

Project SafeCom News and Updates

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1. Afghan refugees in Iran being sent to fight and die for Assad in Syria

Exclusive: Photographs of funerals for Afghans killed in Syria reveal refugees recruited into Iran's effort to save its ally

The Guardian

Saeed Kamali Dehghan Iran correspondent

Thursday 5 November 2015 21.15 AEDT

Iran is recruiting Afghan refugees to fight in Syria, promising a monthly salary and residence permits in exchange for what it claims to be a sacred endeavour to save Shia shrines in Damascus.

The Fatemioun military division of Afghan refugees living in Iran and Syria is now the second largest foreign military contingent fighting in support of Bashar al-Assad, the Syrian president, after the Lebanese militia Hezbollah.

Iranian state-affiliated agencies reported in May that at least 200 Fatemioun members had been killed in Syria since the beginning of the war. How many more have died since is not clear.

Iran has always claimed it is participating in an advisory capacity in Syria, dispatching senior commanders to plan and oversee operations, but the Afghan involvement shows it is using other methods.

Recruitment is taking place on a daily basis in Mashhad and Qom, two Iranian cities with the largest population of Afghan refugees. Mashhad, the second most populous city in Iran, is only three hours' drive from the country's border with Afghanistan.

Iran is also accepting Afghans below the age of 18 provided they have written permission from their parents, the Guardian has learned. At least one 16-year-old Iran-based Afghan refugee was killed in Syria earlier this autumn. The rising number of funerals in Iran is a tangible sign revealing a greater involvement in the Syrian conflict in the wake of the Russian airstrikes.

Iranian terminology for those killed in Syria is "defenders of the holy shrine". The Abolfazli mosque in eastern Mashhad's Golshahr district – situated at the heart of an impoverished area accommodating most of the city's Afghans – is the place where the refugees, usually young men, sign up on a daily basis to go and fight for Iran in Syria.

On an autumn morning this year, some 50 Afghans were queuing at the mosque, which is lacklustre and missing the dome and minaret that decorate some of the country's most glittering, to put their name on the list. The requirements are simple: those interested have to prove they are Afghan, and singles or minors must have parental consent.

"This is mere exploitation of vulnerable people," said Mujtaba Jalali, a 24-year-old Iranian-born Afghan refugee from Mashhad who has recently fled to Europe. Jalali, a professional photographer, has visited at least 10 funerals in his city held for Afghans who have lost their lives in Syria. The Guardian is publishing his photographs for the first time, some of which reveal the identities of the Fatemioun members killed.

Although Jalali was born in Iran, he has not been able to hold an Iranian nationality, in common with all Afghan children born there. People like Jalali face immense difficulties in continuing their education, having bank accounts, receiving paperwork to leave the country or have access to work in Iran.

"This is the war Iran is fighting at someone else's expense," Jalali said. "It's Afghan refugees in Iran who are paying the price of Tehran's support for Assad and they are being lied to about the real motives. It's not religious, it's political. Instead of protecting its refugees, Iran is using them."

According to Jalali, most Iran-based Afghans, who are also Shia, are not going to Syria to risk their lives on religious grounds but because of the financial and stability benefits that their involvement will bring to them and their families. Nearly 1 million Afghans are registered as refugees in Iran but the country is believed to host at least 2 million more who are living illegally.

The crucial role of the Fatemioun division was highlighted earlier this week when an audio clip emerged of Qassem Suleimani, the Iranian commander of the Quds force, the external arm of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, recounting a personal memory in which he praises the Afghan involvement.

In the audio, Suleimani speaks of a recently killed Iranian soldier named Mostafa Sadrzadeh, who had disguised himself as an Afghan called Seyed Ebrahim in order to fight in the Syrian war. He was reported to have been killed in Syria last week.

"In Deir al-Adas [a village in southern Syria], I overheard someone who had a strong Tehrani accent over walkie-talkie," Suleimani says, according to a transcript of the audio published on local agencies. "The next day they pointed him to me and said this is the guy. We didn't let him in so he had gone to Mashhad and registered his name as an Afghan national in order to join the Fatemioun."

Fatemioun was set up in Iran after the Syrian conflict started in 2011 with help from Afghan refugees who had previously cooperated with Iran, notably before the US invasion in 2001. Although it is not clear how many members it has, it was upgraded from a brigade to a military division, or lashkar, earlier this year, which is supposed to have between 10,000 to

12,000 members. Iranian agencies reported that its commander, Reza Khavari, was killed in Syria last month and it is not clear who has replaced him since.

An increasing number of senior Iranian Revolutionary Guards have also been killed in Syria in recent weeks, which shows how far Iran is prepared to go to keep its strategic influence in the country. In October, Hossein Hamedani, described as an elite and exceptional commander of the Iranian Guards, was killed in the vicinity of Aleppo.

Iran has deployed some of its most experienced commanders in Syria, according to Morad Veisi, a seasoned expert of the Iranian military prowess. The recent deaths show that Iranian commanders are operating in the middle of battlefields, although mostly in a commandeering capacity.

“The Afghan involvement has made a big difference for Iran and now they are providing more help to Iran than any other group except for Hezbollah,” Veisi told the Guardian. Afghans are deployed for combat purposes, although a few hold senior advisory roles.

Jalali was allowed to take photographs of the funerals in Mashhad because he was a member of the state-affiliated association of photographers. He was arrested during a photo shoot of one such funeral in Mashhad and his camera confiscated. He has since fled Iran and is seeking asylum in the Netherlands.

“I was hearing every day many Afghan refugees are going to fight for Iran and Bashar al-Assad in Syria and that was a big question in my mind. Why were they going?” he recalled. “Every week, I could see around 10 to 15 young men being brought back for burial in Mashhad. The Iranian authorities misuse the word ‘martyr’ whenever and wherever it suits them.

“Once, an Afghan refugee who has fought in Syria for Iran, who is a friend of mine, told me: ‘Tehran’s morgues are full of dead bodies killed in Syria.’”

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/05/iran-recruits-afghan-refugees-fight-save-syrias-bashar-al-assad>

2. Van Badham: Goddamn! Every woman longs to celebrate like Michelle Payne

She triumphed over family tragedy and elite competition to win the 2015 Melbourne Cup. But it was Payne’s victory over chauvinism that had women cheering

The Guardian
Van Badham
Wednesday 4 November 2015 15.04 AEDT

A female jockey has won the world’s most famous horse race, the Melbourne Cup. Michelle Payne delivered her horse to renown, her team to victory, her punters to relative fortune; Prince of Penzance paid out at 100-1.

She’s the first woman in 155 years to win that race, and what she had to overcome to do so was, of course, not limited to a long course, a tricky track and a lot of other horses.

Nor was it surviving the death of her mother, killed in a car crash when Payne was but six months old and the youngest of 10 children. Or recovering from two serious falls – including one in 2004 that fractured her skull, caused bleeding on her brain and nearly killed her.

More than just the triumphs over elite competition, family tragedy and the kind of medical catastrophe that often destroys lives as it does careers, Payne also had to overcome the unconscionable reality that it is 2015 and still – still! – women are subjected to the inanity of sexism in sport, work and everyday life.

Doubters need only watch Payne’s first, sweaty interview after the victory. “It’s such a chauvinistic sport,” she panted, “I know some of the owners were keen to kick me off.”

The reason? “They think women aren’t strong enough,” she said. It’s clear what was dominating her thoughts in the moment of her victory.

“They” also think that the kind of social fortitude and demanding self-belief required to overcome seemingly inexhaustible gender prejudice is an achievement undeserving of regard.

Payne’s historic victory as the first female winner went entirely unremarked in the congratulatory post-race speeches, which merely subbed her name into the blank spaces with no acknowledgement of just what was required of the woman to do what she had done.

The only surprising thing about Payne’s own statements was her restrained choice of vocabulary – that the chauvinists could “get stuffed”.

Goddamn it! How many of us have longed for an opportunity like hers to say the exact same thing?

Our culture still informs children that “boys will be boys” with all the stereotypes of masculinity that go with it. Refusing to even acknowledge the prejudice that exists is just the silent form of an ongoing aggression that does its best to cripple the agency, ambition and achievement of women. And it is enraging.

Visible sexism in sport is, at last, finally receiving the social censure that it should. Both outrage and industrial action followed this year’s revelation that the Matildas, Australia’s women’s football squad, are paid a mere \$500 a game. It’s nothing compared to their male counterparts in the Socceroos, who get \$7,500 for achieving far less success in international competition.

Similarly, no one could forget the cringeworthy “give us a twirl” demand from a male commentator interviewing tennis champ Eugenie Bouchard after she’d demolished an opponent in a straight-sets Australian Open win.

Assuming chauvinism is neatly contained within the testosterone-scented professional sporting sphere is wilful ignorance. In addition to the stinking realities of violence against women or the gender pay gap, pungent prejudice leaves its smell all over everything: from science, to politics, to professional freakin’ chess.

The first all-female crew of Russian cosmonauts preparing for a mission were just asked by a journalist how they’d cope in space without makeup or men. The question alone is enough to make you want to strap yourself into a rocket into space to get away from it.

Be aware: when Bouchard obliges a twirl or women laugh off the suggestion they’ll be spending their victory winnings on handbags or their orbit ordering lipsticks from eBay, it’s because they’re trying to end the conversation, not indulge it.

It’s what makes Payne’s comments so glorious. The Herald Sun may have been quick to claim it would be “entirely wrong to portray Payne as an angry radical feminist looking to destroy the joint”.

But they’d also be dead wrong. Feminism isn’t actually a manifesto that you chant; feminism is the radical realisation that things are harder for women merely because pervasive, idiotic mythologies exist about our gender.

Feminism is having the bravery to state it plain. The anger is tangible and by refusing to diminish her own achievements with an embarrassed giggle or a reluctant twirl, Michelle Payne wasn’t just destroying the joint, she was dancing in the ruins. Because, brother, when it comes to strength, Michelle Payne has made it clear: you don’t know the first damn thing about it.

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/nov/04/goddamn-weve-all-longed-to-celebrate-like-michelle-payne>

3. CSIRO survey: Most Coalition voters reject humans to blame for climate change

Sydney Morning Herald
November 4, 2015
Peter Hannam

Barely one in four Coalition voters accepts climate change is mostly caused by humans, with more than half of Liberal voters believing changes to global temperatures are natural, according to a CSIRO survey.

The wide-ranging report, which summarised the findings of five surveys of Australian attitudes from 2010 to 2014 before the program was axed earlier this year, was released without fanfare on Tuesday.

As in previous years, just under 80 per cent of respondents accepted the climate was changing, with human activity viewed as accounting for 62 per cent of the change.

Assessments of the cause, though, appear closely tied to political leanings. Of 3789 respondents since the September 2013 election, 52 per cent of Liberal voters thought climate change was happening but it was natural, compared with 42 per cent of Nationals voters, 31 per cent of Labor and 17 per cent of Greens voters, the survey found:

By contrast, more than three-quarters of Greens voters said humans were mostly to blame for the warming planet as did 59 per cent of Labor voters.

The findings may be an indication of the challenge the Turnbull government faces convincing its supporters to ramp up action to tackle climate change. All the world’s major science academies and some 97 per cent of published scientists accept climate change is caused by humans, and delegates from about 200 nations will meet later this month in Paris to hammer out a new global treaty to try to limit temperature increases.

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, unlike his predecessor Tony Abbott, has spoken out strongly in defence of science particularly as it relates to climate change, and is expected to re-state the case for action at the Paris climate summit starting at the end of the month.

