

Project SafeCom News and Updates

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1. Simon Hendel: Double standards in medical care for offshore detainees

The Age
June 15, 2016
Simon Hendel

As an anaesthetist and a specialist in aeromedical retrieval, I regularly manage burns and co-ordinate the transfer of critically unwell patients from remote facilities to higher levels of care. I've also served as a medical officer in military field hospitals on operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Healthcare facilities in our offshore processing centres are desperately in need of scrutiny because what we're being told simply doesn't add up.

Earlier this week, speaking on the ABC's Q&A, Opposition Leader Bill Shorten pledged to open Nauru and Manus Island to journalists were he to become Prime Minister on July 2. In response to a question from an audience member, he said: "It would have to be an amazing set of circumstances where we're not prepared to tell you what's going on."

This is a key point of difference between the major players in this election and an essential change to Australia's refugee policy.

On the other hand, Immigration Minister Peter Dutton is happy keeping us in the dark. Scrutiny is not on the Coalition's agenda when it comes to refugees.

The Immigration Minister has primarily sought to reassure us by claiming that health facilities in Nauru are as good as for Aussie troops in the Middle East and better than for regional Australia.

Mr Dutton is unqualified to judge the standard of any hospital – military or otherwise. This has led to a major misunderstanding as evidenced by the nonsense of assessing a single hospital without taking into account the system that surrounds and supports it.

The key difference between other health facilities and the healthcare capability offshore is the option to increase the level of care for a critically unwell patient.

This relies on a dedicated, well-resourced and around-the-clock retrieval system. Our soldiers in the Middle East and people in remote Australia have this. What this means is that when a person is seriously injured, or is unwell, there is a robust system to take high-level care to them and transfer them to a major tertiary hospital quickly enough to make a difference.

For Mr Dutton's argument to be valid, the Nauruan facilities would need to be able to treat and transfer patients to the same level of care as is possible in regional Australia – or be able to offer the same standard of care and facilities as a major Australian hospital.

The problem with making that assessment is that anyone who has been to Nauru has to shut up and never, ever say what it's really like, or they risk two years in prison. I've spoken to a colleague who's been to Nauru but I can't quote them for fear of putting them at considerable risk.

Welcome to the conundrum of the Border Force Act and the dilemma we face in judging what's being done in our name. We have no choice but to trust what Mr Dutton says about the standard of medical care available on this tiny, impoverished Pacific island.

This has to change. But even before it does, there are some things we can clearly infer that highlight systemic failings and cast serious doubts over Mr Dutton's claims. Whether these failings are by accident or by design is open to speculation.

On April 27, 2016, Omid Masoumali, 23, suffered burns to 80 per cent of his body after setting himself on fire. The key to surviving severe burns is early and effective treatment and rapid transfer to a specialist facility.

But the only chance Mr Masoumali had to survive was lost when he did not receive early advanced burn care and his transfer was delayed by more than a day. No adequate explanation has been given for the delay that sealed his fate. He died on April 29, despite the best efforts of experts in Brisbane.

His is not an isolated case. Hamid Khazaei, 24, died in Brisbane on September 5, 2014, from an infected cut on his leg after his retrieval from Manus Island was similarly delayed. This would be inexcusable in Australia.

Conversely, very seriously injured or wounded coalition troops could almost always receive advanced care in the Middle East in under six hours and were usually evacuated to Germany, or repatriated within 24 to 48 hours.

Before Mr Masoumali died, the Immigration Minister blamed distance from the mainland for the delay in transfer. "It's not as if we're heading out to Bondi or Beenleigh to try and pick up somebody," he said.

And yet troops in a field hospital "of at least the same standard" can be sent halfway around the world in a day and patients fetched from remote Australia in hours.

I'm really not sure how much faith we can place in Mr Dutton's reassurances about the gleaming excellence of the Nauruan health system. I guess the only way to know for sure is to go and take a look.

