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1. Margaret Simons: Journalism faces a crisis worldwide – we might be entering a new dark age

Almost anyone can use the worldwide web to be a media outlet, so how will we differentiate between truth, myth and lies?

The Guardian
Margaret Simons
Saturday 15 April 2017 11.13 AEST

Australia's two largest legacy media organisations recently announced big cuts to their journalistic staff. Many editorial positions, perhaps up to 120, will disappear at Fairfax Media, publisher of The Age and The Sydney Morning Herald, and News Corporation announced the sacking of most of its photographers and editorial production staff.

Both announcements were accompanied by corporate spin voicing a continuing commitment to quality journalism. Nobody in the know believes it. This is the latest local lurch in a crisis that is engulfing journalism worldwide.

Now, partly thanks to Donald Trump, many more people are turning their mind to the future of news, including “fake” news and its opposite.

How, in the future, are we to know the difference between truth, myth and lies?

Almost too late, there is a new concern for the virtues of the traditional newsroom, and what good journalists do. That is, find things out, verify the facts and publish them in outlets which, despite famous stuff-ups, can generally be relied upon to provide the best available version of the truth.

As this week's announcements make clear, the newsrooms that have traditionally provided most original journalism are radically shrinking.

News media for most of the last century appeared to be one relatively simple business. Gather an audience by providing content, including news. Sell the attention of the audience to advertisers.

The internet and its applications have brought that business undone. As any householder can attest, the audience no longer assembles in the same concentrations. The family no longer gathers around the news on television. Most homes have multiple screens and news is absorbed as it happens.

“Appointment television” is nearly dead, at least for those under 50.

At the same time, technology has torn apart the two businesses – advertising and news – that used to be bound together by the physical artefact of the newspaper. Once, those who wanted to find a house, a job or a car had to buy a newspaper to read the classifieds. Now, it is cheaper and more efficient to advertise and search online, without needing to pay a single journalist.

Publishers and broadcasters have moved online, but the advertising model fails. Ads on websites earn a fraction of the amount that used to be charged for the equivalent in a newspaper or during a program break.

All this is last century's news – but over the past five years the landscape has shifted again because of the dominance of Google (which also owns YouTube) and Facebook. These social media engines have quickly become the world's most powerful publishers. Besides them, Murdoch looks puny. Yet Google and Facebook don't employ journalists. They serve advertisements and news to the audience members on the basis of what they know about their interests.

For advertisers, it's all gravy. Why pay for a display ad in a newspaper when you can have your material delivered direct to the social media feeds of people who you know are likely to be interested in buying your product?

It is now estimated that of every dollar spent on advertising in the western world, 90 cents ends up in the pockets of Google and Facebook.

Today, just about anyone with an internet connection and a social media account has the capacity to publish news and views to the world. This is new in human history.

The last great innovation in communications technology, the printing press, helped bring about the enlightenment of the 1500s and 1600s.

The optimists among us thought the worldwide web and its applications might lead to a new enlightenment – but as has become increasingly clear, the reverse is also possible. We might be entering a new dark age.

Fake news isn't new. The place of Barack Obama's birth was about as verifiable as a fact gets – with the primary document, his birth certificate, published online. But the mere publication of a fact did not stop a large proportion of US citizens from believing the myth that he was born overseas.

It is very hard to say how many Australian journalists have left the profession over the last 10 years.

This is partly because the nature of journalistic work has changed. Many now work aggregating or producing digital content, never leaving their desks.

Institutions such as universities and NGOs are now producing journalistic content, published online, but the people employed to do this task rarely show up in the figures compiled by unions and the Australian Bureau of Statistics, because their employers are not classified as media organisations.

Nevertheless, the big newsrooms have shrunk beyond recognition. This week's announcements were the latest in a 15-year trend. In 2013, industry commentators estimated that more than 3000 Australian journalists had lost their jobs in the previous five years. Since then, there have been further deep cuts, and last week's announcements were merely the latest. In the US, it is estimated that 15 per cent of journalistic jobs disappeared between 2005 and 2009, and the cuts haven't paused since then.

At the same time, and offsetting this, there are new participants in the Australian media. We now have online local versions of the British Daily Mail, the youth-oriented news and entertainment outlet Buzzfeed, the New York Times, (which has just launched) and the Huffington Post, which operates in partnership with Fairfax. Not least, there is this outlet – an Australian edition of the Guardian.

There are also many small, specialist outlets that exist because the economics of online publishing beat the cost of buying broadcasting licences or printing on bits of dead tree, trucking the papers around the nation and throwing them over the fences.

For the same reasons, almost any large organisation can, if it chooses, use the worldwide web to be a media outlet – though whether the output classes as journalism or public relations is another matter.

Most of the new entrants to the business employ only a few local journalists. The reputable ones struggle to perform miracles each hour with hardly any reporters.

So what does the future hold?

I think it is clear we will have many more smaller newsrooms in the future – including new entrants, non-media organisations touting their wares and the wasted remains of the old businesses.

Some of these newsrooms will operate on the slippery slopes that lie between news, advocacy and advertising.

Some of them will be the fake news factories, devoted to earning an income from spreading clickable, outrageous lies.

If it were only the decline of businesses, we would not need to worry so much. It is rare in history for those who have profited from one technology to go on to dominate the next. Cobb and Co ran the stagecoaches, but not the steam trains.

But it is more serious than the decline of private businesses.

The future is far from clear, but here are some things we can expect to see delivered more quickly than we might think.

First, social media companies will begin to invest in quality content, because otherwise they will lose their audiences.

This is not merely wishful thinking. In China, WeChat, owned by Tencent Corporation, is the dominant social media engine and has functionality that makes Facebook and Twitter look old-fashioned. If you want to know what's coming next in social media, look to China.

As I found on a recent research trip to China, WeChat is investing a lot of money in original journalism. Many of the most interesting journalists in China – including some who have been jailed in the past for their work – are now earning better salaries than those available on party media outlets by freelancing for Tencent, which actively supports and encourages them in multiple ways.

It's counterintuitive, given China's record on freedom of speech, but then the country is changing so fast and is so complex that preconceptions can only be challenged. China might have begun by copying the social media activity of the west, but it has long since outstripped it.

FULL STORY AT <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2017/apr/15/journalism-faces-a-crisis-worldwide-we-might-be-entering-a-new-dark-age>

2. Opening of UN files on Holocaust will 'rewrite chapters of history'

Archive used in prosecution of Nazis reveals detailed evidence of death camps and genocide previously unseen by public

The Guardian

Owen Bowcott, Legal affairs correspondent

Tuesday 18 April 2017 09.01 AEST

War crimes files revealing early evidence of Holocaust death camps that was smuggled out of eastern Europe are among tens of thousands of files to be made public for the first time this week.

The once-inaccessible archive of the UN war crimes commission, dating back to 1943, is being opened by the Wiener Library in London with a catalogue that can be searched online.

The files establish that some of the first demands for justice came from countries that had been invaded, such as Poland and China, rather than Britain, the US and Russia, which eventually coordinated the post-war Nuremberg trials.

The archive, along with the UNWCC, was closed in the late 1940s as West Germany was transformed into a pivotal ally at the start of the cold war and use of the records was effectively suppressed. Around the same time, many convicted Nazis were granted early release after the anti-communist US senator Joseph McCarthy lobbied to end war crimes trials.

Access to the vast quantity of evidence and indictments is timed to coincide with the publication on Tuesday of *Human Rights After Hitler: The Lost History of Prosecuting Axis War Crimes* by Dan Plesch, a researcher who has been working on the documents for a decade.

The documents record the gathering of evidence shortly after the UN was founded in January 1942. They demonstrate that rape and forced prostitution were being prosecuted as war crimes in tribunals as far apart as Greece, the Philippines and Poland in the late 1940s, despite more recent suggestions that this was a legal innovation following the 1990s Bosnian conflict.

The Polish government in exile, the files also record, supplied extraordinarily detailed descriptions to the UNWCC of concentration camps such as Treblinka and Auschwitz, where millions of Jews were gassed. The accounts had been smuggled out of occupied eastern Europe. A charge sheet from April 1944 mentions victims being forced to strip off clothing and how "the terracotta floors in the chambers ... became very slippery when wet".

The Wiener Library was founded in Amsterdam in 1934 by Dr Alfred Wiener to monitor Nazi antisemitism. He shipped his collection to London on the eve of the second world war, then worked with the British government to inform officials about Hitler's regime and provide evidence for the Nuremberg trials.

Now based in Bloomsbury, central London, the library supports study of the Holocaust and genocide. It also works with the International Tracing Service to provide free help to those searching for relatives who vanished into the concentration camps.

"The UN War Crimes Commission catalogue, which can be searched online, will be available through our website this week," the library's archivist, Howard Falksohn, said. "People will then be able to come in and look through the archive itself.

"We anticipate a lot of interest. Some of the PDF files [on to which the 900GB UN archive has been copied] each contain more than 2,000 pages. This is the first time they will be available to anyone in the UK. It may well be that people will be able to rewrite crucial chapters of history using the new evidence."

Plesch, who is the director of the Centre for International Studies and Diplomacy at Soas in the University of London, had to get special permission to read the documents, which were closely guarded by the UN in New York.

Only researchers who received authority from their government and consent from the UN secretary general were allowed to read them, and they were not allowed to take notes or copies. Plesch helped persuade diplomats, including the then US ambassador at the UN, Samantha Power, to release the secret material.

"This is a huge resource for combating Holocaust denial," Plesch said. "The German national authorities were never given access to the archive by the allies after the war. All of this has never seen the light of day."

Some of the earliest files of evidence were collected to indict Adolf Hitler directly for his role in the coordinating and controlling massacres carried out by Nazi units in Czechoslovakia. Much of the evidence was collected by the Czech government in exile. There are more than 300 pages detailing his orders and responsibilities. The Nazi leader was eventually indicted in secret by a meeting of the UNWCC in late 1944 as Luftwaffe bombs fell on London.

One affidavit in the files is from a British soldier, Harry Ogden, who was captured at Narvik in Norway in 1940, escaped from a prisoner of war camp to join Polish partisans and was re-imprisoned in another POW camp alongside Auschwitz.

By the late 1940s, the US and British governments were winding down prosecutions of Nazis. President Harry Truman made anti-communism, rather than holding Nazis to account, a priority, Plesch says. “Even action against the perpetrators of the massacre of British RAF officers attempting to escape from prison camp Stalag Luft III, a flight made iconic by films such as The Great Escape, was curtailed.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/law/2017/apr/18/opening-un-holocaust-files-archive-war-crimes-commission>

3. Citizenship changes will 'put Australian values first' – Malcolm Turnbull

Plan to replace 457 visas just the start of adjustments to migration program, which must promote social cohesion, PM says

The Guardian

Katharine Murphy Political editor

Wednesday 19 April 2017 11.16 AEST

Malcolm Turnbull has flagged changes to Australia's immigration and citizenship program, saying it is important to attract people who will “embrace our values and positively contribute”.

The prime minister used a speech to a business breakfast on Wednesday morning to warn that support for migration had “disintegrated” in countries without strong border controls, and he said irregular migration had “threatened the social fabric” of European countries. Turnbull said changes to the 457 skilled visa program, outlined by the government on Tuesday, were the start of adjustments to the migration and citizenship program which would put “Australian jobs and Australian values first”.

“Changes to citizenship will enable our migration program to contribute still further to our social cohesion while enhancing our security,” Turnbull said Wednesday. “Australia must continue to attract people who will embrace our values and positively contribute, regardless of nationality or religious belief.”

“This is important for temporary visas, vital for permanent residency and citizenship. Citizenship must be valued and we're making changes so the practices and principles of those obtaining citizenship are consistent with our cultural values.”

The government has been telegraphing its intention to overhaul the current citizenship test for several months, reflecting ongoing deliberations in the national security committee of cabinet. Turnbull's comments suggest an announcement is imminent.