Since grabbing the leadership in September, the Turnbull government has tried to distance itself from some of Mr Abbott's positions. The steps include appointing a pro-renewable energy advocate Alan Finkel as the next chief scientist and seeking the chairmanship of a United Nations Green Climate Fund that Mr Abbott derided as "a Bob Brown bank on an international scale".

Andy Pitman, Director of ARC Centre of Excellence for Climate System Science at the University of NSW, predicted that many Coalition voters will take their cue from the new PM and shift their views.

"To a substantial degree, when asked, a significant fraction of the public say what they think their preferred party says" on issues such as climate change, Professor Pitman said.

"My experience of the public service and right the way through to some media outlets, they absolutely listen to the vibe from the top and respond to it," he said.

Confusion

The CSIRO survey found some confusion among respondents. For instance, even those who thought global warming was not happening still attributed just over a third of climate change to human activity.

Those who thought there was no climate change counted friends and family as their most trusted source of information on the issue. University scientists were the most trusted source of respondents saying humans are to blame for global warming.

"Politicians were also rarely nominated as a basis for opinions, despite the strong associations that opinions had with voting behaviour," the report noted. "This aligns with recent research suggesting politicians and political parties might be more influential than [people] think."

While many respondents accepted that people in developing countries would be among those hardest hit by extreme weather and other climate-related changes, support for increased aid to help them cope gained little backing from respondents. Increased government spending on renewable investment won the most support.

'Valuable study'

Greens Senator Larissa Waters called for the study to be revived.

"It's incredibly disappointing that funding for CSIRO to keep carrying out this valuable study in the future has been axed," Senator Waters said.

"While the Australian public trusts scientists on climate change the most, and mining companies the least, the Turnbull government seems to have it the other way around," she said.

Labor's climate spokesman Mark Butler said people "fundamentally" believe that climate change is real and a significant proportion believe it is linked to human activity.

"They also believe that big-polluting countries, multinational corporations, and wealthy countries are the most responsible for causing climate change," he said.

"[W]hat exactly is Malcolm Turnbull doing to make amends for the unconscionable behaviour of Tony Abbott over the past two years?" Mr Butler said. "Oh that's right, nothing."

The office of the new science minister Christopher Pyne referred questions on the study to the CSIRO.

Environment Minister Greg Hunt, meanwhile, has been touting Australia's commitment to renewable energy at a conference in Shanghai.

"Between 2010 and 2022, just under one third of Australia's emissions-intensive electricity capacity has or is projected to retire," Mr Hunt told the conference on Tuesday. "Between 2014 and 2020, large-scale renewable electricity generation under the Renewable Energy Target is expected to almost double."

<http://www.smh.com.au/environment/climate-change/csiro-survey-most-coalition-voters-reject-humans-to-blame-for-climate-change-20151103-gkpgf8.html>

4. Jonathan Holmes: Chris Kenny's partisan reporting on Nauru does nothing to help us find truth

Sydney Morning Herald
November 4, 2015 - 12:00AM
Jonathan Holmes

As the first foreign journalist to visit Nauru in two years, Chris Kenny's reporting fell short.

We have got to the stage, it seems to me – perhaps we have been there for some time – where the culture wars waged in and through the mainstream media (let alone in social media) has reached such an intensity that truth on some topics has become almost impossible to discern.

Take the now-celebrated visit by The Australian's Chris Kenny to Nauru. If you haven't been following the story, here's a brief summary. Somehow Kenny – normally a pungent conservative columnist and TV host, not a front-line reporter – acquired a journalist's visa to visit Nauru, the first that's been granted to a foreign reporter for two years.

While he was there he filed several reports, including two about the Somali woman, who claims to have been raped, was flown to Australia for an abortion, and then flown back without having had the procedure.

The reports were straight, and valuable. But refugee advocate Pamela Curr alleged that, while she was on the phone to the woman, whose pseudonym is Abyan, she heard her asking Kenny to leave. She accused him of having forced his way into Abyan's room – an allegation that Kenny furiously denies.

A fully-fledged social media frenzy broke out. Kenny was called many rude names by many rude people on Twitter.

The ABC's Media Watch covered the dispute in last week's program. It reported Curr's allegations and Kenny's rebuttal, without coming to a conclusion about what actually happened. Paul Barry spent most of the item lamenting that Kenny is the only foreign journalist to have been allowed onto the island since June 2013, and wondering what role the Australian government plays in decisions about who gets a nod and who does not.

But the item was certainly not damning of Kenny. On the contrary, "we have no problem with Chris Kenny getting a visa", Barry said. "We're glad he did. And, allegations of harassment aside, we think he did a good job."

But that was far too mealy-mouthed for The Australian. Next day, it came out with one of its bizarre editorials. It seems to think that Media Watch's job is to relay to its viewers, without comment or criticism, the substance of other reporters' exclusive stories. "The program could have opined on Kenny's revelations about refugee children boycotting school, some refugees intimidating others over trumpeting their success stories, asbestos problems in Nauruan buildings ..."

But all Media Watch was interested in, The Australian whinged, was the event that had blown into a major media story that week. It was aghast that the program had dared to repeat Curr's "hysterical allegations".

That was on Wednesday last week. Two days ago, Kenny had another blast in his weekly column: the Media Watch item, he complained, was a classic example of the "pathetic smart-arsery of journalism".

Well, in my view, on this occasion, Media Watch was too kind. I don't think Kenny did much of a job on Nauru. One example. Shortly before he arrived, the ABC's 7.30 had reported on another case of alleged rape. Its story included a harrowing phone call by the victim to the police, pleading for help. The caller, reporter Hayden Cooper explained, "feared that the police would not believe her, so she filmed with one phone while calling for help with the other".

In Kenny's view, that story "might raise questions from a properly sceptical journalist". The victim's action in using two phones was, he commented with proper scepticism, "highly prescient given her situation".

Unlike Cooper, Kenny had been on the spot: "This was one case I was able to ask the Police Commissioner, President and Justice Minister about when I was in Nauru. The commissioner, Cory Caleb, said the investigation was complete and it was found to have been a set-up. 'In reality, nothing happened,' he said."

For Kenny, that dealt with that. Presumably the woman had faked the phone call, though why she would have done such a thing was not explained. Kenny makes no mention of any attempt to contact her.

But a "properly sceptical journalist" might not have been quite so easily satisfied. After all, in January last year the President and Justice Minister dismissed Nauru's only magistrate, and effectively exiled the chief justice – both of them Australians. The services of the chief of police, seconded from the Australian Federal Police, had been dispensed with six months earlier.

And in July this year, five members of Nauru's Parliament who talked to foreign journalists about the expulsion of the island's judicial officers were themselves expelled from the Parliament.

Asked about 7.30's rape allegations, the former magistrate, Peter Law, told the ABC's Fran Kelly in September: "I don't have a great deal of faith in the capacity of the police force or the justice system to deal with these incidents until they have some proper governance and leadership ... [The police] are politicised, and that's a regrettable fact."

And the former chief justice, Geoffrey Eames, told The Saturday Paper last March: "It was obvious to me that the decisions being taken were being made by the Minister for Justice and Border Control [David Adeang]. [He is] the power behind the throne."

Neither Eames nor Law are lefties of the kind that Kenny routinely disparages. If he thinks there is reason to doubt whether the "rape phone call" was genuine, there is surely as much reason to question the quality of the police investigation. And to ponder the Australian government's responsibility for the safety of those it has consigned, perhaps forever, to this distant Pacific island. But there was not a mention of such matters in Kenny's reporting. We're to worry instead about asbestos in Nauruan buildings.

More and more we believe stories that come from sources and journalists with whose politics we agree, and mistrust stories from those with whom we disagree. That's a sad state of affairs – and in my view, Kenny's performance on Nauru did nothing to repair it.

Jonathan Holmes is an Age columnist and a former presenter of the ABC's Media Watch program.

<http://www.smh.com.au/comment/chris-kennys-partisan-reporting-on-nauru-does-nothing-to-help-readers-find-truth-20151102-gkp7s5.html>

5. Klaus Neumann: Merkel's high-stakes stand

German chancellor Angela Merkel has shaken off a reputation for indecisiveness, writes Klaus Neumann. But can she hold the line on asylum seekers as circumstances change?

Klaus Neumann
Inside Story
19 October 2015

Until quite recently, Angela Merkel was known for her propensity to dither. A word has even been coined to describe it: merkeln. It's true that the German chancellor has a reputation, particularly outside Germany, for being one of the twenty-first century's most powerful and successful political leaders, but during her ten years in office she has hardly ever led from the front. And the decisions she has eventually made haven't revealed any particular vision for the future, nor have they seemed to be informed by an ideology or a personal politics.

All this has changed in recent weeks, and suddenly Merkel is barely recognisable. It's not easy to pinpoint the date when the merkeln stopped, but the new Merkel was definitely on display as early as 31 August, during the traditional Sommerpressekonferenz – an extended interview during the summer break with members of the Berlin press gallery. Most of that press conference was taken up by a discussion about the refugee crisis, which Merkel initiated before inviting the first question.

The number of asylum seekers reaching Germany via Greece, Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary and Austria had risen sharply over the previous two months. On 19 August, interior minister Thomas de Maizière said he expected 800,000 asylum seekers to arrive in 2015 – about twenty times as many as five years ago, and more than four times as many as last year.

On 21 and 22 August, a racist mob protested against a decision by the state government of Saxony to accommodate more than 500 asylum seekers in a former hardware store in Heidenau, a small town just south of the state capital, Dresden. During one of the violent demonstrations, thirty-one of the police protecting the asylum seeker accommodation were injured, one of them seriously.

Full story at <http://insidestory.org.au/merkels-high-stakes-stand>

6. Klaus Neumann: Germany divided

Twenty-five years after reunification, the mass arrival of refugees in recent weeks has exposed old and new fault lines, writes Klaus Neumann

Klaus Neumann
Inside Story
27 October 2015

When hundreds of people protested against the construction of accommodation for asylum seekers in Dresden-Klotzsche on 15 October, it was seen as barely a newsworthy event. Two of the three daily papers in Dresden, the capital of the East German state of Saxony, didn't report it, and the third, Sächsische Zeitung, published only a few sentences on page ten. According to the newspaper, a 300-strong crowd chanted "Merkel muß weg" ("Merkel has to go") and a speaker demanded that Germany close its borders.

Klotzsche, once a town in its own right, is one of Dresden's northern suburbs. Its grand houses recall the days in the second half of the nineteenth century when the city's wealthy burghers saw it as a desirable place to live. In recent years, it has attracted technology companies and three Fraunhofer research institutes, among them the well-known Center for

Nanoelectronic Technologies. Sleepy but pleasant and reasonably affluent, Klotzsche shows comparatively few signs of having once been part of the German Democratic Republic.

Last week's demonstration was co-organised by the Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany), or AfD, which was established in early 2013 by Bernd Lucke, a professor of economics at the University of Hamburg. Lucke's aim was to harness the eurosceptic vote and provide an option for voters opposed to Germany's bailing out of Greece and other eurozone countries. The party narrowly failed to reach the 5 per cent threshold in the 2013 national elections; in 2014 and 2015, it won more than 7 per cent of the vote in the European elections and managed to send elected representatives to five state parliaments, including Saxony's, where it attracted just under 10 per cent of the vote. In July 2015, Lucke and other prominent members left the AfD because they felt that the party had moved too far to the Islamophobic and xenophobic right.

Full story at <http://insidestory.org.au/germany-divided>

7. Klaus Neumann: Is Germany able to do this?

In the third of a series of articles about Germany's response to the refugee crisis, Klaus Neumann reports from the German–Austrian border

Klaus Neumann
Inside Story
29 October 2015

As recently as last month, Austria was considered Germany's last true friend. But with chaos flaring on the border in recent days, sections of the German media are portraying Germany's southern neighbour as yet another nation that acts selfishly or bows to pressure from right-wing populists. German authorities have been overwhelmed by the arrival of thousands of refugees in buses from the Slovenian–Austrian border, where the situation has also been tense (as it has been at the border between Slovenia and Croatia).