---->>> *Dr Simon Hendel is an anaesthetist at a trauma and burns centre and an aeromedical retrieval specialist. He has served as a medical officer in Afghanistan and Iraq and has worked throughout the Pacific.*

<http://www.theage.com.au/comment/double-standards-in-medical-care-for-offshore-detainees-20160606-gpcs64.html>

2. Jeff Sparrow: In PNG and Nauru, Australia's immigration policy comes at the expense of democracy

Australia's offshore detention policy relies on the weakness of its post-colonial states, even as it weakens them further

The Guardian

Jeff Sparrow

Wednesday 15 June 2016 14.12 AEST

A regional solution for refugees. That was the liberal sweetener in the "expert panel" report of 2012, a document that endorsed the deterrent of offshore processing. Duly fortified against her left flank (one of the "experts" was Paris Aristotle, a well-respected "refugee advocate"), then prime minister Julia Gillard declared her government would "move urgently to restart offshore processing on Manus Island and Nauru".

Last week, the Papua New Guinea police opened fire with automatic weapons on university students marching against corruption. That shocking manifestation of overt authoritarianism by Australia's key partner in offshore detention provides a glimpse of what refugee politics has meant for the region four years down the track.

In July 2013, PNG's prime minister, Peter O'Neill, stood next to Kevin Rudd in Brisbane as the Australian government announced its so-called PNG Solution. Henceforth, Rudd explained, asylum seekers would not only be processed on Manus Island, they would also (if assessed as refugees) be settled in PNG.

According to the PNG supreme court, the deal was, right from the start, entirely unconstitutional. Nowhere else in the world, said PNG MP Belden Namah, would a politician have "amended the constitution to accommodate another foreign country's domestic policy interest."

But, of course, few other countries in the world (other than Nauru, of which more later) relate to Australia in the way that PNG does. PNG was once an Australian colony – "one of the last places in the world where white settler colonialism was advocated as colonial policy," as John Connell explains in his *Papua New Guinea: The Struggle for Development*.

Self-government came in 1973 and independence in 1975. The relative lateness of the process left PNG with particularly acute versions of the ills endemic in post-colonial societies, including widespread poverty, economic underdevelopment, weak civil institutions and an ongoing dependence on the former colonial power.

The "PNG Solution" was made possible by those problems, even as it worsens them.

In its report for 2015, Human Rights Watch lists the financial inducements offered by the Australian government to make the Manus Island deal happen.

"Australia remains [PNG]'s most important international partner," it explains, "providing an estimated US\$460m in development assistance for 2013-2014. Australia provided an additional \$556.7m this financial year to support the Manus Island detention center."

But O'Neill also possessed his own reasons for signing up.

In 2011, the PNG supreme court ordered him to stand down in favour of Michael Somare, an order with which he simply refused to comply. The agreement with Australia, the regional power, thus provided him with international legitimacy. By promising to deliver refugee resettlement (a plan that was, right from the outset, unpopular in PNG, O'Neill made himself indispensable to Canberra, on the basis of the "he-might-be-a-son-of-a-bitch-but-he's-our-son-of-a-bitch" principle so beloved of US presidents).

There was no secret about what that meant. A few days after shaking Rudd's hand, O'Neill boasted that he'd achieved what he called "a realignment" of Australian aid in PNG.

Since then, Professor Jason Sharman, a money laundering expert at Griffith University, has repeatedly warned that Canberra has privileged the maintenance of the detention centre over the fight against corruption.

“The government sends signals,” he told the Guardian, “often reflecting media attention, as to what it wants investigated. Various people have flagged PNG corruption proceeds in Australia as a problem, not least elements of the PNG government and law enforcement as well as the AFP and Austrac, but the Australian government under both Labor and the Coalition has chosen not to investigate, and recently Manus has been a big reason for inaction.”

That’s the backdrop to the recent student protests.