In early February the immigration minister, Peter Dutton, signalled a new, tougher citizenship test could consider behaviour including whether or not parents sent their children to school in the country they lived in before they applied for permanent residency in Australia.

“It could go beyond that,” Dutton said. “We could look at whether or not somebody has been involved in an outlaw motorcycle gang, we could look at whether somebody has been involved, for example, in domestic violence, we could look at whether or not somebody had children that were of school age, but had not attended school for extended periods over that preceding three or four years.”

Dutton said the new test would be about ensuring new arrivals wanted to share Australian values. “If you want to live in this country you need to abide by the law and if you're not going to abide by the law, or you're not going to work if you've got a capacity to work, if you're going to spend your time on welfare, or your kids are involved in Apex gangs in Victoria, for instance, then really we need to question whether that person is the best possible citizen.”

On Wednesday he said the government was of the view that people applying for Australian citizenship needed to demonstrate adherence to Australian values and a concrete commitment to abide by Australian laws.

The immigration minister said “measures” would need to be taken before people achieved permanent residency under the revised test.

His comments are consistent with a proposal under which would-be permanent residents would be granted a provisional visa before achieving permanent residency. Documents obtained by Fairfax Media last November indicated the government was contemplating such a system.

The leaked documents also made it clear that federal officials had significant concerns about the government's proposal, with a briefing note that said: “The proposed reforms could undermine Australia's social cohesion and potentially increase the risk factors that may lead to violent extremism by creating a two-tier society where migrants are treated substantially differently to Australian citizens.”

The briefing paper also suggested the overhaul could contravene Australia's internal obligations if the provisional visa system imposed an additional waiting period for access to the social safety net.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/apr/19/citizenship-changes-will-put-australian-values-first-malcolm-turnbull>

4. 'Speak English, respect our values': Malcolm Turnbull's next citizenship crackdown

Canberra Times
April 19 2017 - 9:44PM
James Massola

Would-be Australians will face tough new hurdles – including a new English language and "Australian values" test – and have to wait several more years before being eligible for citizenship, under a major shake-up of the migration program.

Migrants could be asked whether they support female genital mutilation and forced marriages, or whether it's acceptable to strike a spouse at home, under proposed values-based citizenship test questions to be put to the public for feedback.

Applicants will also have to demonstrate they have attempted to integrate into Australian society, providing evidence of a job, the enrolment of their children in school, and even membership of community organisations.

Under the current system, migrants enter Australia on a range of visas. They can then become permanent residents but have to wait a further year before applying for citizenship. The one-year wait will rise to four years under the redesigned scheme.

The new measures are the second tranche of changes to Australia's immigration system in less than a week. On Tuesday, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and Immigration Minister Peter Dutton announced the 457 foreign worker visa program would be axed and replaced by an "Australians first" approach to skilled migration.

The two-step push underscores the Turnbull government's shift to the right on immigration and border protection, which has been driven in part by Mr Dutton and other leading conservatives. They will probably be welcomed by the conservative base of the Coalition and nationalist parties such as One Nation, but some sections of Australia's migrant communities could feel targeted.

The changes are due to take effect from Thursday, but they will have to pass both houses of Parliament, opening a fresh political fight with the Labor opposition and crossbenchers.

Mr Turnbull said the citizenship changes, to be announced on Thursday, would put "Australian values at the heart of citizenship processes and requirements".

"Membership of the Australian family is a privilege and should be afforded to those who support our values, respect our laws and want to work hard by integrating and contributing to an even better Australia. We must ensure that our citizenship program is conducted in our national interest," Mr Turnbull said.

"Any conduct that is inconsistent with Australian values will be considered as part of this process. Criminal activity including family violence or involvement in organised crime is thoroughly inconsistent with Australian values."

Mr Dutton said Australians "shouldn't be embarrassed to say we want great people to call Australia home".

"We want people who abide by our laws and our values and we should expect nothing less," he said.

A third tranche of changes is expected and could include the creation of a "provisional visa" class which would tighten access to social security payments, as Fairfax Media revealed in November.

At present, citizenship applicants sit a 20-question test and must correctly answer at least 75 per cent. The quiz asks factual multiple-choice questions about Anzac Day, Australia's system of government and the colours of the Aboriginal flag.

The new quiz will not dump these questions, but "values-based" questions will be added to assess would-be citizens' understanding of and commitment to "Australian values".

If a person fails three times, they will have to wait two years before trying again.

A stand-alone English language test examining reading, writing and listening skills will also be introduced.

A permanent resident has most of the same rights as an Australian citizen, though they must have a valid visa with authority to travel if they wish to return to Australia. They also can't vote in elections, unless they were enrolled to vote as a British subject before 1984.

Opposition Leader Bill Shorten on Wednesday said the 457 changes were "already unravelling", pointing to an analysis by the ALP that showed just 8.6 per cent of people currently on foreign worker visas were working in jobs that would be excluded under the new visa system. Mr Dutton disputed that claim.

About 7 million permanent migrants have settled in Australia since 1945. In 2014-15, 190,000 places were available for permanent migrants in Australia's immigration program.

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/speak-english-respect-our-values-malcolm-turnbulls-next-citizenship-crackdown-20170419-gvng0y.html>

5. Kristina Keneally: Turnbull and Dutton are appealing to racist attitudes for base political purposes

It's true Australia could do more to bind migrants to the community and its values. But the government is going about it the wrong way

The Guardian
Kristina Keneally
Friday 21 April 2017 15.57 AEST

When I applied for permanent residency and citizenship I got a lesson in real Australian values. You could sum it up in three simple words: "No worries, mate."

Applying for permanent residency in 1993 was a casual affair. I filled out a few forms, wrote a \$400 cheque, and sent it all off from my home in Dayton, Ohio to the Australian embassy in Washington DC. I never met an Australian official face to face. I only spoke to one briefly on the phone, and I initiated that call. A few months later my permanent residency – complete with a green Medicare card – arrived.

Free healthcare and the right to live and work on a permanent basis in Australia, no strings attached, right there in my mailbox.

I moved to Australia. I had no job lined up. Being American, I expected no government welfare support. After answering some job advertisements, I decided to cover all bases and went to Centrelink to lodge my resume for prospective employers to review.

By the time I walked out of the Centrelink office that day, I had signed up for Newstart allowance and rent assistance. My Centrelink officer was a kindly Turkish man who said, "You are an immigrant, just like me. I want you to get all the support you can."

Today this guy would probably be fired for the ease with which he handed out government entitlements. (Don't worry, Christian Porter, I only stayed on these income supports for a couple of weeks before I found work.)

My new Turkish-Australian friend would be not only the most helpful government agent I would meet as a permanent resident, but indeed, the only one.

That is, until I went to lodge my citizenship application in 2000.

As an American, I expected there would be a citizenship test. Such tests are legendary in the USA. In preparation, I read *The Fatal Shore* and learned the rules of rugby league. I knew the Dismissal was a constitutional outrage and that Harold Holt may or may not have been abducted by spies. I even grudgingly accepted that the Americans may have killed Phar Lap.

"What's on the Australian citizenship test?" I asked my Australian husband.

"There's no such thing," he said.

I refused to believe him. I called the Department of Immigration. They confirmed: no test. You've lived here long enough as a permanent resident. Just show up at your appointed time with the paperwork filled out. Later, there will be a ceremony in your local council area. That's it.

Well, that wasn't quite true.

I lodged my form. A Polish-Australian woman was on the other side of the counter, processing my paperwork. We exchanged pleasantries, establishing she was born in an area of Poland I had visited. Then she said, "OK, we are almost done. Now, just a few questions. Can you tell me the rights and responsibilities of Australian citizenship?"

I said, "I was told there would be no test."

She said, "Well, you have to answer this question."

So, I started, "Well, you have to vote, and, um, to follow the laws, and, um, defend the constitution, and ... "

She gave me a withering look and grabbed a pamphlet from her desk. She turned the pamphlet towards me, pointed her finger at the third paragraph, turned her head away from me, and said again, "What are the rights and responsibilities of Australian citizenship?"

Suffice to say, I passed.

Here's the thing: I was a young, well-educated, English-speaking, healthy woman who grew up in a liberal western democracy. I had an Australian partner who collected me from the airport on arrival. I was unencumbered with children when I came here. My religious faith was shared by most of the population. I even had family connections to Australia through my mother and grandmother.

I had every advantage as a migrant yet at times I still felt left out, confused and on my own when it came to understanding the culture, history, rules, values and language (Aussie slang) of my new country. How in goodness' name is a person who lacks some – or all – of those natural advantages supposed to integrate into Australia? How are they supposed to learn Australian values?

Sure, there are community groups and organisations, some with government funding, that help newly arrived migrants. But they are underfunded and under-resourced. They live year to year on government grants. Their funding is easy to cut: their constituency isn't one that can complain very loudly.

Later, I genuinely learned the rights and responsibilities of Australian citizenship and ran for state parliament. I represented an electorate where 40% of people were born overseas. Yet in the decade I served in office, whether as a MP, minister or premier, I saw little evidence that our federal government had developed anything more sophisticated than a "she'll be right" attitude when it came to integrating new citizens into Australia.

The prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull, and the immigration minister, Peter Dutton, are correct to point out that Australia can do so much better at binding new migrants to our Australian community and its values.

But they are so wrong in their approach.

The Turnbull government's changes to citizenship requirements lack sophisticated thinking about who we are as a nation and how we best invite new migrants to join us.

Instead, Turnbull and Dutton are appealing to nativist, xenophobic and racist attitudes for base political purposes. Their newfound concern for citizenship requirements is disingenuous: Turnbull didn't mention changing citizenship requirements in his National Press Club address in February when he set out his priorities for the year. The new questions are designed to stoke fear and instil suspicion. These measures will be ineffective and, most likely, counterproductive.

If this is the best that Malcolm Turnbull can offer, well, Australia, we've got plenty to worry about, mate.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/commentisfree/2017/apr/21/its-hard-to-integrate-into-australian-society-even-as-an-english-speaking-white-woman>

6. Refugees will be hardest hit by changes to Australia's citizenship test, experts say

Refugee Council of Australia says older refugees, and those from conflict zones with disrupted educations, would potentially fail under new English requirements

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Friday 21 April 2017 09.24 AEST

Refugees would be hit hardest by changes to Australia's citizenship test, the refugee council says, with people deterred from applying for citizenship or potentially failing the test under new English language requirements.

The Refugee Council of Australia argues older refugees, and those who've arrived from conflict zones with disrupted educations, would find the strengthened English requirement hardest.

"While the overwhelming majority of refugee and humanitarian entrants are children and young people who typically learn English quickly, those brought to Australia as refugees include some older adults, torture survivors and people with disabilities who struggle to master English. These are the people who are most likely to miss out on citizenship under the changes being planned by the government," the RCOA chief executive, Paul Power, said.

"The sad irony is that people who have come to Australia as refugees value the freedom and security associated with Australian citizenship more highly than any other group in the nation."

Power said the proposed changes to the citizenship test would not achieve what the government has said it is aiming to do.

“No extremist or terrorist is going to be unearthed by a few questions about values. But the person who will struggle will be the 45-year-old Sudanese mother, who has come to Australia as a refugee, who has had a disrupted, if any, formal education, and is struggling in adulthood to learn a fourth language.”

Department of Immigration and Border Protection statistics reveal refugees apply for citizenship at a higher rate than any other migrant group. But they also fail the test at a far higher rate – refugees have a failure rate of about 8.8% , six times the rate of 1.4% for other categories of migrants. On average, a refugee needs to attempt the citizenship test 2.4 times, double the average for all migrants of 1.2 times.

Announcing the changes, the prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull, said speaking English was a key element of successfully integrating into Australia.

“I reckon if we went out today and said to Australians ‘Do you think you could become an Australian citizen without being able to speak English?’ They’d say ‘You’re kidding. Surely you’d have to be able to speak [English]’, most people would be surprised that this has not been the law for years and it’s fundamental.”