Around 2000 refugees broke through police barriers on Monday and crossed into Germany near Passau in the southeast of Bavaria. The Bavarian state government has accused the Austrians of conveying people arriving from Slovenia as speedily as possible to the German border, without checking whether they would like to claim asylum in Austria and without informing German officials about where and when buses will arrive. Several roads have been closed to normal cross-border traffic.

Full story at <http://insidestory.org.au/is-germany-able-to-do-this>

8. A Refugee Committed Suicide At Brisbane Airport And Barely Anyone Noticed

The very public death of Reza Alizadeh reveals a system that fails our most vulnerable people.

BuzzFeed
Nov. 2, 2015 10:43am
Rob Stott
BuzzFeed News Reporter

At around 4 a.m. last Tuesday morning, Reza Alizadeh, a 26-year-old Iranian man who had been living in Australia on a bridging visa since 2013, walked to the entrance of Brisbane International Airport.

He had been troubled for some time. Suffering from depression, he fled the Iranian city of Ahwaz by boat in 2013 and headed for Australia. He spent around three months in various detention centres before he was released into the community on a bridging visa and moved to Melbourne.

It was at this point that his already fragile mental health rapidly declined. Two troubled years, dotted with incidents of self-harm, emotional breakdowns, paranoia, and suicidal thoughts finally ended, alone at Brisbane airport when AFP officers found him hanging from a bag strap attached to a railing at around 4 a.m. on Tuesday morning.

How did it come to this? BuzzFeed News has spoken to Reza's friends who tried desperately to get him the help he needed, as well as medical professionals who say Australia's immigration system is giving birth to a crisis in the refugee community.

"At the end he got worse and worse. On a number of occasions he tried to harm himself and he had scars all over his body, and none of the authorities cared," a friend of Reza's says.

Full story at <http://www.buzzfeed.com/robstott/a-refugees-public-suicide-and-the-system-that-let-him-down>

9. Cost of offshore detention centres on Nauru, Manus Island blows out by \$100 million: Immigration Department annual report

ABC News Online

By political reporter Stephanie Anderson

Posted Sat 7 Nov 2015, 3:16am

The Department of Immigration and Border Protection has suffered a \$100-million blowout in the cost of detaining asylum seekers offshore.

Detention on Nauru and Manus Island cost taxpayers more than \$1 billion in the 2014-15 financial year, the sixth year running that spending has gone over budget.

Funding allocated for the period was lower than the previous year, according to the Immigration Department's annual report, though 2013-14 also saw an \$89-million overspend to total \$3.1 billion.

The department said the spending was attributable to a range of "minor factors", such as "higher occupancy levels than budgeted, more accurate depreciation assumptions for offshore infrastructure and minor expenditure items which were not planned", but excluding incidents recorded at the two centres over the 12-month period.

Further clarification was requested of the department, but denied.

Costs for the onshore management of what the department calls illegal maritime arrivals (IMAs) came in 16 per cent under budget with savings of more than \$320 million.

The department said the closure of onshore centres did not have an impact on the offshore budget, and there were no plans to reopen any.

The annual report also recorded a dramatic decrease in the number of protection visas approved for asylum seekers arriving by boat, down 99.9 per cent from two years ago.

One protection visa was approved in the past financial year — granted to a Pakistani asylum seeker — though 2,746 were granted to asylum seekers who had not arrived by boat.

"This is due to changing government policies, including the commitment to not grant a permanent visa to an IMA," the department said.

The report also provided a breakdown of people taken into immigration detention over the 12-month period.

As of June 30 this year, 3,202 people remained in immigration detention. A total of 2,239 were described as IMAs.

GRAPH: People transferred to immigration detention in 2014-15

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-11-07/cost-of-offshore-detention-blows-out-by-100m/6920196>

10. MEDIA ALERT: Kurdish refugee dead on Christmas Island - another victim of long-term detention

Sunday November 8, 2015

Refugee Action Coalition

Ian Rintoul

mobile 0417 275 713

It is believed that an Iranian Kurdish refugee, Fazel Chegeni, has died on Christmas Island.

The man in his early 30s, escaped from the North West Point detention centre 48 hours ago -- on Friday 6 November. Detainees had reported that Fazel was missing on Friday.

Detainees in the centre report that police brought the man's body to the detention centre around 9.00am Christmas Island time, this morning, Sunday 8 November.

The circumstances of his death are not known. But there was a resident was woken around 4.00am this morning at a house in the Settlement area and the man disappeared down a track known as "The Incline".

Fazel arrived in Australia in 2010. He had been found to be a refugee when he was in Curtin detention centre, around two and half years ago. He was unfairly charged with assault following a fight between detainees at the detention centre. He was

later released into the community in Melbourne for a few months but was re-detained in Melbourne even though he was given a good behaviour bond for the assault charge.

He had been in Christmas Island detention for around 10 weeks after being transferred from Wickham Point, Darwin. He had recently been invited by the Minister to make another protection visa application.

Christmas Island detention centre has been locked down since this morning.

At a meeting late this afternoon, detainees were told that Fazel's body was found 'in the jungle' and that he had been dead 'for some time'.

Like so many others, Fazel, was suffering the effects of long-term, arbitrary detention. He had told other detainees that he could no longer stand being in detention and just wanted "to go outside."

"This is another needless detention death," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition, "This time of a refugee who should never have been in detention.

"The delay in processing and releasing him is inexcusable. He is a victim of the punitive regime detention regime that cares nothing for the human rights of asylum seekers and refugees.

"This list of deaths of refugees and asylum seekers is steadily mounting. There needs to be a full judicial inquiry into all the circumstances of this refugee's death. All asylum seekers and refugees should be released and allowed to live and work in the community. The detention regime has killed Fazel."

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

11. Asylum seeker dies after escaping Christmas Island detention centre

ABC News Online

First posted Sun 8 Nov 2015, 5:07pm

Updated Sun 8 Nov 2015, 9:29pm

A detainee has died after he escaped from the Christmas Island detention centre.

Australian Federal Police found the body today after a day-long search for the man.

The Department of Immigration and Border Protection confirmed the escape and death this evening and said the matter was being investigated by the coroner.

The department said in a statement that on Saturday morning, service provider staff said an "illegal maritime arrival" had escaped from centre.

"The matter was referred to the Australian Federal Police who commenced a search and discovered a deceased person today," the statement said.

The Refugee Action Coalition said the detainee was an Iranian Kurdish man in his 30s.

Border protection officials said the situation remained calm at the detention centre.

Christmas Island Shire president Gordon Thomson said he was angry local residents had been told nothing about how the asylum seeker escaped from the local detention centre and died.

Mr Thomson said he had contacted the Immigration Department this morning but it did not tell him anything.

"I am very sad to hear that someone has died," he said.

"I want that recorded and I am very, very disappointed that the department has allowed rumour to spread through the community over the last two-and-a-half days, without providing any information about what underpins that rumour."

Mr Thomson said the escape had triggered an element of panic in the community.

"That's why I wanted the information from the department [on Sunday] morning so we could put people's minds to rest or inform them at least what's going on and any precautions they might need to take," he said.

The centre has been in operation since December 2008, but earlier this year the federal budget outlined the winding down of detention facilities on Christmas Island.

The budget included plans to close the Phosphate Hill and Construction Camp facilities.

It also said the main North West Point centre — where the asylum seeker who was found dead on Sunday went missing from — would only be used as a contingency from 2016.

In the five months after the announcement, the number of detainees at the detention centre tripled to 221, with one detainee claiming that asylum seekers were being detained alongside criminals waiting to be deported.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-11-08/asylum-seeker-who-escaped-christmas-island-dies/6922666>

12. Refugee found dead after escaping Christmas Island detention centre

Body found in bushland near North West Point facility understood to be that of Fazel Chegeni, who had suffered well-documented mental health problems

The Guardian
Ben Doherty and agencies
Sunday 8 November 2015 23.39 AEDT

A Kurdish-Iranian refugee has been found dead on Christmas Island two days after he escaped from an immigration detention centre.

The man is understood to be Fazel Chegeni, who was in his 30s. He escaped from the North West Point detention centre on Friday or Saturday, and his body was found in bushland on Sunday. The cause of death is not yet known.

Chegeni arrived in Australia by boat in 2010, and in 2013 he was determined to be a refugee. He spent time at Curtin detention centre in Western Australia, where he was charged with involvement in an assault, and lived in the community in Melbourne. He was detained again by immigration authorities and taken to Wickham Point in Darwin, before being moved to Christmas Island about 10 weeks ago.

Friends told refugee advocates that Chegeni was suffering from serious mental health issues and had grown increasingly anxious about his detention. He had reportedly attempted suicide at least three times in recent weeks.

Australia's Department of Immigration and Border Protection said Chegeni's escape had been reported to federal police, who coordinated a search and discovered his body.

"Christmas Island detention centre remains calm and support services are available to all detainees and staff," the department said in a statement. "As this matter is now subject to a coronial inquiry, the department will not be commenting."

A spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition, Ian Rintoul, said Chegeni's death was "another needless detention death, this time of a refugee who should never have been in detention."

Rintoul said Chegeni's mental health problems were well known and would only have been exacerbated by detention. "The delay in processing and releasing him is inexcusable. He is a victim of the punitive regime detention regime that cares nothing for the human rights of asylum seekers and refugees," he said.

Chegeni's death is the latest in a series of deaths of people held in Australian-run detention centres. Hamid Kehazaei and Reza Barati died on Manus Island in 2014, and Ali Jaffari and Mohammad Nasim Najafi died at Yongah Hill in Western Australia this year.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/08/refugee-found-dead-christmas-island-fazel-chegeni>

13. Detention centre in lockdown after Iranian Kurdish man found dead on Christmas Island

The Age
November 8, 2015 - 10:36PM
Neelima Choahan

An Iranian Kurdish detainee has died after escaping from the Christmas Island detention centre.

Confirming the death, an Immigration Department spokesman said an "illegal maritime arrival" escaped on Saturday morning [November 7].

"The matter was referred to the Australian Federal Police who commenced a search and discovered a deceased person today [November 8]," he said.

"Christmas Island detention centre remains calm and support services are available to all detainees and staff.

"As this matter is now subject to a coronial inquiry the department will not be commenting."

Refugee Action Coalition spokesman Ian Rintoul said the centre was in lockdown since Sunday morning.

He said the man was an Iranian Kurd named Fazel Chegeni, aged in his early 30s, who arrived in Australia in 2010.

Mr Rintoul said the exact circumstances around Mr Chegeni's death were not known.

"Detainees had reported that Fazel was missing on Friday," Mr Rintoul said.

"Detainees in the centre report that police brought the man's body to the detention centre around 9am Christmas Island time, this morning, Sunday November 8."

Mr Rintoul said Mr Chegeni had been found to be a refugee when he was in Curtin detention centre, around two and a half years ago. But he had been charged with assault following a fight between detainees at the detention centre.

He was later released into the community in Melbourne for a few months but was re-detained in Melbourne even though he was given a good behaviour bond for the assault charge, Mr Rintoul said.

"He had been in Christmas Island detention for around 10 weeks after being transferred from Wickham Point, Darwin," Mr Rintoul said.

"Like so many others, Fazel, was suffering the effects of long-term arbitrary detention. He had told other detainees that he could no longer stand being in detention and just wanted 'to go outside'."

