Australia border protection authorities no choice but to rescue the passengers.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa, while refusing to comment directly on any turn-back incidents, repeated Jakarta's general condemnation of the policy. "let me put it once more on the record, our rejection of such policy [is] because it's not a conducive and comprehensive solution to the issue," he said.

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/to-the-lifeboats-abbott-plans-to-secure-turnbacks-20140107-30fka.html>

Asylum seekers say they were tricked by navy

Australia for the first time used one of its new lifeboats to send a group of 56 asylum seekers back to Indonesia in a move that is likely to plunge the bilateral relationship to a new low. Fairfax Media has interviewed a large number of would-be refugees from Pakistan and Bangladesh who scuttled their wooden vessel in an attempt to avoid being pushed back to Indonesia.

Instead they were picked up by an Australian Navy vessel, HMAS Stuart, and kept overnight before being transferred to a Customs and Border Protection vessel.

The men said they were tricked into thinking they were going to be taken to Christmas Island. But they were put on a small, bright orange lifeboat-style vessel close to the Indonesian shore, with only enough fuel to return there.

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/asylum-seekers-say-they-were-tricked-by-navy-20140116-30xtz.html>

Jakarta demands: stop your boats

Jakarta has demanded an immediate halt to the Abbott government's asylum-seeker turnbacks policy and announced it will send a frigate to bolster its southern defences after Australian ships repeatedly breached Indonesian territorial waters. In a dramatic escalation of the diplomatic tensions over border protection, Indonesia drew a line in the sand, saying it would step up its own maritime patrols. "The government of Indonesia has a right to protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity in accordance with international laws and the charter of the United Nations."

Fairfax Media understands that three navy ships – including the heavily-armed frigate HMAS Stuart – and one Customs ship have crossed the 12-nautical-mile limit on a total of five occasions.

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/Jakarta-demands-stop-your-boats-20140117-310kq.html>

An apology from Australia

Australia has apologized to Indonesia over Australian border patrol boats entering Indonesian territorial waters without permission as part of a bid to stop asylum seekers. The boat patrols had the potential to further damage strained relations between the near neighbours. Indonesia was outraged and downgraded its relations with Australia.

Border Protection Minister Scott Morrison described the breaches as "a very serious matter," which he said was "extremely regrettable." "We will ensure that the issues that led to these inadvertent breaches of Indonesian territorial sovereignty are rectified and do not re-occur," Minister Morrison said. Indonesia has complained that Australia's policy of turning back asylum seekers' boats threatened to violate Indonesian sovereignty. Australia has denied this, saying that Australian vessels would not enter Indonesia's territorial waters when turning boats around.

Rod McGuirk reports for the Jakarta Post

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2014/01/17/australia-apologizes-boats-entering-indonesia.html>

Significant investor visa programme

New investment options have been added for significant investor visa applicants who wish to invest through eligible managed funds, Assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection, Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash said.

New investment options include annuities issued by an Australia registered life insurance company, derivatives used for portfolio management and non-speculative purposes, loans secured by mortgages over other permitted eligible investments, and bonds, equity and other corporate debt in companies and trusts. The expansion of the list of complying investments through eligible managed funds would provide greater investment flexibility to significant investor visa applicants.

“The government believes that people who create business, people who risk their capital, people who go out every day and create jobs from their own efforts and from their own enterprise are vital to our national interest,” Senator Cash said.

The significant investor visa was introduced to facilitate migration of investment migrants who are willing to invest a minimum of \$5 million in a complying investment in Australia over at least a four year period. The government has approved 65 significant investor visa applications since the programme began on 24 November 2012.

For more information contact Diana Tong in our office.

<http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/mc/2013/mc209891.htm>

Search warrants

Investigators are poring over evidence gathered from a suspected unlawful Melbourne migration agency following a joint Immigration and Australian Federal Police (AFP) operation, Minister for Immigration and Border Protection, Scott Morrison said. The business is suspected to have been making false promises of permanent residence as well as providing migration assistance while not registered to do so. “My department takes allegations of migration fraud seriously and the department and the courts will act against those who attempt to engage in this behaviour”.

Outcomes of visa and migration applications cannot be guaranteed. Migration agents in Australia are required by law to be registered with the Office of the Migration Agents Registration Authority (MARA). It is an offence under the Migration Act for a person who is not a registered agent to provide migration assistance to another person. “Instances of alleged criminal activity relating to the immigration portfolio can result in criminal and/or administrative penalties, including imprisonment.”