Citizenship already has a “basic” English test requirement, that will be strengthened to a “competent” level assessed by an independent, accredited organisation.

Henry Sherrell, researcher at the ANU’s Crawford School of Public Policy, said the proposed new English language requirement would be a serious barrier to citizenship, particularly for refugees and people in Australia on family visas or the spouses of skilled migrants.

He said the proposed new English level, the equivalent English proficiency of some university entrance requirements, was too high.

“Migrants want to learn English. They want to work. However, not every single newcomer to Australia is in the position to achieve this level of English. This represents a fundamental change to citizenship in Australia with enormous consequences.”

In 2008, one of Australia’s most senior diplomats, Richard Woolcott, reviewed the citizenship test, which had only been introduced the year before. He found it was “flawed, intimidating to some, and discriminatory” and needed significant reform.

“Alternative and improved education pathways to acquire citizenship need to be established for different categories of people seeking citizenship.

“The special situations of refugee and humanitarian entrants and other disadvantaged and vulnerable people seeking citizenship must be addressed.”

The test underwent minor changes in 2009. The citizenship test currently has exemptions for people aged over 60 or with significant disabilities. A government discussion paper on the proposed citizenship test changes, released on Thursday, mentions these exemptions and indicates that they will continue.

Refugees already in the country face substantial – in some cases illegal – barriers to becoming citizens.

More than 10,000 potential citizens who have completed all the requirements for citizenship, including passing the test, and are awaiting only a ceremony to confer citizenship.

In December last year, the federal court ruled the government had acted illegally in putting valid citizenship applications from refugees who’d arrived in the country by boat “in a drawer” – either physical or metaphorical called the “undocumented arrivals drawer” – and refusing to process them.

The government revealed in court there were 10,231 people who had qualified for citizenship who were living in limbo unsure, when, if ever they would be granted citizenship. Some had been invited to ceremonies only to be told by text message the night before that they would not be made citizens.

Justice Mordecai Bromberg ordered the department to re-process the applications of the two refugees brought as test cases before the court, and the department is evaluating the others still waiting on a citizenship ceremony.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/apr/21/refugees-will-be-hardest-hit-by-changes-to-australias-citizenship-test-experts-say>

7. A Report Into “Prison-Like” Conditions For Refugees Was Released Late On A Friday Afternoon

Asylum seekers detained in "prison-like" conditions at Australia's offshore detention centre on the Pacific Island nation of Nauru should have improved medical treatment options and potentially be settled in New Zealand, an Australian government committee has recommended.

BuzzFeed
April 21, 2017, 2:45pm
Gina Rushton
BuzzFeed News Reporter, Australia

Detainees had access to "substandard health facilities" and suffered severe mental illnesses, the committee's report, released on Friday afternoon, stated.

The committee, which was made up of six parliamentarians from across the political spectrum, began by stating that the Australian government clearly had a "duty of care" to asylum seekers in its offshore detention facilities.

"The secrecy surrounding regional processing centre [RPC] operations must cease. Refugees and asylum seekers are highly vulnerable, and this vulnerability is exacerbated where they are housed in distant and remote locations."

The committee recommended that the government increase Australia's refugee intake, give "serious consideration" to resettlement options in New Zealand, and commission an external review of its medical transfer procedures in offshore processing centres.

There were 134 incidents of self harm and 75 instances of the use of force against asylum seekers from July 2014 to July 2015.

"The committee heard allegations of unprofessional conduct by some members of RPC staff, including conduct designed to deliberately antagonise and taunt asylum seekers and refugees," the report read.

But not all six parliamentarians on the committee agreed.

The Coalition's Ian Macdonald and David Fawcett disputed the contents of the report and argued against many of the recommendations. The inquiry, they wrote, was a "politically motivated public relations stunt" designed to "tarnish the success of the Coalition's strong border protection policies".

"The report is highly speculative and relies consistently on anecdotal evidence, second and third hand reports, and on unsupported allegations that are presented as fact," their dissenting statement read.

The non-dissenting committee members were the ALP's Louise Pratt, Patrick Dodson and Murray Watt and Greens senator Nick McKim.

https://www.buzzfeed.com/ginarushton/nauru-report?utm_term=.vvZxrGy7N#.qqGIWXdVq

8. Australia must end 'fiction' it does not control Nauru and Manus centres, Senate inquiry finds

Government has duty of care to asylum seekers and refugees held in offshore processing, senators say, after investigation sparked by publication of the Nauru files

The Guardian
Helen Davidson and Christopher Knaus
Friday 21 April 2017 17.41 AEST
Last modified on Friday 21 April 2017 17.42 AEST

The Australian government must admit it controls the offshore processing centres on Manus Island and in Nauru and has a duty of care to the asylum seekers and refugees it detains, a Senate inquiry has found, declaring that "to suggest anything else is fiction".

On Friday the Senate standing committees on legal and constitutional affairs delivered damning findings from a seven-month inquiry into allegations of abuse on Manus Island and Nauru, sparked by the Guardian's publication of the Nauru files.

Its publication coincided with the release of fresh evidence about the December death on Manus of a Sudanese refugee, Faysal Ishak Ahmed, who waited 12 hours for an air ambulance after suffering a seizure.

The committee's majority report, written by Labor senators and supported by the Greens, labelled the federal government's offshore processing policy as "disturbing" in its lack of accountability and said the Department of Immigration and Border Protection had clearly failed to deliver the policy in a transparent and safe manner.

In a foreword to the report, the inquiry's chair, the Labor senator Louise Pratt, said significant changes had to be made to the administration of offshore processing policy if it was to continue.

"First and foremost" the Australian government had to acknowledge that it controlled the regional processing centres, the report said.

The government routinely dismisses questions about incidents and operations inside the centres by declaring it a matter for the Papua New Guinean and Nauruan governments. But the report noted that the Australian government paid for all associated costs, engaged contractors, owned all major assets and was responsible for negotiating third-party resettlements.

Additionally, the department was the final decision maker regarding specialist health services and medical transfers. "Incident reports are also provided to the department so it cannot claim that it was not aware of incidents that occurred in RPCs outside of Australia."

The government clearly had a duty of care to the asylum seekers it transferred to the Pacific islands, the report said, and "to suggest otherwise is fiction".

The committee also called for an end to the secrecy, which it said exacerbated the vulnerability of refugees and asylum seekers, and prevented proper scrutiny.

It made 12 recommendations to improve the conditions inside the two island centres, but stopped short of calling for their closure, as the Greens' report did.

The committee's recommendations included an increase to Australia's refugee intake, greater funding to the United Nations high commissioner for refugees, a regional processing framework and an immediate external review of the department's medical transfer procedures.

The committee also recommended an independent assessment of the impact of detention on physical and mental health, and an external audit and investigation into all incident reports over the life of Transfield and Broadspectrum contracts to run both centres, including:

- Incidents that were downgraded in severity, as the Nauru files revealed Wilson's Security officers did regularly
- Any inconsistencies in relation to incidents being downgraded in severity
- Evidence of follow-up activities after reported incidents.

The Greens said the establishment and operation of the regional processing centres was "a shameful chapter in Australia's national story" and recommended they be immediately closed, with the detainees brought to Australia. They called for a formal apology and reparations, as well as a royal commission or, failing that, a standing inquiry that reports every six months.

'Clear failures by the department'

The Senate inquiry was launched in September after the Guardian's publication of the Nauru files, a cache of more than 2,000 documents containing reports and allegations of assaults, acts of sexual abuse of children, self-harm and suicide attempts in the Nauru detention centre.

Pratt said the evidence provided by the Nauru files was "deeply concerning" and it was the first time such volume and detail of information had been made public.

"Some of the reports are recordings of allegations made by refugees and asylum seekers, and many contain information which workers have observed first hand," she said. "Even more troublingly, these reports only record those incidents which have actually been reported to workers, or which workers have themselves observed. Undoubtedly, they do not reflect the true prevalence of such incidents."

Australia's offshore processing policy was "deeply affected by structural complexity" and a reliance on the private sector, the report said.

"Despite the efforts of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection, its contractors and subcontractors, and other related stakeholders, there are clear failures by the department in administering the current policy in a safe and transparent manner," it said.

"This structural complexity has led to a lack of accountability and transparency in the administration of the policy, and a failure to clearly acknowledge where the duty of care lies in relation to those asylum seekers and refugees."

It said Australian taxpayers and the Senate were entitled to greater transparency about the cost of administering the policy, and the lack of accountability was “disturbing”.

Coalition: report a ‘public-relations stunt’

In a dissenting report the Coalition senators dismissed the inquiry entirely as “a politically motivated public-relations stunt on the part of Labor and the Greens designed to tarnish the success of the Coalition’s strong border protection policies by inference and hearsay”.

The report, written by the Queensland senator Ian Macdonald, praised the Coalition government’s success at stopping boat arrivals, closing mainland detention centres and contributing to budget savings. It disagreed with all recommendations by the majority committee, noting improvements in health services and rejecting the cost of further investigations, which it said were not needed.

The suggestion the government was not taking all third-country offers seriously was “mischievous and false”. It also said there was already a regional framework in place. It accused the report of being “highly speculative” and relying on anecdotal evidence and second- and third-hand reports, as well as on unsupported allegations presented as fact.

It said the inquiry should have been permanently abandoned if media reports were the basis for the allegations. The Guardian’s Nauru files were primary documents – largely written by staff and many from eyewitness accounts – and were distributed to at least 19 government email addresses and stored by the department. The Senate report also criticised the government for clear obstructionism and refusing to provide requested information to the inquiry.

During one of the inquiry hearings, Macdonald dismissed the Nauru files as mostly “trifling at best” while also admitting he had not read them.

Refugee waited 12 hours for ambulance

The report’s release coincided with the publication of answers to questions on notice by the department.

They revealed that Faysal Ishak Ahmed waited 12 hours for an air ambulance after suffering a seizure on 22 December 2016. Ahmed had sought medical attention 13 times in the two months before the seizure, which caused him to fall and hit his head.

The department’s timeline shows an air ambulance was recommended by its health contractor, International Health and Medical Services, at 1.10am. The request was approved at 2.32am but the ambulance did not leave nearby Port Moresby until 2pm.

The ambulance eventually arrived at Manus at 3.15pm and left for Brisbane at 6.07pm. Ahmed was eventually admitted to hospital in Brisbane just after midnight on Christmas Eve.

His death is being investigated by the Queensland coroner.

The department refused to disclose the turnaround times for other medical evacuations, saying it would be an “unreasonable diversion of resources” to provide that level of detail.

Further evidence to the inquiry also confirmed the extent of a dengue fever outbreak at Nauru in February, revealing that 41 people had dengue on 27 March, and four had been airlifted to Australia for treatment.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/apr/21/australia-must-end-fiction-it-does-not-control-nauru-and-manus-centres-senate-inquiry-finds>

9. Manus Island refugee who died in Brisbane waited 12 hours for medical evacuation

ABC News Online

By political reporter Stephanie Anderson

Friday April 21, 2:53pm

A seriously ill young refugee waited more than 12 hours on Manus Island for a medical evacuation to Australia, where he later died.

The 27-year-old Sudanese refugee Faysal Ishak Ahmed died in the Royal Brisbane and Women’s Hospital on Christmas Eve after collapsing on Manus Island two days before.

At the time, the Department of Immigration and Border Protection said in a statement it was unaware of any suspicious circumstances surrounding his death.

New information from the department outlined a 12-hour wait between officials approving the evacuation and the aircraft departing for Manus Island.

The flight from the PNG capital Port Moresby to Manus Island takes about an hour.

It is unclear what caused the lengthy wait.

Further comment has been sought from Immigration Minister Peter Dutton and his department.

The 12-hour delay was detailed after questions in Senate estimates from Labor senator Louise Pratt.