Mr Rintoul said at a meeting late on Sunday afternoon, detainees were told that Mr Chegeni's body was found 'in the jungle' and that he had been dead 'for some time'.

"He is a victim of the punitive regime detention regime that cares nothing for the human rights of asylum seekers and refugees," Mr Rintoul said.

Refugee advocate Pamela Curr said she was very distressed to hear about the death.

"Fazel was a gentle man who never hurt anyone [and], is now dead under suspicious circumstances," Ms Curr said.

"There are grave questions to answer as to how this man died, and by whose hand."

<http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/detention-centre-in-lockdown-after-iranian-kurdish-man-found-dead-on-christmas-island-20151108-gkttwb.html>

14. Christmas Island: Reports of riot following detainee's death; claims guards have left detention centre

ABC News Online

By Brad Ryan, staff

First posted Mon 9 Nov 2015, 3:48am

Updated Mon 9 Nov 2015, 3:52am

There are reports guards have left the Christmas Island detention centre after rioting broke out following the death of an escaped detainee.

New Zealand detainee Ricky Downs has told Auckland's TVNZ there has been rioting and the centre is in chaos.'

"The canteen's been smashed to pieces, there's no security, there's no emergency response team, there's no border patrol, there's no guards, there's nothing," he said.

"They're not here. They've gone. They freaked out and left, I think."

The man whose body was found yesterday was an Iranian Kurd in his 30s.

He escaped the centre on Saturday morning and his body was found yesterday.

Border protection officials had said the centre remained calm after the death.

Matije, who also says he is also a detainee, said he heard cries for help around the time of the man's escape.

"The person has been screaming for help and later on, people have been carrying a body bag," he said.

"It was a couple of screams: 'Help, help, help me'."

New Zealand Labour MP Kelvin Davis said the island prison was in chaos, TVNZ reported.

Mr Davis said he had been told the riot began when an inmate was punched in the face by a guard after asking questions about the death of the man.

The Department of Immigration has been contacted for comment.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-11-09/guards-abandon-christmas-island-detention-centre/6922866>

15. WA man Ian Wightman facing deportation after jail term despite living in Australia since infancy

ABC-TV - 7.30

By Lauren Day

Posted Fri 6 Nov 2015, 12:32pm

A 51-year-old man who has lived in Western Australia since he was one year old is stuck in limbo on Christmas Island and facing possible deportation to the UK.

He is one of hundreds of people who have lived the majority of their lives in Australia but because they have served more than 12 months in jail have been caught up in changes to the Migration Act that lawyers say are tearing families apart.

Ian Wightman was last year convicted on charges of starting a scrub fire and served 15 months in jail.

He was released in September but immediately apprehended and detained at a WA detention centre for eight weeks before being flown to Christmas Island, allegedly without warning, at 3:00am last Wednesday.

Speaking from Christmas Island, Mr Wightman described the detention as "mind-numbingly degrading".

"It's an open-ended sentence and there's no information, you can't get any information," he said.

"There's a constant struggle every day to keep your sanity, try to maintain who you are without falling into the depths of bloody despair."

Under recent changes to the Migration Act, any foreigners who serve a prison sentence greater than 12 months automatically have their visas revoked.

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton was unavailable to comment but has previously said he made no apologies for the tough approach because it targeted people who were detracting from Australian society, not adding to it.

Mr Wightman described his detention as a "kick in the guts" and said most of the other detainees on Christmas Island were not serious criminals.

"Very, very few people that are in detention here are because they're arch criminals or they're meth-dealing bokie killers," he said.

"You've got people in here for traffic offences, people that are in here that had a run-in with the law 21-and-a-half years ago."

Mr Wightman's brother Gary said his family was in disbelief.

"Ian was convicted of a crime and sentenced and punished," he said.

"He's served his time, he did his rehabilitation, he did the courses required, he attended the counselling, he was viewed for parole and approved and he was released a free man, upon which he was arrested."

He said Ian always considered himself Australian despite never having applied for citizenship.

"I can't see Ian as anything other than Australian. Unfortunately, Ian probably viewed exactly the same, otherwise he would have done something about the paperwork."

Families being 'torn apart', appeal options limited

It follows dozens of similar cases involving New Zealanders that sparked diplomatic tensions between the trans-Tasman neighbours last month.

Previously, those with serious criminal records were targeted for deportation, but under the new legislation anyone with a sentence of greater than 12 months is captured in the net and that 12 months can also be made up of cumulative sentences.

Since the legislation changed last December, about 780 non-citizens have had their visas cancelled compared to 372 revocations in the three years between July 2011 and July 2014 — 151 of those have been deported.

Migration lawyer Alisdair Putt said the changes were tearing families apart.

"Many people have been here decades, they've often got Australian children, longstanding Australian partners, family links, and often have no connection with overseas countries and in some cases they may not even speak the language," he said.

He was also concerned that the Immigration Minister was deciding many matters personally, causing lengthy delays with limited appeal options.

"If the Minister makes a decision personally, there is no merits review to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal," he said.

"So, as a result, if you've been here 40 or 50 years and the Minister decides personally that you are to be deported forever and potentially separated from family and children, you have no rights to merits review."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-11-06/man-faces-deportation-after-jail-despite-living-in-wa-50-years/6919574>

16. Julia Gillard defends hardline asylum seeker policy in al-Jazeera interview

Former Australian PM says government's approach was justified because it was designed to deter people from dangerous boat trips

The Guardian
Shalailah Medhora
Friday 6 November 2015 18.20 AEDT

Australia's former prime minister, Julia Gillard, has defended her legacy on asylum seeker policies, saying that her government's hardline approach was justified on humanitarian grounds.

"I stand by the decisions I made," she told the host of al-Jazeera's show UpFront, Mehdi Hasan. "We took a set of decisions in a very difficult time when we were seeing increasing numbers and we were worried about deaths."

"The government I led was trying to do everything it could to deter people from getting on boats," Gillard said. "Our message to people who were desperate and fleeing hard circumstances was we are going to take refugees, but don't try and make the journey by boat. You may not survive; your children may not survive."

In 2012, Gillard reopened the Nauru and Manus Island offshore detention centres, reinstating the Howard-era "Pacific solution" that had been discarded by Kevin Rudd after the 2007 federal election.

The reinstatement of the Pacific solution came after a boat bound for Australia carrying more than 200 people capsized off the coast of Indonesia just before Christmas in 2011. The tragedy sparked debate on the best way to tackle the large number of boat arrivals that had attempted to make the dangerous journey since Labor dismantled John Howard's tough asylum policies.

"You don't quite know what it's like as prime minister to get the telephone call from your defence forces that tell you that they suspect that an asylum seeker boat has gone down and they are engaging in desperate measures to try and rescue people from the water," said Gillard. "Whatever they do, people die."

"The hardline approach, in my view, does have a humanitarian underpinning which is we do not want people taking that journey and running those risks," the former prime minister said.

Gillard was deposed as prime minister by Rudd in June 2013, and left politics at the following election. She is currently the chair of the Global Partnership for Education, and has spoken publicly of her passion for improving education rates among girls.

Gillard went on the defensive when Hasan asked her how her drive to help children fitted with putting them in offshore detention.

"We took a set of decisions in a very difficult time," she said. "To suggest that that record in any way undermines my passion or my credibility on education is to wholly misunderstand it."

Gillard has been selective about her public appearances since leaving politics, chastising the Australian media in her June 2015 biography, *My Story*, for being biased and inaccurate.

The interview will air on al-Jazeera on Saturday morning Australian time.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/nov/06/julia-gillard-defends-hardline-asylum-seeker-policy-in-al-jazeera-interview>

17. Julia Gillard defends stance on asylum seeker boats in al-Jazeera interview

The Age
November 7, 2015 - 1:52AM
Mark Kenny

Julia Gillard has rejected suggestions her government's detention of children was inconsistent with her subsequent role as chairwoman of the Global Partnership for Education and has dismissed as a "snapshot of history" Amnesty International claims that conditions for asylum seekers on Nauru were "toxic" and "inhumane".

In rare public comments on her government, Ms Gillard addressed questions about the hardline asylum seeker policies undertaken under her prime ministership, which had seen the number of children locked up reach its highest level in the year she was replaced by Kevin Rudd.

Her government re-opened Nauru and Manus Island in Papua New Guinea in 2012 amid the escalating number of asylum seeker boat arrivals.

Saying "I stand by the decisions I made", she also spoke of the terrible moments when as prime minister she had been advised of deaths at sea when crowded vessels sank.

Speaking to al-Jazeera current affairs program UpFront, in an interview to be aired on Saturday morning, Ms Gillard said the tough response to asylum seeker arrivals had been entirely necessary and was motivated by the aim of stopping dangerous ocean voyages by desperate refugees.

"The hardline approach, in my view, does have a humanitarian underpinning, which is we do not want people taking that journey and running those risks," Ms Gillard said.

"The government I led was trying to do everything it could to deter people from getting on boats ... Our message to people who were desperate and fleeing hard circumstances was we are going to take refugees, but don't try and make the journey by boat. You may not survive, your children may not survive.

"You don't quite know what it's like as prime minister to get the telephone call from your defence forces that tell you that they suspect that an asylum seeker boat has gone down and they are engaging in desperate measures to try and rescue people from the water," she said. "Whatever they do, people die."

While many people in Australia worried that Canberra was presenting a callous face to the world and rejecting the most desperate and destitute, Ms Gillard said the approach had been correct.

"We took a set of decisions in a very difficult time when we were seeing increasing numbers and we were worried about deaths."

"We had a policy that I wanted to pursue which was a co-operative arrangement with Malaysia. I was blocked by the Parliament from doing that."

This was a reference to the policy ultimately dismantled in the High Court after being bitterly opposed by an opposition that once in government itself would enact even harsher policies, including forced boat turn-arounds, and cash payments — essentially bribes — to people smugglers.

Pressed on the apparent inconsistency between her current role as advocate for girls' education in particular, and her previous policies of mandatory third-country detention of women and children, Ms Gillard offered no apology.

"We took a set of decisions in a very difficult time," she said, adding that, "To suggest that that record in any way undermines my passion or my credibility on education is to wholly misunderstand it."

Labor's Malaysian "people swap" proposal was never given the chance to work, because the opposition under Tony Abbott's leadership branded it immoral and refused to pass enabling legislation to render it constitutional.

Later Mr Abbott employed more extreme measures based on the edict of absolute refusal of Australian resettlement for any boat arrivals. That policy has since been embraced by Labor under Bill Shorten's leadership.

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/julia-gillard-defends-stance-on-asylum-seeker-boats-in-al-jazeera-interview-20151106-gkt0mo.html>

18. Doctor hold concerns for pregnant asylum seeker facing difficult birth on Nauru

ABC Radio CAF - AM

By Michael Edwards

Posted Fri 6 Nov 2015, 3:53am

Doctors hold serious concerns about the health of a diabetic Kurdish asylum seeker on Nauru, who is 40 weeks pregnant and facing a difficult birth.

One neonatal specialist was approached on social media to go to Nauru to treat the woman, but refused on the grounds that the island lacks the necessary medical facilities for her to be treated properly.

He says she should instead be sent to Australia for treatment.

The 34-year-old pregnant Kurdish-Iraqi woman does not want her name published and will not speak to the media, but her husband Rashid speaks on her behalf.

He told AM the past nine months had been very hard on his wife.

"My wife now has pain around her back and her stomach. She's waiting. She waits. The system is really terrible," Rashid told AM.

Her pregnancy has been plagued by problems and the situation has not been helped by the lack of consistent medical advice the couple has received.

"They checked her stomach three times recently," Rashid said.