See: Office of the Migration Agents Registration Authority

<http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/sm/2013/sm210147.htm>

NSW Skilled Regional Nomination Migration

If you do not qualify for NSW nomination under the Skilled Nominated subclass 190 visa, which is currently on suspension till 1 July 2014, you may still qualify for NSW nomination for a subclass 489 visa. Authorities in New South Wales will consider application for nomination under this visa. To qualify for NSW nomination, you must meet the minimum eligibility requirements. You must be less than 50 years of age at the time of application to DIBP. Applicants must sit the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and score at least a six (6) on each of the four bands (Writing, Speaking, Listening, Reading) and have a suitable skills assessment for their nominated skilled occupation. Certain occupations require a higher standard of English in order to obtain a positive skill assessment.

In order to apply for NSW Nomination under the subclass 489 visa, your occupation must be listed on the NSW State Nominated Occupation List and is on the skilled occupation list of that particular region you are applying for.

The following NSW regions are currently inviting applications under the 489 visa:

- Murray
- Northern Inland
- Orana
- Riverina
- Southern Inland

For this Visa applicants must agree to live in the designated region. Other regions are not currently inviting applications. The Skilled Regional Sponsored Migration visa is a provisional visa valid for four years.

Regional employers can sponsor provisional regional visa holders for permanent residence immediately under the Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme (RSMS) (i.e. they do not have to wait for two years on a provisional visa). Provisional regional visa holders who have lived and worked in regional NSW area for at least two years and worked full time (35 hours a week) for remuneration for one year, may apply directly to the Department for a Skilled Regional (Residence) subclass 887 visa.

Skilled nominated migration

Skilled nomination visa (subclass 190) – NSW nomination closed for 2013/14. NSW will reopen for the subclass 190 visa nomination in July 2014. Information regarding 2014/15 applications will be posted on this website in July 2014.

For more information contact David Bitel in our office.

<http://www.business.nsw.gov.au/live-and-work-in-nsw/visa-and-migration/skilled-regional-migration>

ASIO cancels passports

A Sydney lawyer says she is prepared to fight in the High Court over a decision by ASIO to cancel the passports of 20 Muslim men. The Sydney Morning Herald reported ASIO had cancelled the passports over fears the men, who are from Sydney, who travel overseas to engage in “politically motivated violence”. The move comes after the Australian Federal Police charged two men with allegedly attempting to join the conflict in Syria.

At least four Australians are known to have been killed in the Syria conflict, and intelligence agencies are thought to be tracking about 100 Australians active in the fighting. Lawyer Zali Burrows says she has been approached by 15 of the men whose passports have been cancelled. Ms Burrows says the men have received a letter requiring them to surrender their passports and they have been told they are an adverse security risk. "Basically they're suspected of being terrorists or wanting to go to overseas and participate in the jihad war, or whatever other reasons," she said.

ASIO says it can cancel passports on security grounds and that withholding passports is an important means of preventing Australians from acting against national security.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-12-08/asio-cancels-passports-of-muslim-men/5142884>

Immigration hints at process visa rorts

Reports that a growing number of international students have already found a way of rorting the streamlined visa process appear to have been confirmed with the Immigration Department's launch of a social media campaign to discourage "waka jumping" or "course hopping".

The Maori term refers to students who enrol in a legitimate university or quality private provider then transfer to a cheaper vocational college after six months.

In an email to members of the Education Visa Consulative Committee, Immigration said it would launch a campaign "to raise awareness... about the possible impacts of changing courses". It also plans to send letters to students who swap to non-SVP eligible courses.

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/higher-education/immigration-hints-at-process-visa-rorts/story-e6frgcjx-1226801717778#mm-premium>

Subsequently on 30 January 2014 DIBP issued the following advice.

Fijian migration fraud

Unregistered migration agents who illegally obtain money from their clients have been warned that authorities will actively pursue their prosecution, after search warrants were executed at the home of a western Sydney man.

Officers from the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) were assisted by the Australian Federal Police. Minister for Justice Michael Keenan said the AFP worked closely with DIBP to crack illegal operators who flout Australian migration laws. "This raid should serve as a warning to those providing unregistered migration assistance."

Assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection, Senator Michaelia Cash, said the man is suspected of charging Fijian citizens to obtain visitor visas with no work rights and operating a service which refers them to work illegally on Australian farms.

"This individual, who is not a registered migration agent, is believed to be providing migration advice and advertises these services via his business website, while also referring visa holders with no work rights to work illegally," Minister Cash said. The investigation was in response to an anonymous dobin from the community.