The new details coincide with the release of a report from a Senate inquiry into alleged abuse of asylum seekers in processing centres on Manus Island and Nauru.

In her report, committee chair Senator Pratt recommended an external review of the "complex and confusing" medical transfer procedures in offshore processing centres.

She added that it should be undertaken "as a matter of urgency".

Senator Pratt went on to cite reports that Mr Ahmed had been ill prior to the fall two days before his death and had sought help "every few days".

She further outlined findings from Comcare inspectors, who found that as of late 2014, the approval process for evacuations was "convoluted" and could "unnecessarily delay an evacuation".

But in their dissenting report, Government senators on the committee did not back the recommendation.

They stated that a "robust process is in place for the timely medical transfer of transferees and refugees".

"This inquiry has been a politically motivated public relations stunt on the part of the Labor Party and the Greens," it read.

"Their reckless actions also put into jeopardy Australia's strong relationships with Papua New Guinea and Nauru."

Mr Dutton confirmed last year the centre would be closed following a ruling by PNG's Supreme Court that Australia's detention of asylum seekers on Manus Island was illegal.

Australia and the United States reached an agreement in November for a one-off refugee resettlement deal for people held in detention by Australia on Manus Island and Nauru.

Officials from the US Department of Homeland Security have been on Manus Island fingerprinting and photographing refugees and are expected to return next month to conduct security interviews.

The ABC understands that roughly 600 men on Manus Island may be eligible for resettlement, with about half having had first interviews in December and January.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-04-21/refugee-waited-for-medical-evacuation-for-12-hours/8461794>

10. Human rights groups demand closure of Manus and Nauru after scathing Senate report

Asylum Seeker Resource Centre calls for end to 'dangerous failure' of offshore detention after report finds government responsible for centres

The Guardian
Helen Davidson
Saturday 22 April 2017 12.04 AEST

Human rights and legal groups say a scathing Senate report on offshore processing and conditions inside detention highlights the government's "wilful inaction", and bolsters their calls for the closure of the Manus Island and Nauru centres.

On Friday the government released a report by the Senate committee on legal and constitutional affairs, which followed a seven-month inquiry into allegations of abuse on Manus and Nauru sparked by the Guardian's publication of the Nauru files.

The report found the federal government's offshore processing policy to be "disturbing" in its lack of accountability, and said the immigration department had "failed" to implement it in a safe and transparent manner.

The report said the government had to admit that it was in control of the centres, not the Papua New Guinea and Nauru governments, and that it had a duty of care to people it transferred. "To suggest anything else is fiction," it said.

The report made 12 recommendations including external audits of incident reports made during the contracts of service providers Broadspectrum and Transfield. It also recommended an increase in Australia's refugee intake and an immediate review of the medical transfer process.

The committee's majority report, was written by Labor senators and supported by the Greens, who called for a royal commission or at least a standing inquiry.

The Human Rights Law Centre said "enough is enough".

"For the last four years we've seen report after report confirming that these centres are harmful and fundamentally cruel. How much more evidence do we need?" said the centre's director of legal advocacy, Daniel Webb, calling for every detainee to be immediately evacuated to Australia.

"After four years of fear, violence and limbo, people are completely exhausted. Most were found to be refugees years ago. It's well and truly time our government allowed them to get on with rebuilding their lives in safety."

Natasha Blucher, the detention advocacy manager for the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, said it was "beyond comprehension that our government is continuing to inflict such grave suffering on people in this way".

The ASRC said the government had overwhelming evidence and recommendations from multiple inquiries, but continued to demonstrate "wilful inaction" on addressing the "dangerous failure" of offshore processing.

"Previous reports of the committee have made recommendations relating to increased transparency and access to regional processing centres by media, support to police to ensure their effectiveness for protection of people in the regional processing centres, the construction of permanent infrastructure rather than keeping people in tents, and the removal of children from regional processing centres as a matter of priority," said the organisation.

"The ASRC is still seeing a serious lack of safety in regional processing centres, intense secrecy and lack of media access, and cruel and inhumane living conditions. Children remain in the regional processing centres on Nauru."

Shayne Neumann, opposition spokesman for immigration, said the ball was "firmly in the Turnbull government's court".

"Labor has made clear our commitment to offshore processing, regional resettlement and boat turn backs, when safe to do so, because we know it saves lives," he said.

"We want refugees out of offshore processing centres and resettled into third countries, but while they are living in Australian funded offshore processing centres, Australia has an obligation to ensure they are not subjected to any harm or violence."

Neumann said every refugee in the camps should be eligible to apply for US resettlement, and that no one receiving medical care in Australia should be forced to return to the islands in order to apply.

The Senate inquiry was called in September following the Guardian's publication of the Nauru files, a cache of more than 2,000 internal documents detailing life inside the Nauru centre and including allegations of assault, child abuse, self harm and suicide attempts.

In a dissenting report, Coalition senators dismissed the inquiry entirely as "a politically motivated public-relations stunt on the part of Labor and the Greens designed to tarnish the success of the Coalition's strong border protection policies by inference and hearsay".

During one of the inquiry hearings, Queensland senator and committee deputy chair, Ian Macdonald dismissed the Nauru files as mostly "trifling at best" while also admitting he had not read them.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/apr/22/human-rights-groups-demand-closure-of-manus-and-nauru-after-scathing-senate-report>

11. MEDIA RELEASE: Shooting breaks out on Manus - refugees fear for their lives

Friday April 14, 2017
Refugee Action Coalition
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

There are reports that shooting has broken out between the PNG police and locals on the navy base after locals began attacking the detention centre.

Local navy staff have responded by shooting into detention centre compounds. (Audio of shooting attached)

Wilson security and all staff have fled the compounds, leaving refugees and asylum seekers unprotected and concerned for their lives.

Refugee and asylum seekers are frightened for their safety. There are concerns that the attack could escalate in to the murderous assault that resulted in the killing of Reza Berati in 2014.

One report indicates that there was a clash between refugees and local navy staff playing soccer, that escalated into an attack on the detention centre.

Local began attacking the centre with rocks and knives. After PNG police fired shots, there are reports that navy staff have responded by firing at the PNG police and shooting into the compounds.

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

12. Shots fired as armed mob tries to storm Manus detention centre, reports say

A group of locals, including personnel from naval base, tried to break into camp to attack refugees after incident outside the centre, according to reports

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Friday 14 April 2017 21.06 AEST

Shots have been fired into the Manus Island detention centre as an armed mob attempted to storm the compound, according to reports from security personnel and refugees inside the centre.

At about 6.30pm on Friday, it was reported that a large group of local men had attempted to break into the camp to attack refugees and asylum seekers inside.

Several of the attackers, including reportedly some personnel from the naval base where the detention centre is located, were armed. Live rounds were fired into the compounds of the detention centre, as refugees and asylum seekers cowered inside.

Security personnel working in the detention centre confirmed to Guardian Australia that shots had been fired into the detention centre. Bullets have reportedly been found inside some detention centre compounds, and bullet-holes identified in accommodation blocks.

There were reports of some injuries, but these have not been confirmed.

Manus province police commander David Yapu confirmed his officers had responded to reports of "a situation at the centre". Reinforcement police had been sent to the detention centre.

One refugee inside the camp told Guardian Australia: "The local guys attacked the camps, and they just used the guns. They just shoot the guns. I don't know what to do."

As he spoke, gunshots could be heard in the background, causing him to cower. Voices could be heard yelling in the background as well.

Another refugee said the navy personnel and police began firing and locals were with them throwing rocks at the camp.

"Refugees were beaten by police, navy and locals. After that police and navy started firing in air, but after 10 minutes they started shooting at the detention centre," he said.

"Locals were moving in cars with rocks. And high horns ... about 20 minutes ago. We don't know what will happen tonight."

It is understood the incident may have been sparked by some sort of confrontation on a field just outside of the detention centre. Refugees – though not asylum seekers – are allowed, under certain conditions, outside the wire of the detention centre.

According to some reports, shortly after the incident on the field, a group of local men began attacking the centre with rocks and knives.

After PNG police fired shots at the group, the group, which reportedly included naval personnel, left only to return carrying weapons, and responded by firing at the PNG police and shooting into the compounds.

It is not clear how the incident escalated to the point of a large group trying to storm the detention centre or from where the weapons were brought.

Relations between the refugees and asylum seekers held within the detention centre and local Manusians wax and wane, but there is an underlying mistrust of the transplanted population on behalf of the local people and a fear from the refugees.

In February 2014, the detention centre was attacked during a riot and more than 70 asylum seekers seriously injured.

One man was shot, another had his throat cut and Iranian asylum seeker Reza Barati was murdered by up to 15 people kicking him and jumping on his head.

Ian Rintoul from the Refugee Action Coalition, who has been in contact with several people on Manus Island, said the Manus detention centre was not safe, and should be immediately closed.

"It's just further graphic proof of just how precarious the detention centre is and how vulnerable the men held inside are, that a small incident outside the detention could result in shots being fired at unarmed people, endangering the lives of asylum seekers and refugees."

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/apr/14/shots-fired-as-armed-mob-tries-to-storm-manus-detention-centre-reports-say>

13. Sustained gunfire breaks out at Manus Island detention centre

Canberra Times
April 14 2017 - 10:37PM
Michael Gordon

"They are attacking again." This is how Benham Satah, a witness to the murder of Reza Barati three years ago described the eruption of violence at the Manus Island detention centre on Friday night.

Several detainees reported sustained gunfire from outside the centre after a local sparked an altercation when he tried to shut down a soccer game involving detainees in the Navy base that surrounds the compound.

They said Wilson Security guards who were attempting to protect asylum seekers came under sustained assault from outsiders intent on attacking the refugees.

At least one detainee, a Sudanese refugee, is understood to have been badly hurt after being hit by a rock and a gate to the centre was rammed by a car. A code red was declared and the centre placed in lock-down, detainees said.

A spokesperson for the Australian Immigration and Border Protection department confirmed an incident was being investigated by PNG authorities and that "residents" were safely inside the centre. "There are reports PNG military personnel discharged a weapon into the air during the incident. No-one was injured," the spokesperson said.

"Navy guys and locals I think trying to get inside the camp after beating Australian guards," Imran Mohammad, a 22-year-old Rohingya refugee reported. "Our camp is under attack. The Navy officers are firing. I am hiding in my room," he told Fairfax Media.

He later said: "We are left by ourselves. There is no security inside the compounds."

Several detainees said they feared a repeat of the violence of February 2014, when scores of asylum seekers were injured and Mr Barati was killed when local security guards and residents attacked the centre after days of protests by detainees.

"The refugees were playing soccer in the field and around six o'clock the locals said to the refugees to leave the field," one detainee reported.

"They were leaving the field and suddenly the navy officers and the locals started beating the refugees."

A separate account said the officer who initiated the confrontation was drunk and was hurt in the initial fracas, prompting the officer and others to seek revenge.

"The refugees came back inside the camp now, but the Navy officers are throwing stones and now they are firing. We are really scared now. It's like another riot taking place here today."

One detainee said locals and Navy officers had filled vehicles with stones and were driving around the four compounds throwing them.

Mr Satah said he heard gunfire over a 10-minute period. There were no casualties in the Mike and Foxtrot compounds and they were waiting to establish this was the case in the Oscar and Delta compounds, which were closer to the gunfire, he said.

Late last night he had been told by security guards that asylum seekers were safe but the gates to the centre remained locked.

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/sustained-gunfight-breaks-out-at-manus-island-detention-centre-20170414-gvlcnh.html>

14. Manus Island detention centre shot at by PNG Defence Force members, detainees say

ABC News Online

By PNG correspondent Eric Tlozek

Friday April 14 2017

Papua New Guinea Defence Force personnel have fired shots into the Manus Island detention centre after a fight with asylum seekers, detainees say. Detainees in the centre took cover after a large group of men stormed the gates of the centre about 6:30pm local time on Friday.