"They are really different in what they tell us. They can't make a decision about her birthing.

"Someone says your wife's birth is natural, and someone else says maybe she should get a caesarean."

The woman suffers from diabetes, and Rashid fears for her health, and that of his unborn child.

Medical experts say Nauru lacks the medical facilities needed to treat a difficult pregnancy, and it appears that moves have been made to bring in outside help.

Neonatal specialist Dr Andrew Watkins told AM he was asked to go to Nauru to treat the woman at short notice and refused to go on the grounds that the island lacks the necessary medical facilities for her to be treated properly.

Dr Watkins, based in Melbourne, said the recruiter was Aspen Medical and that the approach was made via his page on social media site LinkedIn.

"They anticipate the delivery of a baby on Nauru. They want a neonatologist to be available from the 6th of November, today, for a week to look after the baby," he said.

Dr Watkins said it was normal procedure for specialists to be approached via social media, and he was not told specifically who he would be treating.

He turned down the request as he felt the pregnant woman should be transferred to Australia.

"My response was that, given the request had come on the 5th and that no neonatologists could be there until at least the 6th and be ready to act until sometime later, probably that they had ample time to move this mother and baby to Australia, given the safest form of transport for babies is in-utero, not ex-utero, and that if the baby needed intensive care it could not be safely provided on Nauru," he said.

Dr Watkins said it was outrageous the woman has not been flown to Australia.

"Presumably this has been predictable for some time," he said.

"Pregnant women can fly with appropriate supervision. It's probably safer than transferring a sick baby," he said.

Refugee advocates say there are three other pregnant asylum seekers who are close to full-term on Nauru.

AM contacted Aspen Medical, who referred any inquiries about Nauru onto the Immigration Department.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-11-06/pregnant-asylum-seeker-facing-difficult-birth-on-nauru/6917694>

19. MEDIA RELEASE: Immigration negligence puts Nauru mother and baby at risk

Friday November 6, 2015
Refugee Action Coalition
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

The Refugee Action Coalition is calling for the heavily pregnant, 34 year-old, Kurdish asylum seeker, Hatami (photo attached), to be urgently brought to Australia to give birth.

Hatami's diabetic pregnancy, means the welfare of herself and her baby is at serious risk. That risk has been dramatically increased because the baby is also in the breech position.

It has also been revealed that the Immigration and Border Force Department is making urgent attempts to find a neonatologist to go to Nauru (as early as today, Friday 6 November) and be prepared to stay a week.

Hatami's husband Rashid wrote to the IHMS and the Immigration Department and to detention managers Transfield on Nauru at least three times in September appealing for help for his wife, but his appeals were ignored. (Copies of letters available on request.)

"The deliberate delays by the Immigration Department have put the lives of baby and mother at risk," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

"The risks in a diabetic pregnancy are well established. To delay proper treatment to the point where lives are at risk is medical negligence of the worst kind.

"Medical best-practice is a distant second to ideologically driven policy agenda of the Immigration Department and the minister, Peter Dutton. This is the second time in three weeks that Border Force policy has over-ridden medical advice.

"Abyan, the pregnant Somali refugee's requests for medical attention were also ignored for weeks. Now Border Force is playing with the life of another woman.

"Hatami must be brought to Australia for the medical assistance she and her baby urgently need."

Hatami, her husband Rashid, and their four year old son, have been on Nauru since 15 May, 2014. Like most other children in the Nauru detention centre, their son has been diagnosed with "passive" tuberculosis.

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

20. Doctors want pregnant asylum seeker flown to Australia for treatment

ABC Radio CAF - AM
Michael Edwards
Friday, November 6, 2015 08:10:00

MICHAEL BRISSENDEN: Doctors have serious concerns about the health of a Kurdish asylum seeker on Nauru who is 40 weeks pregnant and facing a difficult birth.

One neo-natal specialist was approached on social media to go to Nauru to treat the woman but he refused on the grounds that the island lacks the necessary medical facilities for her to be treated properly.

The woman is diabetic and her husband says she's in severe discomfort. The doctor says she should be sent to Australia for treatment.

Michael Edwards reports.

MICHAEL EDWARDS: The 34-year-old Kurdish-Iraqi woman has been on Nauru for three years since leaving her home in Iran.

She's 40 weeks pregnant with her second child. Her husband Rashid has told AM it has been a difficult pregnancy.

He says she's been examined by a number of doctors on Nauru.

RASHID: Someone say, "Your wife's birth is natural, someone else say maybe she should be dealt a caesarean."

MICHAEL EDWARDS: The woman, who doesn't want her name made public, suffers from diabetes and Rashid says she has been in pain throughout her pregnancy.

RASHID: My wife now has got pain around her back and her stomach.

MICHAEL EDWARDS: Medical experts say Nauru lacks the medical facilities needed to treat a difficult pregnancy.

And it appears that moves have been made to bring in outside help.

One neo-natal specialist, Dr Andrew Watkins, has told AM he has been contacted to go to Nauru at short notice.

The Melbourne-based doctor says the recruiter was Aspen Medical and that the approach was made via his page on the social media site, LinkedIn.

ANDREW WATKINS: They anticipate that the delivery of a baby on Nauru. They want a neonatologist as a neo-intensivist to be available from the 6th of November, today, for a week to look after the baby.

MICHAEL EDWARDS: Dr Watkins says it not normal procedure for specialists to be approached via social media and he wasn't told specifically who he would be treating.

He turned down the request as he feels any woman on Nauru with a difficult pregnancy should be transferred to Australia.

ANDREW WATKINS: My response was that given that the request had come on the 5th and that no neonatologist could be there until at least the 6th and be ready to act until sometime later probably, that they had ample time to move this mother and her baby to Australia given the safest form of transport for babies is in utero not ex utero.

And that if the baby needed intensive care it could not be safely provided on Nauru.

MICHAEL EDWARDS: Dr Watkins says it's outrageous the woman hasn't been flown to Australia.

ANDREW WATKINS: Pregnant women can fly with appropriate supervision. It's probably safer than transferring a sick baby.

MICHAEL EDWARDS: Refugee advocates say there are three other pregnant asylum seekers on Nauru who are close to full-term.

AM contacted Aspen Medical, the company referred any inquiries about Nauru onto the Immigration Department.

MICHAEL BRISSENDEN: Michael Edwards.

<http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2015/s4346385.htm>

21. Doctors plead for pregnant refugee to be sent from Nauru to Australia for birth

The 40-week pregnant woman has known health complications, but Nauru authorities have refused to transfer her to Australia for specialist care

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Friday 6 November 2015 12.16 AEDT

Medical authorities on Nauru are refusing to send a refugee to Australia for an imminent complex birth, despite the woman's family and other doctors insisting that her health and that of her baby is being jeopardised.

Medical providers on Nauru have even made a last-minute appeal on the LinkedIn social business network asking for specialists come to the island.

Golestan (not her real name), is a 34-year-old Kurdish-Iraqi woman who suffers from diabetes and has had a difficult pregnancy. She is now 40 weeks pregnant.

Doctors are planning a caesarean because of expected complications.

Golestan's husband has written to the immigration department at least three times since September asking for her to be transferred.

"I have to save my wife and the baby, this is really important to me," he said. "She has diabetes, thyroid and kidney problems and has been in pain through all the pregnancy. But [detention centre health providers] IHMS says we can't help. They do not seem to know anything about my wife's situation."

Having previously routinely flown pregnant asylum seeker women to Australia for delivery, it is now Australian government policy that asylum seekers and refugees deliver babies on Nauru.

Aspen Medical, which provides medical services at Nauru Hospital, took the extraordinary step on Thursday of searching LinkedIn seeking a neonatologist able to fly out within 24 hours to oversee the baby's delivery.

"I know this is a long shot but Aspen Medical has been requested to provide a Neonatologist to fly to Nauru tomorrow (6 November), for a week. There will be a baby born by planned caesarean which will require the care and oversight of an experienced neonatologist," the company wrote in a LinkedIn message to doctors.

Doctors were even asked to nominate a salary.

"I am also curious about what your salary expectations might be for such a role (even if you aren't actually interested), or if you happen to know of someone else who may be interested."

World Health Organisation statistics show Nauru has a neonatal mortality rate – number of deaths within 28 days per 1,000 live births – of 21. Australia's rate is three per 1,000.

Dr Andrew Watkins, a senior Melbourne neonatologist, said he held grave concerns that both the mother and baby's care was being compromised by the last-minute effort to fly a neonatologist to Nauru. He said the woman should be brought to Australia to deliver the baby.

"They know they are going to deliver a baby in Nauru who will need the services of a neonatologist. What follows from that is that they anticipate this baby will require intensive care and high level support and supervision. Nauru is not a place equipped to be able to provide that level of care, there is a real risk that the baby's care will be compromised."

Watkins has written to the chief medical officer of the Australian Border Force explaining his medical concerns about the proposal to fly in a neonatologist "at the last minute".

Watkins told Guardian Australia that in addition to a neonatologist, management of a sick baby required competent nursing staff, working and reliable equipment, established protocols and neonatological oversight, together with a robust and independently audited review of morbidity and mortality, as is the norm in Australian neonatal units.

If the baby were to develop severe respiratory distress or other complications, "the backups that exist in Australia, simply are not there", Watkins said.

"They are trying to do this at the last minute, but they've got at least 24 hours. There is time to get this woman to Australia.

"The safest transfer for babies is in utero unless maternal or foetal condition dictates urgent delivery. The fact that this is a planned delivery some days away argues for the safety of this option."

Watkins said many doctors had refused to accept such roles because they did not want to lend a "a veneer of legitimacy" to a flawed and potentially dangerous pattern of clinical practice.

The Australian Medical Association said Golestan must be flown to Australia immediately.

AMA president Brian Owler said the immigration minister should stop "playing with people's lives" by inflexibly applying the government's hard-line stance on asylum seekers remaining in Nauru.

"It is time for the minister to show some humanity and compassion and fly this desperate woman to Australia for appropriate care," Owler said.

"The baby will need specialised neonatal care. It is a nonsense to fly the doctor to Nauru. The minister [immigration minister Peter Dutton] must make the order to fly the woman to Australia now."

Dr Richard Kidd from Doctors for Refugees said the attempt to recruit a specialist at the last minute could jeopardise the health of mother and baby.

"This has been terrible management," he said. "This situation has been known about for weeks, even months, and now, in the last hours to now say 'let's fly in a neonatologist'.

"They are proposing to fly in a neonatologist without a team and without all the necessary support. This person will have to function as the entire neonatological team, for 24 hours a day, seven days a week, possibly for weeks or months, depending on the health of the baby. It is totally unsustainable and entirely irresponsible."

Kidd said because of the known and foreseeable complications of this pregnancy, the mother should have been transferred to an Australian tertiary hospital several weeks ago, where neonatal teams, equipment and protocols were already established.

"It is now a very difficult situation. They have condemned her to a very high risk of a bad outcome. They have now made this a very complex and difficult and risky situation."

Ian Rintoul from the Refugee Action Coalition said deliberate delays by the immigration department had put the lives of baby and mother at risk.

"The risks in a diabetic pregnancy are well established. To delay proper treatment to the point where lives are at risk is medical negligence of the worst kind. Medical best-practice is a distant second to ideologically driven policy agenda of the immigration department."

Guardian Australia contacted Aspen Medical, who referred all inquiries about its Nauru practices onto the immigration department.

A spokeswoman for the Department of Immigration and Border Protection said Golestan was being assisted by doctors on the island.

"This individual is now fully engaged with primary and specialist health care practitioners. All appropriate support is being provided to this woman."

A variety of medical providers were contracted to provide services to asylum seekers and refugees on Nauru, the spokeswoman said.