<http://www.ministerjustice.gov.au/Mediareleases/Pages/2013/Fourth%20Quarter/19December2013ImmigrationmountscaseagainstFijianmigrationfraud.aspx>

New Australian citizen convicted of identity fraud

An Indian man's Australian citizenship will be considered for revocation following his conviction for supplying false information, Minister for Immigration and Border Protection Scott Morrison, said.

He welcomed the successful prosecution of Victorian businessman Randeep Singh Waraich for supplying false information in application for Australian visas, and for Australian citizenship.

"The conviction means Mr Waraich may be liable for revocation of his Australian citizenship. The Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) identified that this Thomastown resident had assumed a false identity in an attempt to circumvent Australia's border control and migration laws," Mr Morrison said.

Waraich was convicted on charges s234(1)(c) of the Migration Act (1958) and s50(1) of the *Australian Citizenship Act* (2007). He was fined "\$5000 and was ordered to pay court costs. Where the department becomes aware of fraud, the matters are fully investigated and can result in both criminal and administrative penalties. The successful DIBP prosecution is a clear and unambiguous reminder of this."

This press release reminds citizens that if appropriate convictions are obtained DIBP can move under the Citizenship Act to cancel citizenship and then Permanent Residence. The law in this area is very complex and affected persons should consult a specialist lawyer for advice.

<http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/sm/2013/sm209931.htm>

For more information contact David Bitel in our office.

Human Rights

Refugee Council of Australia advocated human refugee policies

Paul Power of the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) said, "I never imagined that the situation for asylum seekers in Australia would be as dire as it is" now the decision of the Australian Government not to grant asylum to anybody for more than six months is deeply shocking. Australia has, in effect, suspended the commitments that it made when it acceded to the Refugee Convention nearly 60 years ago.

- Australia is sending all asylum seekers who arrived by boat since July to Papua New Guinea and Nauru for long-term detention and a very uncertain future.
- No Bridging Visas have been renewed since September, leaving thousands of asylum seekers who are living in the community with no lawful status and in deep anxiety.
- Most asylum seekers have lost access to government-funded legal aid, meaning that many will have great difficulty articulating the reasons they need protection in a way which meets the provisions of the Migration Act.
- Thousands of asylum seekers remain in detention in Australia in fear and uncertainty.
- Well over 1000 asylum seekers, many from Sri Lanka, have been forcibly returned home with no opportunity at all to put their case for protection from persecution.

It is hard to believe that conditions for asylum seekers have deteriorated to such an extent but it is also impossible to believe that current policies are sustainable – practically, economically or morally.

Change must happen eventually but this will occur only if there are credible voices pushing tirelessly for change no matter how difficult the political environment is now.

We at the Refugee Council of Australia are committed to being a tireless, credible voice for humane policies for refugees. In the 32 years of our organisation's existence, we have never been busier. In the past four months, we have established four new working groups within our membership network to focus in detail on different aspects of asylum policy – detention, offshore processing, legal aid and policies for asylum seekers in the community.

The Refugee Council of Australia represents non-government organisations and individuals working with and for refugees in Australia and around the world.

[From Refugee Council of Australia Newsletter – December 2013](#)

UN denounces inhumanity of island centres

Offshore processing centres on Nauru and Manus Island are more focused on sending asylum seekers home than promoting "safe, fair and humane conditions", a scathing United Nations report has found. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees visited the centres and issued reports finding that Australia's agreements with its island neighbours had left hundreds in limbo. The findings paint an especially dire picture for children and survivors of torture.

The inspectors found children were living in hot, humid, cramped conditions with little privacy, were not going to school and their parents held deep concerns for their mental health. At the time of the UN visit, there were 801 asylum seekers on Nauru and 1091 asylum seekers on Manus Island, including two unaccompanied children.

The UN found the morale of asylum seekers was extremely low because of delays in processing and uncertainty about their futures.

<http://www.smh.com.au/federl-politics/political-news/asylum-seekers-children-found-in-distress-un-denounces-inhumanity-of-island-centres-20131126-2y889.html>

Immigrant family fights deportation

A professional immigrant family in Australia faces deportation because their son has been diagnosed with autism, even though the parents are prepared to pay the extra cost for the child's special schooling. The Kabir's pursuit of a better life in Australia from their native Bangladesh appears to be an immigration success story: Enamul Kabir is a doctor of mathematics and his wife, Siuly, is a doctor of biomedical engineering. Residents of Brisbane, they have lived in Australia for five years and never fail to pay their taxes, they say. However, their eight-year-old-son, Srijon, has been diagnosed with autism and for that reason the Kabirs may be sent packing back to Bangladesh.