The detainees said Australian staff ran for cover after locking the gates. Some sheltered inside the centre with asylum seekers while others were seen running for a boat moored nearby.

The shooting was reportedly in response to an earlier fight between asylum seekers and PNG Defence Force personnel from the adjacent Lombrum Naval Base. Australia's Department of Immigration and Border Protection said in a statement one man had been injured by a rock thrown into the centre but other residents were safe.

"There are reports PNG military personnel discharged a weapon into the air during the incident," the statement said. "No-one was injured." But detainees sent photos from within the centre showing bullets and bullet damage to their accommodation. They said at least 100 rounds were fired during the incident.

Iranian refugee Amir Taghinia was on a bus being driven into the centre when he heard shots. "It's crazy, many people are in shock," he said.

"The staff were running out of the compound like crazy, I think they were getting on a ship."

An Iranian asylum seeker, who wished to remain anonymous, said Australian security staff were sheltering inside the complex with the detainees. "Security staff were inside, they were hiding with us," he said. He said the attackers used high-powered weapons and left bullet holes in building and destroyed a light fitting.

"They were repeatedly shooting and a couple of rooms have been shot," he said. Asylum seekers inside the centre said they did not know if anyone had been shot.

Police waits for more information

Police on the island said reinforcements were ordered to the centre to patrol its perimeter and protect detainees, but they were not sure who the attackers were.

"We have police on the ground and they are trying to contain the situation," Provincial Police Commander David Yapu said shortly after the reports of an incident emerged.

"There is a situation at the centre but I am still waiting for a report."

The dangerous incident highlights the escalating tensions on the island, where more than 800 asylum seekers and refugees remain.

It is not the first time there has been high-level violence at the centre.

Iranian asylum seeker Reza Barati was killed and dozens more people were injured when guards and local people responded to a protest in February 2014.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-04-14/png-police-respond-to-reports-of-shooting-at-manus-is-centre/8445274>

15. Manus Island asylum seeker injured after group tries to storm detention centre

Sudanese man badly hurt by rock thrown into the facility and reports suggest shots were fired by PNG navy and police

The Guardian

Elle Hunt

Saturday 15 April 2017 12.12 AEST

At least one asylum seeker has been injured during a violent altercation after an armed mob attempted to storm the Manus Island detention centre about 6.30pm local time on Friday.

Initial reports also suggest that shots were fired by the Papua New Guinean navy and police. The Guardian has not yet confirmed this.

Fairfax reported that the incident had been sparked when a local man tried to shut down a football match being played by detainees in the navy base surrounding the compound.

A large group of locals stormed the gates of the centre, and gunfire broke out. Wilson Security guards attempting to protect the detainees "came under sustained assault", Fairfax reported.

A Sudanese refugee was badly hurt by a rock thrown into the centre, and a gate to the centre was rammed by a car.

According to the ABC, some Australian staff took cover alongside detainees inside the facility, while others were seen running for a boat moored nearby.

Behrouz Boochani, an Iranian-born journalist and asylum seeker held on Manus Island, was tweeting from the compound as the situation unfolded late on Friday.

"The situation on Manus is critical," he wrote.

His report that more than 100 shots was fired, with some bullets hitting rooms, was confirmed by the Refugee Action Coalition.

Later, about 10.30pm, he tweeted that the Australian staff unexpectedly left the centre, leaving the detainees unprotected.

"The officers closed the gates and left the centre. We are alone, nobody here to protect refugees ... The refugees are scared of another attack on the centre. The Australian officers did not tell us, why did they leave the centre?"

The officers returned after 11pm, according to Boochani's account. "Australian officers just came back to the prison. Navy gone, police driving around the prison. Too scary tonight."

The Australian Immigration and Border Protection Department confirmed in a statement to AAP that an "incident" had occurred at the detention centre, with reports of PNG military personnel discharging a weapon into the air.

It said "residents" were now safe but it was monitoring the situation.

A spokeswoman for the department said it had no further comment to make to Guardian Australia on Saturday morning.

Shayne Neumann, Australia's opposition immigration spokesman, said in a news release that the incident was "concerning and must be fully investigated".

"There have been conflicting reports about how and why this incident began and the types of force used by authorities on Manus Island. The culture of secrecy must change."

Amnesty International echoed the calls for an investigation into the "shocking shooting incident", adding that it was further evidence the Manus detention facility was not a safe place for asylum seekers.

Anna Neistat, the group's senior research director, said further incidents were "inevitable" if refugees and asylum seekers were not relocated to safety.

In February 2014, the Iranian asylum seeker Reza Barati was killed and more than 70 others seriously injured in an attack on centre by local security guards and residents.

Daniel Webb, the legal advocacy director at the Human Rights Law Centre, compared those riots three years ago to the "terrifying and violent attack" on Friday night.

"Most of these men were found to be refugees years ago. Last night's attack has again left them terrified and – after four years of fear, violence and limbo – they are completely exhausted.

"I first visited the camp just after Reza Barati's murder in 2014 and I saw how terrified and tired the men were back then. Yet more than three years later those men are still trapped behind the same fence and living in constant fear. Last night they were once again hiding in their rooms from outsiders intent on attacking them.

"This can't go on another day."

Webb said the lives of the men were in the hands of the prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull. "These attacks show just how urgent the situation is."

The Manus Island detention centre is due to close on 31 October.

The immigration minister, Peter Dutton, has said that those refugees who are not taken under an agreement with the US will be settled in Papua New Guinea, while non-refugees will be sent back to their home country.

People now detained on Manus Island will not be coming to Australia, no matter how hard refugee advocates push, Dutton said this week.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/apr/15/manus-island-asylum-seeker-injured-after-group-tries-to-storm-detention-centre>

16. No one safe at Manus detention centre, say refugees

Canberra Times
April 15 2017 - 5:04PM
Michael Gordon

Refugees have challenged Turnbull government claims that shots fired during an outbreak of violence at the Manus Island detention centre were discharged by PNG military personnel into the air.

They also say at least three asylum seekers and some Australian guards were injured when they were attacked by locals after playing soccer in the navy base that surrounds the compound.

"Last night proved that Australia cannot ensure safety, not only for refugees, but for its citizens too," said Kurdish journalist and detainee, Behrouz Boochani, reflecting the views of other refugees.

Pictures posted by asylum seekers showed bullet holes in rooms of detainees in two compounds, contradicting a statement released by the Australian immigration and border protection department.

A department spokesperson declined to comment on Saturday on reports that at least three asylum seekers were injured, along with some security guards who were trying to protect the detainees.

In a statement issued after the violence late on Good Friday, the department said there was a report on one injury and "reports that PNG military personnel discharged a weapon into the air during the incident".

Church leaders and human rights groups have renewed calls for the detainees to be brought to Australia while asylum seekers are processed for possible resettlement in the United States.

The chair of the Australian Churches' Refugee Taskforce, Dr Peter Catt said, even if the arrangement with the United States continued, the government must act to "create safety and security for those who have languished in offshore detention for too long".

"By bringing people to Australia, the US deal may continue. More importantly, the healing of those who have been damaged by our nation's policy can begin," Dr Catt said.

The director of legal advocacy at the Human Rights Law Centre, Daniel Webb, who has been to Manus three times to investigate conditions on the ground, said the violence was further proof that Malcolm Turnbull "must immediately evacuate the camp and bring the men to safety in Australia".

"Enough is enough. The men on Manus must immediately be evacuated and brought to safety in Australia," he said. "Most of these men were found to be refugees years ago. Last night's attack has again left them terrified and - after four years of fear, violence and limbo - they are completely exhausted."

Amnesty International and Labor for Refugees also called for the asylum seekers to be brought to Australia.

Labor's immigration spokesman Shayne Neumann said the reports of violence were concerning and should be fully investigated.

PNG's chief migration officer Solomon Kantha has ordered a report on the violence, saying he will not comment until he receives it.

Mr Boochani said all of those injured were hit by stones thrown by locals. He did not know if any locals had been hurt.

"The problem started when some of the refugees were coming from a soccer game to the centre, and a man from the Navy who the refugees claim was drunk started to argue with them," he wrote.

"They started to fight each other and then a lot of young local people and refugees got involved in the fight. After a while the refugees ran away to the centre and the local people followed them throwing stones."

As fighting escalated, and some Australian guards were beaten, Mr Boochani says navy personnel began shooting as locals, officers and refugees ran away. "The Navy shot about 100 times and some of their bullets hit and entered the rooms in Mike and Foxtrot (compounds)."

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/no-one-safe-at-manus-detention-centre-say-refugees-20170415-gvliwf.html>

17. Churches demand Manus Island asylum seekers be evacuated

Churches and refugee advocates want all those detained on the Papua New Guinea island brought to Australia after violence against the facility

The Guardian
Australian Associated Press
Sunday 16 April 2017 08.35 AEST

Churches and refugee advocates are calling for asylum seekers on Manus Island to be evacuated to Australia after shots were fired when local men tried to storm the facility.

The Australian Immigration and Border Protection Department has confirmed one asylum seeker was hit by a rock and injured during the violence on Good Friday evening, which reportedly included personnel from the local naval base.

However, Behrouz Boochani, an Iranian-born journalist and asylum seeker held on Manus Island, says three asylum seekers and some Australian officers were hurt.

The Human Rights Law Centre spokesman Daniel Webb on Saturday said "enough is enough" and that Australia's prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull, should immediately bring the men to safety in Australia.

"Most of these men were found to be refugees years ago," he said. "Last night's attack has again left them terrified and – after four years of fear, violence and limbo - they are completely exhausted."

The Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce, which represents several Christian church leaders, called on the government to "act with compassion" and evacuate the camp.

"The darkness of betrayal and abandonment that we are familiar with in the Jesus story is being felt keenly by those on Manus Island this weekend," Very Reverend Peter Catt said in a statement. "By bringing people to Australia, the US (refugee) deal may continue.

"More importantly, the healing of those who have been damaged by our nation's policy can begin".

The immigration department confirmed an incident had occurred at the detention centre, and that there were "reports PNG military personnel discharged a weapon into the air".

Boochani said some of the 100 shots he heard had hit accommodation buildings in the compound.

"Last night proved that Australia cannot ensure safety not only for refugees but for its citizens too," he said on Facebook on Saturday.

Opposition immigration spokesman Shayne Neumann has called for a full investigation at the Australian-funded offshore processing centre, adding that there were conflicting reports about what had happened.

"The culture of secrecy must change," Neumann said on Saturday. "The Turnbull government must be upfront about what has happened overnight on Manus Island."

Amnesty International has also called for a prompt and independent investigation, with senior director for research Anna Neistat joining the calls for the asylum seekers to be moved.

"Friday's shooting serves as just another example that the Manus island detention facility is not a safe place for asylum seekers," Dr Neistat said. "More incidences like this are inevitable unless the refugees and asylum seekers are relocated to safety."

The Manus Island detention centre is due to close on 31 October.

The immigration minister, Peter Dutton, says those refugees who aren't taken under an agreement with the US will settle in PNG, while non-refugees will be sent back to their home country.

Refugees detained on Manus Island would not be coming to Australia, no matter how hard refugee advocates pushed, Dutton said last week.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/apr/16/churches-demand-manus-island-asylum-seekers-be-evacuated>

18. Drunk soldiers blamed for Manus rampage

Canberra Times

April 16 2017 - 5:06PM

Michael Gordon

Provincial police commander David Yapu has slammed the "unethical and unacceptable behaviour of the drunken soldiers" who went on a violent rampage at the Manus Island detention centre on Good Friday.

Inspector Yapu said the soldiers assaulted refugees, his policemen, PNG immigration officers and service providers and caused extensive damage to property and vehicles.

More than 100 detainees have signed a formal complaint, accusing Australian Border Force and Wilson Security of failing to protect those injured during the rampage.