"As the government has previously indicated there was a group of transferee and refugee women on Nauru who were refusing appropriate medical assistance with their pregnancies. However most are now engaging with health service providers."

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/nov/06/doctors-plead-for-pregnant-refugee-to-be-sent-from-nauru-to-australia-for-caesarean>

22. Doctors call for asylum seeker on Nauru to be brought to Australia to give birth

The Age
November 6, 2015 - 6:07PM
Jane Lee

A heavily pregnant diabetic asylum seeker is receiving sufficient medical support in Nauru's detention centre, the Immigration Department says, despite doctors calling on Immigration Minister Peter Dutton to fly her to Australia to give birth.

Melbourne neonatalist Dr Andrew Watkins declined a request from health agency Aspen Medical on Thursday to fly to Nauru on Friday to take care of the Kurdish woman's baby for about a week following a planned caesarean.

The director of the paediatrics unit at Mercy Health said Nauru did not have enough staff with intensive neonatal care experience.

"It was quite clear to me I couldn't provide a competent service and this wasn't an emergency call ... it was possible to move her to Australia," he said.

Dr Watkins later learned that the woman was reportedly diabetic.

He has written to the chief medical officer of the Australian Border Force saying it was a "high-risk situation" for a woman whose baby would require special neonatal care to give birth on Nauru.

Babies born by caesarean to mothers with gestational diabetes have a far greater risk of developing respiratory distress.

"If everything went swimmingly, you might get away with it, but if you've got a baby born with significant respiratory distress ... you'd suddenly be faced with moving the baby elsewhere, and there's good evidence that in utero is the safest way to transfer a baby," Dr Watkins said.

An Immigration Department spokesman said the woman, who is 40 weeks pregnant, was "fully engaged with primary and specialist healthcare practitioners. All appropriate support is being provided to this woman."

A spokesman for Immigration Minister Peter Dutton did not answer Fairfax's questions about whether the woman should be flown to Australia for specialist care, saying: "Decisions on medical treatment are a matter for medical practitioners. The department is guided by and acts upon the advice of its medical experts."

Australian Medical Association president Brian Owler said on Friday that it was "time for the minister to show some humanity and compassion and fly this desperate woman to Australia for appropriate care".

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists agreed, saying Mr Dutton needed to give an assurance that the asylum seeker would receive obstetric care equal to Australian standards.

The college's president, Professor Michael Permezel, said he was concerned for both the mother and the baby's wellbeing.

"All women have the right to quality medical care regardless of social, political and economic status, and the college wishes to see the same standard of healthcare provided for asylum seekers as is provided for Australian women," he said.

Dr Watkins said he and at least one other doctor had received requests to care for the baby via social media network LinkedIn.

Until a few years ago, he said, pregnant asylum seekers were typically flown from Nauru to Australia 35 weeks into their pregnancy to give birth, in recognition of the fact they could not be safely monitored on the island. He had looked after dozens of such babies.

"The straight medical facts speak for themselves and there is an obligation to provide proper care."

The latest case comes weeks after a Somali asylum seeker allegedly raped on Nauru was transferred to Australia for an abortion. The government had allowed the woman to seek medical advice in Australia, but sent her back to Nauru, saying she had changed her mind on the procedure.

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/doctors-call-for-asylum-seeker-on-nauru-to-be-brought-to-australia-to-give-birth-20151106-gksu1x.html>

23. Bill Shorten promises Labor's support to doctors calling for transfer of pregnant asylum seekers to Australia

ABC News Online

By political reporter Stephanie Anderson

Posted Fri 6 Nov 2015, 1:25pm

Doctors will have Labor's backing when it comes to requests regarding the treatment of asylum seekers in offshore detention centres, Opposition Leader Bill Shorten says.

Doctors currently hold concerns for three heavily pregnant women on Nauru, and are calling for them to be transferred to Australia to give birth.

Mr Shorten stopped short of referring to a particular case when asked about the women, telling reporters that his party would follow the medical advice when it came to the "safety of people".

"The medical advice is what matters here, nothing else," he said.

"If the doctors say it's safe to be in one place or it's better to be in another place, we will back the medical treatment, the priorities of that and the advice of the doctors."

His comments follow reports that doctors are concerned for the welfare of a diabetic Kurdish woman on Nauru, who is 40 weeks pregnant.

The husband of the 34-year-old woman, Rashid, told the ABC that medical advice given to the couple on Nauru had been inconsistent.

"They checked her stomach three times recently," he said.

"They are really different in what they tell us. They can't make a decision about her birthing."

The Royal Australasian College of Physicians has called on the Turnbull Government to bring the woman to Australia, with paediatrics and child health division president Dr Nicki Murdock saying an immediate transfer should take place.

"Any mother likely to deliver a baby needing more than the most basic level of care must be transferred to Australia," she said.

Immigration 'scrambling' for doctor to send to Nauru

Her request has been backed by the Greens.

Green's Senator Sarah Hanson-Young told the ABC that there were at least three heavily pregnant women who should be brought to Australia for treatment.

"The Immigration Department has been scrambling to find an Australian specialist who will go and treat these women on Nauru," she said.

"All of the specialists know that simply the safest option is to bring the women to Australia."

Neonatal specialist Dr Andrew Watkins told the ABC he had been approached on social media site LinkedIn and asked if he could travel to Nauru to treat at least one of the women.

A spokesperson for the Department of Immigration and Border Protection said various medical providers were contracted to provide services to asylum seekers and refugees on Nauru.

They further stated that "most" women from a group of pregnant transferee and refugee women on Nauru, who had previously refused appropriate medical assistance, were now engaging with health service providers.

"This individual is now fully engaged with primary and specialist health care practitioners," the spokesperson said.

"All appropriate support is being provided to this woman."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-11-06/labor-supports-doctors-call-for-transfer-of-pregnant-refugees/6919912>

24. Pregnant asylum seekers: Labor says medical advice should trump policy

Concerns are growing over three heavily pregnant women on Nauru and Bill Shorten says they should be brought to Australia if that's what doctors say

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Friday 6 November 2015 19.27 AEDT

The advice of doctors should be paramount in caring for asylum seekers in offshore detention, Labor leader Bill Shorten has said, as concern over three heavily-pregnant women on Nauru grows.

There is particular concern for Golestan, an Iraqi-Kurdish woman with serious health complications who is 40 weeks pregnant. Nauru health providers are trying urgently to find a neonatologist to fly to the island.

But doctors have told the government it is in the best interests of Golestan's health, and that of her unborn child, that she be brought to Australia before the delivery.

Golestan's husband has also consistently asked for his wife to be transferred.

Shorten said on Friday that medical advice should override any policy considerations.

"The medical advice is what matters here, nothing else," he said. "If the doctors say it's safe to be in one place or it's better to be in another place, we will back the medical treatment, the priorities of that and the advice of the doctors."

A spokeswoman for the Department of Immigration and Border Protection told Guardian Australia Golestan was being assisted by doctors on the island.

"This individual is now fully engaged with primary and specialist healthcare practitioners. All appropriate support is being provided to this woman."

However, doctors, advocates and Golestan's family say her case has grown increasingly desperate as her pregnancy has progressed.

Her health concerns, and their implications for her child, were identified several months ago. Her husband has written three times to the immigration department asking that she be transferred.

On Thursday, Aspen Medical, which provides health services to Nauru hospital, sent a last-minute plea via LinkedIn to neonatologists: "I know this is a long shot but Aspen Medical has been requested to provide a neonatologist to fly to Nauru tomorrow (6 November), for a week." Doctors were asked to nominate a salary.

The president of the Australian Medical Association, Brian Owler, said the immigration department's inflexible policy on asylum seekers remaining on Nauru was "playing with people's lives".

"It is time for the minister to show some humanity and compassion and fly this desperate woman to Australia for appropriate care," he said.

Senior neonatologist Dr Andrew Watkins said he held grave concerns that both the mother and baby's care were being compromised by the last-minute effort to fly a neonatologist to Nauru.

"They know they are going to deliver a baby in Nauru who will need the services of a neonatologist. What follows from that is that they anticipate this baby will require intensive care and high level support and supervision. Nauru is not a place equipped to be able to provide that level of care; there is a real risk that the baby's care will be compromised."

There are two other asylum seekers on Nauru in the final stages of pregnancy. Other asylum seekers and refugees have had babies on the island in recent weeks.

Previously, asylum seeker and refugee woman were routinely transferred to Australia in the final weeks of pregnancy to deliver their babies. However, it is now government policy that all babies are to be born on Nauru.

The government is keen to prevent court injunctions being taken out to prevent families' return to Nauru, a practice the immigration minister, Peter Dutton, has described as a "racket".

A spokeswoman for Dutton's department said a variety of medical providers were contracted to provide services to asylum seekers and refugees on Nauru.

"As the government has previously indicated, there was a group of transferee and refugee women on Nauru who were refusing appropriate medical assistance with their pregnancies. However, most are now engaging with health service providers."

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/nov/06/pregnant-asylum-seekers-labor-says-medical-advice-should-trump-policy>

25. NT Police probe allegation of asylum seeker bashing by guards at Darwin's Wickham Point immigration centre

ABC News Online

By Katherine Gregory

First posted Wed 4 Nov 2015, 1:02pm

Updated Wed 4 Nov 2015, 1:07pm

NT Police have confirmed they are investigating allegations that up to five guards at a Darwin immigration detention centre bashed a man, putting him in hospital.

The 45-year-old man, who wishes to be known as Osman, was allegedly set upon by staff at the Wickham Point Immigration Detention Facility on Monday night.

The man's son, who is also being detained there, said his father went to the medical area to get medication for his kidney stones.

"When he was coming out, one of the officers and another one, they ask him 'open your hand'," said the man's son, who did not wish to be named.

"They thought my dad had got pills in his hand but actually my father, he had them already."

He said his father "opened his hands and then the officer, he thought my father is tricking him... he grabbed my dad's hands".

"My dad said 'why are you touching me? Don't touch me, you don't have any reason to touch me'," the man said.

"When my father said that, he (the guard) called on more officers and they ganged on him, they beat him... after like five minutes they said, 'come with us to interview room, we're going to talk with you'."

The man alleged his father was taken to an interview room, where "they start to beat him really hard and he was breathing really bad".

The man was later transported to Royal Darwin Hospital in "a bad situation", the man's son said.

"He was bleeding bad... and his eyesight became dim," he said.

Northern Territory Police have confirmed they are investigating the matter.

The father and son, who are from Iraq, have been at Wickham Point for seven months after spending 15 months on Nauru and six months at Christmas Island.

The Department of Immigration has been contacted for comment.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-11-04/police-probe-claim-asylum-seeker-bashed-guards-wickham-point/6911736>

26. UN's Nauru verdict: A poor, isolated island ravaged by phosphate mining

Sydney Morning Herald
November 3, 2015 - 2:51PM
Nicole Hasham

When Nauruan officials tried to implement a truancy policy to ensure children attended school, a problem emerged: teachers frequently didn't show up either, leaving few around to enforce it.

Such is life on the tiny Pacific island where the male life expectancy is 58, half of households live off an average \$9000 a year and unregulated phosphate mining has left 80 per cent of the land barren, uninhabitable and so contaminated that human health is suffering.

This is the picture painted by the United Nations ahead of a hearing into Nauru's human rights record in Geneva on Tuesday, which will probe the conditions faced by both locals, and refugees and asylum seekers Australia has turned away.

The Nauruan government last week hit out at negative Australian media coverage of the island, saying refugees live in freedom and safety, and "many are happy and making the best of their situation". However international concern about the protection of basic human rights persists.