They had their application for permanent residency turned down because their son Srijon's condition could "likely result in a significant cost to the Australian community in the areas of health care and community services," The Australian newspaper reported. Enamul Kabir insists his son Srijon will not be a burden on Australia. "He doesn't require any medication and therapy, [the] only support he requires is special schooling, and we are very happy to pay his special school fees if we get permanent residency," he said.

The Kabirs are now awaiting a decision from Mr Morrison who can personally intervene on behalf of the family. "There is discretion on the part of the minister that on the ground of compassionate circumstances he can reverse the decision of the tribunal." A spokesperson said the minister was "waiting for a submission to be prepared for his consideration" by the Immigration Department.

<http://rt.com/news/australia-immigrant-autism-deportation-247/>

ASIO methods criticised

The Administrative Appeals Tribunal chastised ASIO and the Immigration Department over the treatment of a Muslim migrant who was deemed a security risk.

Australian spies illegally coerced a man into speaking with them and failed to inform him of his rights, a tribunal says. The man, referred to only as CXQY, applied for citizenship in 2011 as he wanted to join the police force. However, the domestic spy agency blocked his application, saying he held extremist Islamic views and was likely to engage in politically motivated violence. The Sunni Muslim, who lives in Perth, appealed against the assessment. He said his religious faith was strong but he was not an extremist. The tribunal, which heard some evidence in secret, backed ASIO's decision but rebuked the spy agency for wrongly forcing the man into two interviews. "We also note CXQY was not advised that he could be accompanied to the interviews by another person, including a lawyer," it said.

A spokesman for the spy agency said that it "acts lawfully at all times, including when conducting interviews".

<http://www.smh.com.au/national/asio-methods-used-to-assess-threat-of-wouldbe-police-officer-criticised-20140107-30fk1.html>

Refugee health group gutted

The federal government has gutted the independent body that oversees asylum seekers' health as a new survey showed half of all detainees were taken to hospital emergency wards, most commonly for psychiatric illnesses and self-harm.

Members of the Immigration Health Advisory Group would be dissolved and replaced by one adviser, current group chairman Paul Alexander, who will become the sole independent health adviser to the Immigration Department.

"This is probably one of the most serious, high-risk approaches that government could take in terms of the outcomes for asylum seekers and refugees. They have sacked the people in the country who know the most about refugees. Torture and trauma services... psychologists who have worked extensively with refugees, mental health nurses who know about refugees," a source close to the situation said.

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/refugee-health-group-gutted-20131215-2zfc9.html>

Nauru sacks its sole Magistrate

Nauru's justice system is in disarray and cases against scores of asylum seekers are in limbo after the Nauru government sacked its only magistrate and denies its Australian chief justice a visa to re-enter the country.

The government moved without warning against the Australian magistrate Peter Law when they terminated his employment and escorted him in police custody to the airport. It then ignored an injunction aimed at preventing Mr Law's removal issued by the Nauru's chief justice, Geoffrey Eames, a former Victorian Supreme Court judge, who has expressed concern that the dismissal was politically motivated and an abuse of the rule of law.

Directions hearings involving about 40 asylum seekers charged with riot and wilful damage at the country's detention centre last year were due to be held but are now unlikely to proceed. The move against Mr Law came after he issued two injunctions restraining the government from deporting two residents without giving them any reason or right to challenge the action.

<http://smh.com.au/federl-politics/political-news/nauru-sacks-its-sole-magistrate-leaving-detainees-in-limbo-20140119-312.html>

Education

Minister welcomes new Australia-Indonesia centre

The new Australia-Indonesia centre at Monash University will strengthen Australia's vital relationship with its important neighbour. It will enhance mutual engagement and understanding between the two countries.

The Australia-Indonesia Centre will foster high-value links among government, business and academia," My Pyne said before the Vice President – a former Monash student – delivered a lecture at the university.

"It will help the people of both countries deepen their understanding of each other. I am confident that the centre will help Australians get to know contemporary Indonesia better, build personal connections and foster collaboration in research," Mr Pyne said.

<http://ministers.education.gov.au/pyne/minister-welcomes-new-australia-indonesia-centre>

New Colombo Plan

The Minister for Education, Christopher Pyne welcomes the launch of the New Colombo Plan which is an integral part of the Government's policy to foster deeper relationships and understanding with regional neighbours. "At its heart, the New Colombo Plan is an education initiative that allows the building of relationships through the experience of attending university in a different country". The plan will include highly prestigious scholarships for the most outstanding students going for a semester or a year and a large mobility programme of grants and loans supporting many more students for periods from a few weeks to a full academic year.

"Australian students on the New Colombo Plan in the Asia-Pacific will develop a very valuable understanding of our region – a familiarity that will stand them in good stead throughout their careers.