Inspector Yapu said the soldiers were retaliating after one of their colleagues was allegedly assaulted during an altercation between Navy personnel and refugees who were playing soccer in the Navy base that surrounds the detention centre.

Their account is rejected by Sudanese refugee Hass Hassaballa, who has filed a written complaint accusing a "drunk Navy man" of abusing and then assaulting him with others as he was leaving the soccer pitch to return to the centre.

Another asylum seeker has requested further medical treatment after being hit by stones during the rampage, saying he is still bleeding from a head injury.

"I am not feeling safe here," he says.

Human rights and church groups have renewed calls for about 900 asylum seekers on Manus Island to be brought to Australia while applications for resettlement in the United States are processed.

While police say shots were fired into the air during the violence, refugees and one other source insist shots were fired into two compounds and have released pictures of damage.

A witness who asked not to be named said a Naval member approached the centre with an automatic weapon and began firing randomly at the staff and into the centre.

"Chaos immediately broke out as all centre staff desperately tried to run from the gunman and were ordered to take refuge inside the central area of the centre and lock themselves inside," he said.

"It appeared that at least one more gunman arrived with what sounded like a shotgun and both proceeded to walk along the perimeter fence and fire rounds randomly into the centre for approximately five minutes, firing well over 100 rounds."

Inspector Yapu described the situation at the centre as "quiet but tense" on Sunday, and said intervention by the Commanding officer of the Naval Base, Begsy Karaki, had stopped the incident from getting out of hand.

A senior PNG immigration officer and an asylum seeker had been treated at the centre's medical service and discharged, he said. Asylum seekers say three other detainees were hurt.

"Only a day ago the PNG Defence Force Chief of Staff Colonel Numa addressed the commanders' parade and made some good comments to the soldiers to maintain high level of discipline, professionalism and leadership," Inspector Yapu said.

"However, this message had gone to deaf ears and the soldiers showed disrespect to the international and local community at the centre."

Inspector Yapu has set up a team to investigate the incident, and vowed to "leave no stones unturned" in dealing with the perpetrators. "Someone will answer," he said.

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/drunk-soldiers-blamed-for-manus-rampage-20170416-gvlqbu.html>

19. Manus Island shooting caused by drunk soldiers, police say

Police investigating 'nasty' Good Friday shooting at Australian-run detention centre blame Papua New Guinea's military

The Guardian
Helen Davidson
Tuesday 18 April 2017 18.09 AEST

The Good Friday shooting at the Manus Island detention centre was the work of "drunken" PNG soldiers, the regional police commander has said.

During the incident on Friday multiple shots were fired and projectiles thrown at the detention centre as an armed mob, including members of the Papua New Guinea defence force, stormed the facility.

The PNGDF said the incident was triggered by an altercation on a football field when asylum seekers refused to leave the ground as directed, and escalated after an officer was assaulted. Detainees have denied the claim.

Detainees and security personnel working at the centre confirmed multiple shots were fired, which could also be heard in a number of videos. Photographs shared on social media purportedly showed bullet holes in walls and windows.

The local police commander, Inspector David Yapu, said he had launched a full investigation into the "nasty" event which he blamed on drunken soldiers.

Yapu accused members of the PNGDF of "unethical and unacceptable behaviour", shooting at the centre and assaulting staff and asylum seekers in retaliation for the alleged assault.

Yapu said the soldiers went on a rampage and assaulted his officers, PNG immigration officers, and other service providers, as well as targeting the centre and its detainee occupants. They also damaged vehicles and property, he said.

"The soldiers fired several gunshots on the air causing great fear and threats to the local and international community serving at the centre," he said.

"A senior PNG immigration officer was seriously attacked and injured by the soldiers, [and] an asylum seeker, and were treated at International Health Medical Service at the centre and discharged."

Relations between the police force and PNGDF have long been strained, but Yapu said a commanding officer from the Lobrum Naval base brought the situation under control promptly. While it was now quiet, the situation remained tense, he said.

The PNGDF chief of staff, Colonel Ray Numa, told the ABC initial internal investigations had been completed and a legal team from Port Moresby had been given two weeks to determine who was responsible for breaches of military and civil law.

The incident has added to tensions between local Manusians and the detainee population. Ronny Knight, the MP for Manus, rejected claims by asylum seekers and refugees that soldiers were aiming at "head height" rather than firing warning shots, and said they shouldn't be surprised after assaulting an officer.

"There's a hardcore group of these illegal immigrants that cause all these issues because they have failed all their chances at being declared as suitable candidates," he wrote on Facebook.

A journalist detained at the Papua New Guinean immigration detention centre said the incident marked the first time Australian staff had been targeted in the same way as asylum seekers and refugees.

Behrouz Boochani, a Kurdish Iranian journalist, said detainees were returning from the nearby town of Lorengau on a bus when they saw staff fleeing their accommodation.

Two female lawyers had been walking on the road when shooting began, and fled into the jungle, seeking safety with locals nearby, he said, and others who were caught outside also took shelter in the jungle for hours.

"Some officers told me that the soldiers put the guns directly to some Australian officers then shot into the air. The officers were shocked," he said.

“Some staff who could not run away were sheltering in the rooms and some of them were hiding under beds. An Australian woman told me: ‘I have never experienced violence like that and it was the first time in my life that I heard gunshots.’ Another Australian woman was stuck in the immigration office and some soldiers attacked the office and tried to break the window.”

Boochani said the staff he spoke to were “seriously traumatised” by the event, and he’d been told many were leaving Manus and not returning.

“This incident proves that the Australian government and the companies working here cannot ensure safety not only for refugees, but also for Australian citizens. I think that for the first time those people who are working here could understand how hard it is for the refugees who are living under a situation like this for four years.”

Yapu said he was unaware of the specific incidents Bouchani described. Service provider, Broadspectrum, and the Australian department of immigration have been contacted with questions.

A letter signed by dozens of refugees and asylum seekers said they did not feel safe at the centre.

“To those who dragged and forced us to airplane from Christmas Island/Darwin and dropped us to Manus Island: We people have been detained on Manus Island for about four years against our will, are requesting to be moved to some safe place,” it said. “Everyone is terrified due to current attack by PNG defence forces by machine guns, our lives is in danger.”

Guardian Australia has obtained a voice recording of a man, apparently a PNG immigration officer, warning detainees not to walk around outside unnecessarily, telling them he will lock the gate if something should happen again.

The Human Rights Law Centre, the Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce and Amnesty International have said the Good Friday shooting shows the centre is not safe and called for those detained to be brought to Australia while the US process continues.

The department of immigration has maintained no one from Manus Island will be brought to Australia.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/apr/18/manus-island-shooting-asylum-seekers-drunk-soldiers-police-say>

20. Peter Dutton alleges Manus shooting rampage sparked after refugees seen with boy

Immigration minister’s version of events disputed by refugees and contradicts evidence by Papua New Guinean authorities that fight was sparked by football field dispute

The Guardian
Ben Doherty and Helen Davidson
Thursday 20 April 2017 17.24 AEST

The immigration minister, Peter Dutton, has alleged a shooting rampage by Papua New Guinea navy personnel at the Manus Island detention centre on Good Friday was sparked after refugees were seen leading a small boy into the centre.

But this version of events has been fiercely disputed by refugees – who have accused the minister of lying – and contradicts police and defence force evidence which say the fight was sparked over a football field dispute. The police said “drunken soldiers ... rampaged” through the centre, shooting into the air and indiscriminately assaulting people.

Evidence from police, defence force and refugee witnesses to the shooting on Manus Island say the confrontation escalated from a fight over who was allowed to use the soccer field near to the detention centre and inside the naval base which houses the centre.

None of the authorities on the island, or those held inside the detention centre, have mentioned a boy in the six days since the shooting.

In an interview on Sky News, Dutton said three asylum seekers were seen leading a five-year-old boy towards the detention centre.

“I think there was concern about why the boy was being led, or for what purpose he was being led, away back into the regional processing centre,” the minister said on Thursday.

Dutton said there was significant angst surrounding the incident among the PNG community.

“I think it’s fair to say that the mood had elevated quite quickly. I think some of the local residents were quite angry about this particular incident and another alleged sexual assault,” he said.

“Again, I don’t have the full details and those matters are under investigation.”

Behrouz Boochani, an Iranian journalist and Kurdish refugee held on Manus Island, said the shooting was sparked after a fight in the early evening of Good Friday, when naval personnel asked a group of refugees to leave the soccer field, citing orders from the base commander. Security staff tried to break up the fight and were assaulted, and refugees threw rocks at the naval staff.

Boochani said the minister's allegation about the boy's treatment being the cause of the shooting was untrue.

"It's a big lie, and he wants to hide the truth," Boochani said. "He is lying and he wants to deny that he has responsibility for refugees and Australian citizens who are working here."

Boochani said the comments were dangerous because they would create further tension between refugees and the Manusian population.

"Local people and refugees are both victims under this harsh Australian policy."

Boochani said that from Thursday, the navy commander has ordered that refugees cannot use the soccer field until an investigation into the shooting is complete.

"If the fight started because the refugees wanted to take a boy to the centre, why did the navy commander order that we cannot use the soccer ground?"

PNG police confirmed in a statement that "a group of drunken soldiers" had "rampaged" through the detention centre, "firing several shots into the air and indiscriminately assaulting policemen, PNG immigration officers, other service providers and asylum-seekers".

A statement from the PNG defence force alleged an officer was assaulted by an asylum seeker "which led to an escalation of the confrontation".

"Rocks were allegedly thrown by asylum seekers and shots fired by the members of the naval base," the statement read.

"[A] few people [were] treated for minor injuries."

Neither the police nor navy mentioned a boy.

Community tension and hostility towards refugees has reportedly increased since those detained inside the naval base were given the ability to travel into nearby Lorengau township.

In March a 28-year-old Pakistani asylum seeker was arrested for the alleged assault of a 10-year-old PNG girl, and in January an asylum seeker was charged with assaulting a 18-year-old woman.

The Manus MP Ron Knight predicted at the time there may be violence. Those alleged attacks also follows a number of others by staff working at the detention centre, including the alleged drugging and gang rape of a PNG woman who worked at the centre by expatriate colleagues, including Australian citizens.

The PNG government has ordered the Manus Island detention centre closed after nearly four years of detention, and the Australian government has committed to shutting the centre by 31 October. But the fate of the more than 800 refugees and asylum seekers housed on Manus remains unclear.

The US departments of state and homeland security are undertaking "extreme vetting" of refugees for possible resettlement in the US, but president Donald Trump has made no guarantees on how many might be accepted.

The Australian government says there will be a "balance" of refugees left on Manus Island, but that it is not in discussions with any other potential resettlement countries, and that those left must resettle in PNG.

Only about 30 refugees have resettled in PNG over four years. The government firmly maintains that no one from its two offshore detention islands will ever come to Australia.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/apr/20/dutton-alleges-manus-shooting-rampage-sparked-after-refugees-seen-with-boy>

21. Manus Island gunfire sparked by fears over five-year-old boy, says Peter Dutton

Michael Koziol
Canberra Times
April 21 2017

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton says fears about the safety of a five-year-old boy may have sparked last week's rampage on Manus Island, in which gunshots were allegedly fired into the Australian-run detention centre.

Mr Dutton told Sky News asylum seekers had been spotted leading the Papua New Guinean boy into the regional processing centre, which could have led to tensions escalating before the fracas on Good Friday.

Members of the PNG Defence Force, who were apparently drunk, allegedly discharged their weapons, threw stones and assaulted refugees, guards and local police officers in the clash.

However, PNG police were unable to confirm Mr Dutton's account on Thursday, and refugees on the island vehemently denied its accuracy. In his first comments on the incident, Mr Dutton appeared to link the two incidents. "There was an alleged incident where three asylum seekers were alleged to be leading a local five-year-old boy back toward the facility," he said.

"There was a lot of angst around that within the local PNG community. There was concern about why, or for what purpose, the boy was being led away back into the regional processing centre.