The Australian government is seeking other countries willing to resettle refugees from Nauru, but the majority are expected to remain on the island for the immediate future.

In its own submission to the UN's periodic review, the Nauruan government said it was making progress in the promotion of human rights, but faces "ongoing challenges" including "lack of capacity and insufficient resources".

It cited the development of a youth policy paper, which was not formally adopted due to "financial constraints".

Some refugee and asylum seekers have complained Nauruan schools offer a poor-quality education, and many parents refuse to send their children to school.

The Nauruan government said student truancy "continues to plague" the education system and teacher punctuality was also a problem.

The UN said while a truancy policy has been introduced, "enforcement has been constrained by frequent absenteeism of teachers".

It said phosphate mining had devastated Nauru, leaving the majority of land uninhabitable, and lost to agriculture or development. Little attention was given to rehabilitation. Cadmium residue, phosphate dust and other contaminants "have caused air and water pollution with negative impacts on health".

"Nauru has no legislation or environmental standards in place to regulate the mining industry or its environmental (including health) impacts," the team wrote, adding the government intended to expand the industry to raise revenue.

Asbestos used in construction also posed an "urgent health risk" and needed immediate action, it said.

Non-communicable disease rates are on the rise, partly due to a lack of agricultural land and a reliance on unhealthy food imports. Comment has been sought from the Nauruan government.

In a submission, the government said it continues to "strive for the best" on human rights. It pointed to law reform on cyber crimes and refugees and policies and plans on women, people with a disability, education and sustainable development.

In May this year Australian Federal Police ran a course to improve the official response to sexual violence and the government had worked to finalise overdue reports, it said.

Among other Nauru issues to be examined by the UN review are decriminalising homosexuality, combating gender-based and domestic violence, the independence of the judiciary and media freedom.

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/uns-nauru-verdict-a-poor-isolated-island-ravaged-by-phosphate-mining-20151102-gkp145.html>

27. Australia urges Nauru to uphold rule of law and stop censorship

At UN review of Nauru's human rights record, Australia also says journalists should be welcomed and same-sex relationships should be decriminalised

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Wednesday 4 November 2015 15.54 AEDT

Australia says it is concerned at the erosion of the rule of law in Nauru, and has urged the Pacific nation to allow journalists to visit, stop censoring the internet and decriminalise same-sex relationships, in a frank assessment at the United Nations.

Nauru is being assessed before the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), a quadrennial assessment of countries' human rights record by the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Australia, Nauru's chief benefactor, which provides 15% of Nauru's domestic revenue through direct aid, said it welcomed Nauru's efforts to improve its human rights legislation and practices since its last review in 2011.

But it raised concerns over Nauru's adherence to the rule of law, which has been heavily condemned, including by the country's former chief justice, Geoffrey Eames.

Despite reports of 29 sexual assaults on asylum seekers and refugees on Nauru, including 10 on children, there have been no arrests or prosecutions.

Australia also raised concerns over Nauru's democratic institutions: five opposition MPs are suspended from parliament and one has had his passport seized.

Facebook remains blocked in Nauru, although this is under review, and foreign journalists, with notable exceptions for sympathetic reporters, are effectively banned from visiting the island.

Speaking in Geneva on Tuesday night, Australia's deputy permanent representative to the UN, Tanya Bennett, said Australia recognised Nauru's efforts to improve its human rights legislation and practices, but still held significant concerns.

"Australia encourages Nauru to continue to uphold the principles of democratic processes, including freedom of speech and the rule of law. Recognising concerns including journalistic freedom, internet censorship and suspension of opposition MPs, Australia recommends Nauru actively address issues of freedom of expression and association in Nauru and support political representation for all Nauruans."

Australia also said Nauru should move to "swiftly decriminalise" same-sex relationships.

Australia holds significant influence over Nauru. Commentators have described the 20 sq km island as a "client state" of its former UN-mandated administrator.

Aside from \$25m in aid each year, Australia's offshore detention regime pours millions of dollars each year into Nauru, which has had a tiny indigenous economy since the end of the phosphate mining boom.

The detention centre is the nation's second-biggest employer, after the government. Nauru's justice minister, David Adeang, said Nauru welcomed the opportunity for reflection afforded by the UPR process. His government took its human rights obligations "very seriously".

"We believe that every nation benefits from having a mirror held before it," he said. "Every nation has challenges, and can reach greater heights by participating seriously in the UPR." He said internet restrictions had been applied to protect Nauruan citizens, in particular young women, from exploitation, and the ban on Facebook and other media sites was temporary.

Adeang said Nauru had an "open arms" policy for international organisations, including UN agencies, who sought to come to Nauru. "See for yourself how well we are doing, how hard we are working." But he said many international journalists' reporting of Nauru was "less factual" and, instead, driven by opposition to offshore processing.

Graham Thom, the national refugee coordinator with Amnesty International Australia, said there had been positive steps on Nauru, such as the opening up of the detention centre, and hiring 320 community liaison officers, but an "open arms" policy implied greater independent access.

"So, if that's the case, there should be no more barriers to international organisations such as Amnesty being able to visit Nauru." Thom said his organisation still held serious concerns for the protection of women and children on Nauru.

Australia is before the UPR on Monday.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/04/australia-urges-nauru-to-uphold-rule-of-law-and-stop-censorship>

28. Internet ban to stop bullying, not free speech: Nauruan government

Sydney Morning Herald
November 4, 2015 - 3:39PM
Nicole Hasham

The Nauruan government says a ban on websites such as Facebook protects its citizens from "abuse, harassment and bullying" as the United Nations urges the island's controversial regime to lift its game on freedom of expression and human rights.

Nauru launched the defence at a hearing in Geneva on Tuesday night, where the island's human rights record, including the plight of refugees and asylum seekers turned away from Australia, came under the international microscope.

UN member countries urged Nauru to lift restrictions on access to the internet, as well as immediately improve the living conditions of asylum seekers and refugees, enact domestic violence laws, decriminalise homosexuality and let more journalists into the country.

Access to Facebook was reportedly barred in May this year and apps such as Skype and Viber are also understood to be blocked. Detractors say the move is designed to prevent criticism and free speech, and stop refugees and asylum seekers from communicating their plight to the outside world.

In a statement to the UN, a six-member Nauru delegation headed by Justice Minister David Adeang said some internet sites were restricted this year "in efforts to protect citizens from abuse, harassment and bullying". The Nauruan government has previously claimed the ban was an attempt to crackdown on pornography.

The UN urged Nauru to adopt a series of recommendations, including lifting internet restrictions, reducing the \$8000 non-refundable visa fee for foreign journalists and allowing more media into the country.

It said limited access by foreign journalists to the detention centre has strongly affected "international scrutiny of key human rights issues".

The UN has previously said all Nauruan media is state-owned and access to information is limited. In 2013 the government tried to ban its own media from reporting on politics two weeks before national elections, and in May this year three MPs were suspended from parliament after making critical remarks about the government to foreign media.

The nation should release all children from immigration detention centres and "take immediate measures to improve the physical conditions and security situation in detention and processing centres for asylum centres", the UN recommended.

Nauru argues that its recent open centre arrangements mean detainees are free to leave the facility and travel around the island. But many asylum seekers and refugees say public transport is poor, there are few places on the island they wish to visit and they must return to the centre for meals and a place to sleep.

The UN said Nauru should also decriminalise same-sex relations between consenting adults, ensure an independent judiciary and implement domestic violence laws and a child protection framework.

The Nauruan government and its Australian public relations agency, Mercer PR, did not respond to requests for comment.

The government told the hearing that the creation of a dedicated "human rights desk" in the Department of Justice and Border Control showed its commitment to human rights obligations and the Australian government would be supporting Nauru with safety, security and law enforcement.

It said a new criminal code helped address violence against women, the number of Supreme Court judges had risen from one to three and the government was consulting on a new leadership bill to improve transparency and governance.

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/internet-ban-to-stop-bullying-not-free-speech-nauruan-government-20151104-gkqggm.html>

29. Human teeth found in meal served to asylum seekers on Manus Island

It is not known whose mouth the two teeth – which appeared to be stained red with betel nut juice – came from or how they came to be in the lunchtime meal

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Tuesday 3 November 2015 07:27 AEDT

Human teeth were found in a meal served to an asylum seeker in the Manus Island detention centre.

The two human teeth were found in a meal served at lunchtime in Oscar compound on Saturday.

The asylum seeker photographed the teeth and made a formal complaint to the detention centre managers.

“This is the food they give us, always like this, always disgusting,” an asylum seeker, not the complainant, told Guardian Australia. “They treat us like animals, worse than animals.”

Transfield Services in Sydney did not return repeated calls and emails from Guardian Australia.

But two Transfield staff on Manus Island separately confirmed to Guardian Australia the teeth had been found and a complaint lodged.

“We know about that,” one said. “People are talking about it.”

It’s not known from whose mouth the teeth came or how they came to be in the food. They appeared to be stained red with betel nut juice: the nut is widely chewed on the island, mixed with powdered lime and mustard stick.

Several asylum seekers refused to eat lunch after the tooth was found.

It is not the first time teeth have been found in food in the detention centre. In 2013, Amnesty International reported that a tooth had been found in a meal served in the detention centre.

And the teeth being found Sunday follows a mass outbreak of food poisoning affecting up to 100 asylum seekers and refugees in the detention centre on Friday.

Transfield staff initially tried to tell asylum seekers they were struck by gastroenteritis and diarrhoea – all of them on the same day – because they didn’t wash their hands before eating.

Staff have since conceded to asylum seekers they were food-poisoned.

One asylum seeker told Guardian Australia detention centre staff had told him that since the outbreak, insects had been found in food, and food had been discovered stored in unhygienic conditions.

“They are going to have a big meeting to check samples of food everyday from the beginning, such as preparation, loading to distribution and serving. All of this is going to happen tomorrow or the next day.”

Hygiene has been a consistent problem on Manus. Soap often runs out in dispensers in toilets, and replacements are slow to come to the island. Toilet paper is also often in short supply, asylum seekers have told Guardian Australia.

In January, there was no running water in the detention centre for several days.

Transfield management did not respond to questions from Guardian Australia.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/nov/03/human-teeth-found-in-meal-served-to-asylum-seekers-on-manus-island>

30. No teeth found in food on Manus Island detention centre, says operator

Broadspectrum, the company formerly known as Transfield, says it has not had any complaints from asylum seekers about food poisoning or teeth found in food

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Thursday 5 November 2015 10.34 AEDT

Broadspectrum, the company formerly known as Transfield and which runs Australia’s offshore detention centres, has said there was no food poisoning or teeth found in food on Manus.

However, the company’s staff on the island, as well as asylum seekers, have insisted the events did occur.

Guardian Australia reported last Friday on an outbreak of gastroenteritis in Delta compound, and on Tuesday about two human teeth reportedly found in food in Oscar compound.

In a statement released late Wednesday, the company said: “Broadspectrum confirms there is no validity to these claims. Broadspectrum has not received any complaints or reports from asylum seekers relating to these alleged incidents.”

"Broadspectrum is committed to the highest food security and quality standards and stands by its track record in delivering services at regional processing centres."

However, in response to the statement, staff on Manus Island said both incidents did happen.

The staff cannot be named because they could be jailed for speaking out about conditions of detention.

Asylum seekers in the affected compounds also insisted the events did occur.

"Last Friday more than 60 people got sick and [they] sent them to medical," one person said from inside the detention centre. "I am in Delta now, it definitely happened, the people got diarrhoea and stomachache."

"Oscar people found teeth in food."