“Future leaders of neighbouring nations are already visiting and studying in our country and with the New Colombo Plan, our future leaders will similarly benefit by living and studying in our region”. The Department of Education is working closely with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to deliver the scholarships and student mobility grants and loans which are at the heart of the New Colombo Plan.

<http://ministers.education.gov.au/pyne/education-heart-new-colombo-plan>

Free study in Australia

Trade and Investment Minister Andrew Robb has announced the major prize winner of the Government’s *Win your Future Unlimited* competition for international students. Uttam Kumar, 22, from India, won 12 months study in Australia, return flights, accommodation, a stipend and the opportunity for an internship. This valuable prize will provide a life-changing opportunity for Mr Kumar, a gifted student who grew up in a village in the north Indian state of Haryana and won a place at the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi.

He impressed the judges with the clarity, honesty and creativity with which he made his case. “The immense international popularity of this competition shows that Australia’s educational reputation is up there with the best, Mr Robb said.

Postcard Entry by Uttam Kumar

I’m really worried about environmental degradation and pollution. Pursuing research in material science, I want to develop nature friendly materials which will replace harmful material and help alleviate problem of environmental pollution and will enhance environmental sustainability in the world. I believe Australia has the best universities in this field.

http://trademinister.gov.au/releases/2013/ar_mr_131217.html

Additional university places

The Minister for Education has announced a boost to postgraduate and sub-bachelor student places in Australian universities. “Over the next four years, 1,500 more places will be available for people undertaking postgraduate nursing and allied health specialities. “Almost 2,000 new places will be available for students undertaking diplomas of language, and 1,000 places for students undertaking tertiary preparation programmes.

“The Government has paid particular attention in allocation places to support universities that are serving regions with a high need for trained professionals in skills shortage occupations. “We have allocated places for diploma-level language courses and encourage more people to study a second language. “The government is especially keen for students to take up opportunities to study an Asian language,” Mr Pyne said.

<http://ministers.education.gov.au/pyne/coalition-announces-additional-university-places>

Support for students with disabilities

Extra resources and teacher training opportunities to help students with a disability is on its way as a result of revisions to the More Support for Students with Disabilities (MSSD) initiative.

“The MSSD initiative helps schools and teachers better address the needs of students with a disability. States are implementing a range of strategies including boosting a state-wide autism coaching model to increase the skills of classroom teachers.

“The Australian Government is dedicated to improving outcomes for school students with disability”.

<http://ministers.education.gov.au/pyne/government-boosts-support-students-disabilities>

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Australia-China Council Board

Foreign Minister Julie Bishop has announced the appointment of Professor Sandra Harding and Mr Frank Tudor as members of the Australia-China Council Board. Professor Harding and Mr Tudor bring significant experience and knowledge of business and education sectors to the Australia-China Council Board.

They join the Council as Australia looks to further strengthen and diversify our economic and strategic engagement with China, revitalise Australia’s international education sector and facilitate greater student and professional mobility, including through the New Colombo Plan.

The Australia-China Council was established by the Australian Government in 1978 to promote mutual understanding and foster relations between the two countries.

http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2013/jb_mr_131216a.html

Top three ranking

The Heritage Foundation, a conservative US think tank, has once again named Australia as third freest nation in which to do business, putting us behind Hong Kong and Singapore, and above New Zealand and Taiwan in fourth and fifth place.

“With an economy that benefits from sound fundamentals including monetary stability, low public debt, and a vibrant employment market, Australia has weathered the global economic uncertainty well,” the Foundation said. “Openness to global trade and investment is firmly institutionalised, supported by a relatively efficient entrepreneurial framework and a well-functioning independent judiciary.”

<http://www.pressdisplay.com/staging/timesonline/viewer.aspx>

Appointment of Consul-General in Chennai

Foreign Minister Julie Bishop has announced the appointment of Mr Sean Kelly as Australia's next Consul-General in Chennai.

Mr Kelly is a career officer with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and has previously served overseas as Australia's Consul-General in Guangzhou; Australian Embassy, Beijing. He was most recently Director of the India Political and Regional Section.

Engagement with South India is crucial to building Australia's Strategic Partnership with India. India is Australia's fifth largest export market, with South India being a primary export destination. Close to half of the \$11 billion invested from India into Australia has come South India, mainly in resources.

Links with South India's knowledge economy are growing rapidly, particularly in the area of education, science, space and IT. Cooperation on combatting people smuggling is strong. Indian Ocean, cultural and people-to-people linkages are also driving closer engagement with South India.

http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2014/jb_mr_14110a.html

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