"I think it's fair to say the mood had elevated quite quickly. I think some of the local residents were quite angry about this particular incident and another alleged sexual assault [by a refugee on Manus Island]."

Mr Dutton said he did not yet have all the details about the incident and it was subject to an investigation in PNG.

The explanation differs significantly from that put forward by the PNG Defence Force and Manus Island's provincial police commander, David Yapu. Mr Yapu previously said the incident had been sparked by a fight that broke out during a soccer match between asylum seekers and navy personnel. Defence chief-of-staff Raymond Numa said asylum seekers started to throw rocks at soldiers after they were instructed to vacate the naval oval.

Fairfax Media spoke to Mr Yapu on Thursday afternoon. He said the substance of Mr Dutton's explanation "needed to be confirmed", and he had ordered an investigation into the claims.

The boy in question was reportedly the son of a PNG navy officer. He was safely returned to his family.

An Iranian refugee and journalist on Manus Island, Behrouz Boochani, reacted angrily to Mr Dutton's remarks.

"It's a big lie," he said. "His comment is very dangerous and makes this place more unsafe because he is going to make more conflict between refugees and local people."

Tensions are high on Manus Island after a 28-year-old Pakistani refugee was arrested and charged last month for the alleged sexual assault of a 10-year-old girl in Lorengau.

It was the second sexual assault charge brought against an asylum seeker on Manus Island this year. None have been proven, and both have been contested.

The centre is slated for closure in the latter half of this year after being found unconstitutional by the PNG Supreme Court.

American authorities are assessing refugees who have applied for resettlement in the US as part of an agreement struck with the former Obama administration to take up to 1250 refugees from Manus Island and Nauru.

The PNG government has ordered separate investigations into the Good Friday incident, the PNG Post-Courier reported, following divergent explanations about what happened.

In an earlier statement, Mr Yapu said soldiers had fired their guns "into the air", but refugees produced photographs they said showed damage from bullets fired into the compound.

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/manus-island-gunfire-sparked-by-fears-over-fiveyearold-boy-says-peter-dutton-20170420-gvom73.html>

22. PNG police dispute Peter Dutton's account of Manus detention centre attack

ABC News Online

By Eric Tlozek, Stephanie Borys, Uma Patel and Sarah Whyte

Friday April 21, 2017

Papua New Guinea police have rejected claims by Australia's Immigration Minister Peter Dutton that concerns for a small boy led PNG soldiers to attack the detention centre on Manus Island.

Mr Dutton said the incident — in which PNG soldiers fired shots into the centre — was triggered over concerns for the safety of a small child brought into the centre.

Mr Dutton suggested Manus residents feared the boy had been sexually assaulted.

But Manus province police commander David Yapu said Mr Dutton was referring to an unrelated incident in which there was no allegation of sexual assault, and no concerns for the boy's safety.

"If there was a sexual assault, a formal complaint would be made by the parents for the police to pursue investigations," Mr Yapu said.

A 10-year-old boy was brought into the centre, the senior inspector said, to be given food some days before the attack by the soldiers.

"He was given some fruits by the residents in the centre and then he was taken out again," he said.

"So there was nothing done to him and also there was no official complaint by the parents of that small boy."

Asylum seekers in the centre said the boy was begging for food at the centre entrance and that staff were aware that he was brought inside to be fed.

They urged the Australian Government to release CCTV footage from the many cameras at the centre, saying it would show their account was correct.

Mr Dutton's office declined to comment.

Manus MP Ronny Knight said a boy was brought into the centre, but that it happened well before the attack.

"Basically what happened was he was led in there and we don't know the reason why he was led in there," Mr Knight said.

"It was lucky that the parents realised he was missing and acted very quickly and they retrieved him before anything could happen to him.

"I believe he was checked by [medical provider] IHMS and there was nothing done to him sexually or physically."

The MP, PNG Police and the PNG Defence Force have all said the attack on the centre was triggered by a confrontation about the use of the naval base sporting field which led to an officer being assaulted.

PNG Police said the Defence Force personnel were drunk.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-04-21/no-link-between-manus-detention-centre-attack-and-sex-crime/8460948>

23. PNG police flatly reject Peter Dutton's account of Manus shooting

Police contradict immigration minister's claim the shooting began when three asylum seekers led a five-year-old boy to the detention centre

The Guardian

Helen Davidson

Friday 21 April 2017 11.52 AEST Last modified on Friday 21 April 2017 13.06 AEST

The top police officer on Manus Island has flatly rejected the Australian immigration minister's claim that a shooting incident last Friday was sparked by detainees taking a five-year-old boy into the detention centre.

The regional police commander, David Yapu, told Guardian Australia Peter Dutton's comments were completely wrong, and maintained the shooting incident began when an incident between navy personnel and asylum seekers escalated.

"It's a total separate incident altogether," he said. "The incident that transpired on Friday was because a duty soldier was being assaulted by one of the asylum seekers or refugees."

Yapu said a young boy had gone to the centre to ask for food, but he was not led there and was 10, not five.

Last Friday evening multiple shots were fired at and around the immigration detention centre. Asylum seekers, refugees and centre staff cowered in rooms or ran into the jungle to escape the rampage, which Yapu blamed on "drunken soldiers".

The navy and Yapu said detainees had refused to leave a soccer field on the naval base and accused an asylum seeker of assaulting a soldier – which detainees who spoke to the Guardian denied. The situation then escalated and at least two people were injured. The navy said asylum seekers had thrown rocks, and all parties acknowledged soldiers were shooting.

However on Thursday, Dutton alleged the incident was sparked by local people witnessing asylum seekers leading a five-year-old boy towards the centre.

"I think there was concern about why the boy was being led, or for what purpose he was being led, away back into the regional processing centre," he told Sky News.

"I think it's fair to say that the mood had elevated quite quickly. I think some of the local residents were quite angry about this particular incident and another alleged sexual assault," he said, while conceding he did not have "full details".

The comments formed Dutton's only public statement on the incident since it happened a week ago.

Dutton's account, which mirrored a witness's statement to News Corp last week, was wrong, Yapu said.

On social media detainees also disputed Dutton's statement, saying the allegation related to an incident two weeks ago when a young boy asked for some food and detainees told him to stay at the doorway while they gathered some up. Benham Satah said several CCTV cameras would have captured the incident and called for Dutton to release the footage.

"Security came to them later that night and asked what [the] child was doing and they explained and security left," he said.

"My friends who were there say we are ready to testify and request for camera records of this false accusations."

There have been long-running tensions between the military and police in PNG, and in the Manus community hostility towards the asylum seekers and refugees has also reportedly grown, particularly since those detained inside the naval base were given the ability to travel into nearby Lorengau township.

In March a 28-year-old Pakistani asylum seeker was arrested for the alleged assault of a 10-year-old PNG girl, and in January an asylum seeker was charged with assaulting a 18-year-old woman.

The Manus MP Ron Knight predicted at the time there might be violence. There have also been a number of alleged attacks by staff working at the detention centre, including the alleged drugging and gang rape of a PNG woman who worked at the centre by expatriate colleagues, including Australian citizens.

Kurdish journalist and Manus detainee Behrouz Boochani told the Guardian on Thursday Dutton's comments were dangerous and could further inflame community tensions.

The navy and police have launched an investigation into the shooting and pledged to bring perpetrators to justice.

Dutton's office has been contacted for comment.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/apr/21/png-police-reject-peter-dutton-account-manus-shooting>

24. PNG officials, refugees dispute Peter Dutton's account of Manus Island violence

Canberra Times
April 21 2017 - 5:01PM
Michael Koziol

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton is facing claims he has spread "children overboard" style misinformation by appearing to blame asylum seekers for last week's violent outburst at the Manus Island detention centre.

Mr Dutton on Thursday raised the possibility that fears over a five-year-old local boy who was allegedly led into the Australian-run facility sparked the fighting, which resulted in PNG soldiers and police firing up to 100 gunshots.

Without specifying the timing of the alleged incident, Mr Dutton said there was "a lot of angst" in the community about why three asylum seekers had brought a child into the centre - especially in light of two sexual assault charges earlier this year.

But officials in PNG disputed that account on Friday. Manus Province police commander David Yapu confirmed a child had been brought into the facility but said it took place "about one week" before the Good Friday brawl, and had nothing to do with the later outbreak of violence.

"A child about 10 years old was taken into the centre and then was given some fruit," Mr Yapu told Fairfax Media by telephone.

"Then Wilson Security had to intervene and get him out from the centre. That had nothing to do with the latest incident involving soldiers."

The child was returned to his parents unharmed, Mr Yapu confirmed. He said the police investigation into Friday's incident was ongoing but stressed: "The child issue is unrelated - unrelated."

"That's a total different issue altogether," he said.

Fairfax Media did not receive a response from Mr Dutton's office before deadline.

PNG Defence Force chief of staff Raymond Numa, whose soldiers were accused by police of drunken violence in the Good Friday brawl, told Fairfax Media he was not aware of the involvement of a child.

"On the preliminary investigation, there's no mention about a young boy being led into the detention centre," he said Friday.

Refugees at the Manus Island facility have also vehemently denied any link between the fight and the incident involving the child.

Benham Satah said on Facebook that two weeks ago a boy who was asking for money or food was brought to the centre and given fruit, before being escorted away by Wilson Security.

Australia-based refugee advocate Ian Rintoul, who has visited the Manus Island facility, said it was "farcical" to suggest refugees could "lead" a child into the detention centre without being noticed by authorities.

"There's a constant movement of staff up and down that road," he said. "The idea that anyone could lead a boy away from the soccer field back to the detention centre, unimpeded or unquestioned or unobserved, is absurd. It just wouldn't happen."

Greens immigration spokesman Nick McKim seized on the discrepancies and called on Mr Dutton to resign or be sacked.

"It's bloody outrageous. He's been caught out lying and he's got to go," Senator McKim told Fairfax Media.

He said the apparent conflation of two separate events by Mr Dutton "smacks of children overboard" - a reference to false claims from the Howard government that asylum seekers threw their children off leaky boats to prompt a rescue.

Meanwhile, a long-running Senate inquiry into alleged incidents of self-harm and abuse on Manus Island and Nauru handed down a report that fell along party lines.

Labor and Greens senators recommended an independent audit and investigation of incidents at both islands, including responses by contractor Broadspectrum.

As part of the inquiry, the Immigration Department on Friday confirmed 41 people at the Nauru regional processing centre had been diagnosed with Dengue fever.

Coalition senators dismissed the entire inquiry as "a politically motivated public-relations stunt" designed to tarnish Operation Sovereign Borders by "interference and hearsay".

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/png-officials-refugees-dispute-peter-duttons-account-of-manus-island-violence-20170421-gvpdu4.html>

25. Michael Gordon: Peter Dutton delivers a new low with comments on Manus Island rampage

Canberra Times
April 21 2017 - 6:22PM
Michael Gordon

Peter Dutton has stooped to a new low, even as he seeks to impose higher standards on prospective Australian citizens.

A week after it unfolded, Dutton has delivered his take on the Good Friday attack by drunken PNG soldiers on refugees at the Manus Island detention centre funded and run by Australia.

The clear implication of his words is that the behaviour of refugees towards a small boy was the catalyst for the attack that re-traumatised those who witnessed mayhem and murder at the centre in 2014.

This is a gross over-reach on two counts. Firstly, it pre-empts the investigation police are conducting into the rampage, which included firing at the accommodation where scores of asylum seekers were seeking cover.

Police have said the rampage was sparked by an altercation at the soccer pitch in the navy base that surrounds the camp, that the soldiers were drunk, and that immigration officials, police, (Australian) service providers and asylum seekers assaulted.

Secondly, it demonises the detainees and inflames tensions that have been simmering on Manus Island for months. On both counts, it is irresponsible.

"There was an alleged incident where three asylum seekers were alleged to be leading a local five-year-old boy back toward the facility and there was a lot of angst around that," Dutton told Sky News.