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/nov/05/no-teeth-found-in-food-on-manus-island-detention-centre-says-operator>

31. PNG can house refugees in 'safe environment', says Peter O'Neill

Sydney Morning Herald
November 2, 2015 - 2:38PM
Tom Arup

Port Moresby: Papua New Guinea can house refugees in a "safe environment", the country's Prime Minister Peter O'Neill has declared, as his government prepares to resettle the first people out of the troubled Manus Island detention centre.

Speaking after a meeting with Opposition Leader Bill Shorten in Port Moresby, Mr O'Neill said he expected the first refugee resettlements to occur in PNG well within the year after his cabinet last week approved a plan which will soon be tabled in the PNG parliament.

It is more than two years since Australia first signed a deal with PNG to take asylum seekers bound for down under by boat without a visa, denying them access to Australian shores even if they have a genuine refugee claim.

There has yet to be any resettlement of refugees from the Manus Island detention centre or a nearby transit facility, despite it being understood that about 260 people have so far been deemed genuine refugees.

At the same time human rights and development groups have been very critical of the conditions on Manus Island, where one man died in a riot and there are reports of sexual abuses, and depression and anxiety problems among those detained.

But Mr O'Neill defended the program, saying while it had not pleased non-government organisations it had worked and "stopped the boats".

"Papua New Guinea was the country that stopped the boats that were coming through because of the solution that we offered to Australia," Mr O'Neill told Australian reporters.

"And It has worked.

"We know it has not been pleasing to some of the non-government organisations in Australia.

"But under the circumstances it is better than having people dying at sea. And we are able to house them in a safe environment, where they have clean water and better accommodation."

Earlier Labor frontbenchers had backed news of the resettlements after meeting with senior political figures in Port Moresby after the past few days.

On Sunday, Opposition immigration spokesman Richard Marles said the Turnbull government had to engage with the PNG government to ensure the resettlements did occur.

Asked whether he thought refugees could have a successful life in Papua New Guinea - a country with significant security issues and a collapsing budget revenue - Mr Marles said: "We have always thought, with the appropriate support of the Australian government, there was the capacity to resettle people in PNG."

Mr Shorten, Mr Marles and deputy opposition leader Tanya Plibersek were in PNG as part of a four-day tour of Pacific nations, which is mainly focused on highlighting the impact of climate change on the region.

It is understood that about 55 per cent of the asylum seekers on Manus Island have been deemed genuine refugees, with about half, or perhaps more, having now had their claims assessed.

But only a subset of the nearly 1000 people in the Manus Island detention centre will be resettled in PNG - those deemed genuine refugees and who are also prepared to stay in PNG.

Genuine refugees who do not want to be resettled in PNG remain in limbo, with both major political parties in Canberra refusing to accept them on Australian shores and an agreement for resettlement in a third country yet to appear.

It is unclear how many refugees have applied to be resettled in PNG.

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/png-can-house-refugees-in-safe-environment-says-peter-oneill-20151102-gkoogf.html>

32. 'One of the rare good days': Peter Dutton gives first visas to Syrian, Iraqi families under expanded program

The Age
November 4, 2015 - 8:03AM
Nick Miller

Amman. Peter Dutton is considering offering more refugees a chance to live and work in Australia, expanding the temporarily-extended resettlement visa program, after a day he ranked as "one of the best" in his time as Immigration Minister.

On Tuesday in Amman Mr Dutton gave out the first refugee visas granted under Australia's temporarily-expanded resettlement program.

The visas were handed over personally by the minister to four families: two that fled the war in Syria, and two Christian families who fled Iraq and now want to join relatives already in Australia.

In September the Australian government announced that, in response to the Syrian conflict and the growing migrant crisis in the Mediterranean, it would add 12,000 places for Syrians and Iraqis to the 13,750 it takes through the United Nations resettlement program – a total of 25,750 vulnerable refugees offered a new life.

But as things stand the addition is a one-off, with the "normal" visa count to go back down to 18,250 in 2018/19.

Mr Dutton said if this additional intake was a success, he would consider raising that figure.

"What I want to do is to demonstrate that with the 12,000 we can do it right, we can get the security checks in place, we are not going to compromise on making sure that we can establish the bona fides," he told Fairfax.

"If we can do that then I think the Australian public will say we do think it's a reasonable thing to look at the prospect of offering more places beyond the 12,000, over coming years.

"If people can relate to those stories, if they can see success in the program that we are rolling out now - then I do think there is the opportunity."

The refugee visas allow the families to live permanently in Australia, to work and study and one day apply for citizenship.

They are expected to arrive in Australia by the end of the year.

"There are lots of bad days in this portfolio. This would rank as one of the best," Mr Dutton told Fairfax media after the ceremony at Australia's Amman embassy – held as a dust storm swept the city.

"The thought that these kids were going to be given a new life, and the sacrifice that those parents have made to come this far, knowing that those kids would have the opportunity to be educated... and that we were providing that next generation with an opportunity. I think that was the most emotional part.

"We are changing these people's lives and saving lives as well. I think that's why Australians are very proud of the program and I think these people are going to make amazing Australians."

The four families have 12 children between them, aged between 8 months and 14.

The Australian government has asked the United Nations refugee agency, the UNHCR, for 1500 files of refugees to review by the end of the year. Those passed on must then pass Australia's extra health and background checks.

Andrew Harper, UNHCR chief in Jordan, said the Australian attention "gives hope" to refugees.

Mr Harper said it was "pretty easy" to find vulnerable refugees in Jordan suitable for Australia's refugee program.

"Almost all the Syrians are vulnerable," he said. "They have been bombed, harassed, maybe the family has been tortured for years, many of them have little hope of returning [to Syria] in the short to medium term."

The UNHCR was passing to Australia for consideration the files of "women at risk, torture survivors, medical cases", he said.

Mr Dutton said he wanted the program to "concentrate on those who are most in need, and those who come from persecuted minorities, those who have a terrible story to tell".

Of the four families in the first wave of approvals, two were Sunni Muslim and two were Christian: Assyrian Christians from Mosul in Iraq, and Chaldean Catholics from Baghdad.

Mr Dutton said religion was not a determining factor in the selection of which refugees won visas.

"We should take those who are most deserving. Those who are persecuted, those who have been in situations where they have lost family members, [or] escaped near-death themselves."

On Tuesday Mr Dutton also visited Care International, which is providing support for refugees in Amman.

He was told of the hardship of living in Amman as a refugee: domestic violence and child abuse was common, as men unable to work lashed out from the frustration of losing their role as family breadwinner.

There were also significant gaps in healthcare, for complex cases such as cancer or cerebral palsy.

Care country director Wouter Schaap said they had helped 40,000 families in the past year.

He said people were "losing hope".

"People are less certain about how they can survive," he said.

Until recently the UN resettlement program helped so few refugees that it was "pretty much irrelevant", he said.

"Now it is getting better with increasing numbers [of places], increasing the chances of resettlement. But still compared to the population the numbers are small. We need solutions for people who are here. But it has given people some hope."

A lot of people were still considering leaving for Europe, he said, making the dangerous crossing over Syria towards Turkey, and beyond.

During a meeting with Care volunteers, Mr Dutton was told that the resettlement process was "in slow motion".

One woman told him she was torn between taking up the offer of a resettlement visa, which would force her to leave behind her brother's children, who she had started caring for when he left to study in Australia.

However an immigration ministry official said they were unable to verify the woman's claims at short notice.

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/one-of-the-rare-good-days-peter-dutton-gives-first-visas-to-syrian-iraqi-families-under-expanded-program-20151103-gkq2nc.html>

33. Peter Dutton: Jordan refugee camp visit 'reinforces belief' in tough border policy

Immigration minister tours world's second-largest refugee camp, Zaatari, and gives Jordan credit for welcoming more than 600,000 Syrian refugees

The Guardian

Staff and agencies

Wednesday 4 November 2015 10.54 AEDT

The immigration minister, Peter Dutton, has vowed to uphold Australia's tough border protection policies, saying his "confronting" visit to a Syrian refugee camp in Jordan has reinforced his belief in the government's hardline policies.

Dutton toured the world's second-largest refugee camp, Zaatari, on Monday, and gave credit to the country for opening their arms to more than 600,000 Syrian refugees.

But he said the trip only reinforced the federal government's policy of turning back boats, saying it allowed Australia to increase its humanitarian intake from offshore.

"The lesson of today reinforces that we have made the right decision."

“The fact we have a tough border policy in Australia means that we can offer a helping hand,” he told the ABC.

Dutton said the scenes at Zaatari, home to more than 80,000 refugees, were “confronting, to say the least”.

“The scenes of children, innocent victims of war, really pull at your heartstrings.

“The fact that the Jordanians here on the border open their arms up not only to the refugees but also to those people who are seriously injured is a great credit to this country.”

UN officials briefed Dutton on its operations to care for Syrian refugees.

Agencies are perilously short of money: the World Food Program has cut in half its food aid to hundreds of thousands of refugees because of lack of funds.

The UN estimates it needs US\$3.8bn a year to care for 4 million refugees seeking safety in the neighbouring countries of Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. So far they have received only half of the required money.

Australia spends \$1bn – US\$713m – a year on its offshore detention regime alone, and more than \$3bn (US\$2.15bn) on immigration detention more broadly, which houses 1,500 people.

Dutton was also briefed by the UNHCR on how Australia would decide which 12,000 Syrian refugees to resettle as part of its expanded humanitarian program.

He told Fairfax the chance to grant visas to four families – two from Syria and two from Iraq – was “one of the best days” of his time in the portfolio.

And Dutton said if the current expanded intake was a success, he would consider further extensions to the humanitarian program.

It is expected the first group of refugees selected from Middle East camps will arrive before Christmas.

But Labor has accused the federal government of a breach of faith by not doing enough to quickly bring Syrian refugees to Australia.

Responding to reports that only a small number of refugees would be in Australia by the end of the year, immigration spokesman Richard Marles criticised the government for dragging its feet.

“They said they would be doing this as soon as possible with significant numbers coming before Christmas,” Marles told reporters in the Marshall Islands.

“The fact that a negligible number would be here by the end of the year [is] a breach of faith.”

Labor believes the government was dragged kicking and screaming to offer 12,000 humanitarian spots over four years for refugees escaping the Syrian crisis.

Marles conceded security checks were necessary but said advanced biometric screening undertaken at the United Nations-run refugee camp in Jordan should make the process quicker.

“We’ve got an emergency going on in Syria,” he said.

“The notion that it’s going to take months and months to do that due diligence is simply wrong.”

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/nov/04/peter-dutton-jordan-refugee-camp-visit-reinforces-belief-in-tough-border-policy>

34. Adelaide man accused of people smuggling released from jail on home detention

ABC News Online
Posted Wed 4 Nov 2015, 11:21am

A man from Adelaide's north accused of people smuggling has been released from jail on home detention bail.

Jasothiran Shellakandu, 35, is accused of facilitating a people smuggling operation between November 2009 and August 2013.

Australian Federal Police (AFP) alleged Shellakandu, while living in Indonesia, helped a non-citizen enter Australia illegally by boat.

It was also alleged that he was in contact with well-known people smugglers in Malaysia, Sri Lanka and India.

In October, he was arrested by the AFP and SA police officers while at work in Wingfield.

Today, he appeared in the Elizabeth Magistrates Court by video link from Yatala prison.

A magistrate approved Shellakandu's release on home detention bail to live at Elizabeth South.

The court heard police are still carrying out identification procedures and so a publication ban remains on the man's image.

After his bail was approved, Shellakandu responded through an interpreter "thank you so much".

He said of one prosecution witness: "I have no idea why he has accused me of this."

The case returns to court in January.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-11-04/accused-people-smuggler-released-on-home-detention/6911920>