"I think there was concern about why the boy was being led, or for what purpose he was being led away, back to the regional processing centre, so I think it's fair to say the mood had elevated quite quickly."

One problem with this unsubstantiated allegation, with its implication of an intent to sexually abuse a child, is that police on Manus Island were unaware of it.

Another is that the suggestion of nefarious conduct is rejected by the asylum seekers, who say a boy who asked for money outside the centre almost two weeks ago was invited to come and get some fruit from inside the centre by asylum seekers.

On their account, the boy would have passed a guard house at the Oscar compound gate where local and Australian guards were working and was captured on CCTV cameras as he waited outside Oscar compound tent number one while the asylum seekers placed fruit in two plastic bags.

"Dutton should get his facts right and stop inflaming the situation," says local MP Ron Knight. "You would expect him to be trying to solve the problem instead of causing it to explode." Dutton also suggested those who live in the navy base that surrounds the centre were angry about "another alleged sexual assault". But this comment is problematic, too.

Provincial police commander David Yapu confirmed that two men had been charged with sexual assault since asylum seekers were able to visit the province's only town, although in both cases those charged insist they are innocent. What about the principle of being innocent until proven guilty?

More broadly, Inspector Yapu told me two days before the rampage: "As far as I'm concerned, the movement of the asylum seekers within the town is quiet and peaceful and mixing with the local community. We are not getting reports of them being involved in illegal activities."

So why would Dutton, a former copper, seek to pre-empt the investigation and apportion blame on the detainees whose motivation, he suggests, is to cause trouble because their plan to come to Australia was thwarted?

Perhaps to deflect attention from the real question: why has Australia been so slow to find durable solutions for those it placed in an unsustainable situation and remove a source of tension from a peaceful province in PNG?

The Immigration Minister began his remarks on Sky News on Thursday by noting that the rampage was being investigated by PNG police and the PNG defence force and "we are best to wait and see what that uncovers".

A prudent minister would have left it at that.

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-opinion/peter-dutton-delivers-a-new-low-with-comments-on-manus-island-rampage-20170420-gvp6tr.html>

26. Martin McKenzie-Murray: Government dismisses shootings on Manus Island

With numerous shots fired at the Manus Island detention centre, the danger to detainees and Australian staff has become undeniable to all but the Australian government. By Martin McKenzie-Murray.

Martin McKenzie-Murray
The Saturday Paper
Issue #153 April 22 – 28, 2017

On Good Friday, I received a message from Behnam Satah, an Iranian detainee on Manus Island. Shooting had broken out, he told me. "It was navy who attacked. The camp is in code red." Soon other men were confirming that the detention camp was under fire. Footage was being uploaded to the internet. Fear and panic were being relayed as many lay on the floor of their room, phones in hand, trying to get news out. "The navy shot more than 100 times and some of the bullets hit rooms," one man wrote to me. "The refugees and Australian officers are extremely scared and are in the centre now in the rooms and tent."

Behnam, who witnessed the murder of his friend Reza Barati during a 2014 riot, was terrified. He thought another fatal breach of the camp was imminent. "History repeated 17th February," he wrote to me, referring to the date of Barati's killing, "but this time navy was shooting." Some days later, he wrote: "People are still frightened and anytime that we hear a loud voice or crashing something, people hide in their rooms. The flashback of the night of the gun attack is always in my mind. I can't forget and at the same time I can't believe the recent attack. We could hear the bullets hit the fence. No Wilson security staff were armed, the night shift [had] just arrived and didn't know anything. They said 'We are together in this with you' and they were asking everyone to go to their rooms and lie down. Voices were getting closer. Every night for me is like 17 February – I have bad and heartbreaking memories of the past attacks."

Papua New Guinean police have since confirmed that "drunk" naval officers, following a dispute with asylum seekers playing on a football field, clashed with police and immigration officers. "The soldiers fired several gunshots on the air causing great fear and threats to the local and international community serving at the centre," Inspector David Yapu said.

"A senior PNG immigration officer was seriously attacked and injured by the soldiers – and an asylum seeker – and were treated at [International Health and Medical Services] at the centre and discharged."

FULL STORY AT <https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/politics/2017/04/22/government-dismisses-shootings-manus-island/14927832004535>

27. US Vice-President Mike Pence to confirm refugee deal in Australia

Canberra Times / AAP
April 15 2017 - 10:10AM
Peter Mitchell

Los Angeles: US Vice-President Mike Pence is not expected to use his Australian visit to raise new objections to the controversial asylum-seeker deal that infuriated President Donald Trump, White House officials have said.

Mr Pence will depart on Sunday for a week-long Asia-Pacific tour, with the first stop South Korea followed by visits to Japan, Indonesia and Australia.

He is scheduled to land in Sydney on April 22.

"I wouldn't anticipate any new news on that front," a senior Trump administration official, speaking to reporters on a background conference call ahead of the tour, said in response to a question about the refugee deal.

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull brokered the asylum-seeker agreement last year with then-President Barack Obama.

Mr Trump, who successfully campaigned on dramatically cutting back the number of refugees entering the US, was outraged when the Australian deal was raised in a phone call he had with Mr Turnbull on January 28 - just days after his inauguration.

After initially objecting to the deal, Mr Trump reluctantly supported it, as long as the refugees - held on Nauru and Manus Island - undergo "extreme vetting".

"Obviously, it's entirely appropriate for a new president to ask questions about agreements struck by his predecessors, especially when it could involve the safety and security of the American people," the official, who asked not to be named, said.

"But the United States is living up to its agreements, and the President is confident that the necessary vetting procedures are in place to protect Americans while, at the same time, accepting refugees through the deal struck by the Obama administration."

In Sydney Mr Pence will meet Mr Turnbull, Foreign Affairs Minister Julie Bishop and Opposition Leader Bill Shorten.

Mr Pence will "reaffirm our enduring presence in the region" and "thank Australia for its partnership in addressing global issues", the official said. Bilateral trade and investment relations will also be discussed.

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/world/us-vicepresident-mike-pence-to-confirm-refugee-deal-in-australia-20170414-gvlf4.html>

28. Michael Gordon and Alex Ellinghausen: Waiting for America

As the fate of the US-Australia refugee deal hangs in the balance, Michael Gordon and Alex Ellinghausen visit Manus Island to find out who might be gifted a new life, and what will happen to those left behind.

Michael Gordon & Alex Ellinghausen
Sydney Morning Herald
April 21 2017 - 8:27PM

When the shooting started, Imran Mohammad hid himself under his bunk and clutched his holy Koran tightly against his chest. As his 23-year-old body went numb and he wet his shorts, he prayed that he and the others would survive the night.

Moments earlier, he had seen the mob of Papuan navy personnel, fired up by grog and resentment, assault an Australian guard after they turned on refugees who had been playing soccer in the navy base surrounding the Manus Island detention centre.

"I clearly heard the navy officers and locals saying they would kill the Australian security guards," Mohammad wrote in an eyewitness account of the Good Friday rampage. "I saw the extreme fear in their faces."

When the gunfire started, Mohammad and around 25 other detainees retreated to their room in Oscar compound. The shots were coming from less than seven metres away and they lasted for around 20 minutes.

As the refugees prayed, they could hear the sound of bullets hitting metal, the screeching of tyres and the crash when a car attempted to smash through the centre's gates.

'FULL STORY AT <http://www.smh.com.au/interactive/2017/waiting-for-america/>

29. Australian children in detention as Peter Dutton warns their Fijian parents will be deported

Canberra Times
April 13 2017 - 11:45PM
Heath Aston

Two Australian children are spending Easter under guard as Immigration Department officials work to deport their Fijian parents.

The Prasad family, from Eastlakes in Sydney's south, were taken from their home on Monday. Father Jitend Prasad was originally placed in Villawood detention centre and mother Joytika put under round-the-clock guard with her three children in an apartment in Parramatta.

The Prasads, ethnic Indians, have lost numerous appeals for protection from the Australian government. They said they had been threatened by indigenous Fijians during the 2000 military coup and would be persecuted again if forced to return to village life in Fiji without land or income.

The case is unusual because the couple have two Australian-born children, Jasmita, 15, and her brother Jasneel, 12, who are full Australian citizens and cannot be forced to leave the country, even if their parents are deported.

Lawyers for the family are appealing to the Federal Magistrates Court, arguing the Refugee Review Tribunal did not take into sufficient consideration the rights of the Australian children to remain among family.

The Human Rights Commission is examining the case, but Immigration Minister Peter Dutton warned on Thursday the Prasads would be deported "sooner not later".

"Those people have been taken into immigration detention and they are awaiting deportation now," Mr Dutton told 2GB.

"People are entitled to their fair hearing, their fair day in court, but the Australian taxpayers are not going to be taken for mugs and that's why we have increased dramatically the number of deportations. We aren't going to pay for their endless legal roundabouts.

"People work hard to pay their taxes. They don't expect the money to be wasted on cases where there's no valid reason to stay, and they are only stalling tactics [being] applied. This still has a way to go but they have been taken into immigration detention and they can expect to be deported sooner than later."

The Prasads say they have not received any welfare since claiming asylum and even their Australian-born children have not been allowed into the Medicare system.

Mr Prasad was moved from Villawood to the Parramatta apartment on Friday.

His uncle, Arun Prasad, said female guards had remained inside the apartment with the family and the children were given food once a day.

"The three-year-old is crying because he does not have enough food," Mr Prasad said.

Jasmita's phone has been removed and immigration officials have told Arun and his sons that there will be no more communication with the family from Thursday.

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/australian-children-in-detention-as-peter-dutton-warns-their-fijian-parents-will-be-deported-20170413-gvkk16.html>

30. Refugee who fled PNG to seek asylum in Fiji has first set of charges dismissed

Loghman Sawari, who was held on Manus Island, still facing second series of charges after fleeing Papua New Guinea

The Guardian
Helen Davidson
Wednesday 19 April 2017 12.33 AEST

A young Iranian refugee who fled Papua New Guinea to seek asylum in Fiji has had charges against him thrown out of court in Port Moresby.

The 21-year-old man, Loghman Sawari, had been resettled in the PNG community after about three years in the Manus Island detention centre. He left PNG on a false passport in January, arriving in Fiji with the intention of seeking asylum from alleged persecution in PNG. However, while on the way to a meeting with immigration officials, he was detained and forcibly deported back to PNG, where he was arrested by authorities and charged over using a false passport.

On Tuesday the charges against him were dismissed by the Waigani district court, which found the prosecution had failed to provide sufficient evidence there was a case for Sawari to answer. "They were relying on testimony from Loghman when he didn't have a lawyer present," said Amnesty International's Pacific researcher, Kate Schuetze. "I think the court has made the right decision in that regard but we're still waiting to hear the outcome of other charges."

Tuesday's verdict was largely expected and thought to have contributed to a controversial decision to rearrest Sawari for the same alleged act and lay similar but broader charges against him.

That arrest occurred as Sawari left a hearing on 4 April during which the prosecution had reportedly been told to produce further evidence for its original case against him.

Earlier this month Schuetze said the rearrest appeared to be a "witch hunt" and a clear abuse of legal process.

Despite having been granted bail on the first set of charges, Sawari was detained at Waigani police station for 10 days. He was granted bail last Thursday by a judge who also indicated the second round of charges could amount to a form of double jeopardy.

"I just want my freedom because Australia and PNG immigration put me in big risk," Sawari said.

Sawari was erroneously detained as a 17-year-old minor on Manus Island in 2013 after seeking asylum in Australia by boat. He has claimed he was assaulted by detention centre staff on Manus Island.

Papua New Guinean authorities determined he was a refugee and he was released from detention into the PNG community. However, he soon found himself homeless on the streets of Lae.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/apr/19/refugee-who-fled-png-to-seek-asylum-in-fiji-has-first-set-of-charges-dismissed>