Two years ago, anti-corruption police issued a warrant to arrest the prime minister over a million-dollar fraud involving the company Paraka Lawyers. O’Neill responded by disbanding the corruption taskforce and installing his own handpicked police chief.

The student demonstration was part of an anti-corruption campaign, seeking to force O’Neill to comply with basic democratic principles.

But the vicious brutality of the PNG police has a context, too – and, again, the links to Australia are telling.

The Manus Island deal entailed a contingent of Australian Federal Police officers training the Royal PNG Constabulary (RPNGC). In late 2015, an AFP whistleblower told the ABC that the Australian government was turning a blind eye to the corruption and police involvement in extra-judicial killings, for fear that the detention centre might be closed.

“The RPNGC were essentially murdering people, raping people, burning villages down,” he said. He’d seen local police commit horrific crimes, he explained, but his reports had been ignored by his superiors.

“What we soon noticed was that anything that painted the government of PNG with corruption, or the RPNGC with their brutality, murder and rape was being sanitised,” he said. The AFP said it had reviewed reports from the officer and hadn’t found any matters requiring further action.

It’s not simply that successive Australian governments, keen to keep the Manus deal alive, do not want to antagonise the PNG government. It’s worse than that.

In the final analysis, the Australian facility on Manus Island relies on coercion to keep asylum seekers detained. That’s why, ever since it opened, it has built a relationship with the most notorious of the PNG police units.

In 2013, for instance, Rory Callinan reported:

“Papua New Guinea’s most thuggish paramilitary police unit – allegedly responsible for rapes, murders and other serious human rights abuses – is being discreetly funded by the Australian Immigration Department to secure the Manus Island asylum seeker detention centre. The ‘Mobile Squad’ officers, who just last month beat a local man to death on the island, are receiving a special living-away allowance of about \$100 a day from funding provided by the department.”

In February 2014, when detainees began to protest, the Mobile Squad played an important role in quelling the demonstration. As Human Rights Watch explains:

“During the incident, many detainees sustained injuries and one detainee was beaten to death. Police allegedly entered firing their guns when violence broke out inside the facility.”

This is not an anomaly. Rather, it’s an illustration of how an Australian program that’s only possible because of the weaknesses of a post-colonial society continues to exacerbate those weaknesses.

FULL STORY AT <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/15/in-png-and-nauru-australias-immigration-policy-comes-at-the-expense-of-democracy>

3. Kon Karapanagiotidis: The humanity crisis

The Saturday Paper
Kon Karapanagiotidis
June 18, 2016

It’s August 2001 and the Tampa crisis is unfolding. Some 438 rescued refugees are stranded on a lonely freighter. The army has been arrayed against them. Bills hurried through parliament. Innocent men and women demonised in the press and by government members.

Two months earlier, the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC) had opened its doors. A handful of people had attended our first volunteer information sessions, but they would become thousands. Thousands of ordinary people who refused to let these hateful salvos go unanswered. In the 15 years since, through all the highs and the lows, it is this compassion that continues to give me hope.

The suffering, limbo and grief experienced by the refugees we have worked with are a stain on our collective hearts. The stories and memories of the past 15 years stay with me. The original membership book of the ASRC holds the names of the first 7529 people seeking asylum whom we assisted. They are not numbers; they are stories of extraordinary sacrifice and courage, of people who would split the world in half and cross its lands and seas for the love of their family and freedom.

I remember their faces. The 10-year-old girl whose hospital bed I rushed to in the middle of the night because she had just tried to hang herself with a bedsheet to end the terror of detention. The young desperate man, facing immediate deportation, whom I was talking to on the phone at 1am, trying to stop him from cutting his throat with the broken glass he held. The father who had lost his five daughters and wife on a boat travelling to Australia, who was on a temporary protection visa and so was unable to sponsor his family to come to Australia safely.

I remember spending time with the extraordinary Amal Basry, a survivor of the SIEV X, the sunk vessel that saw 353 people die at sea while seeking our protection. Amal would tell me how the endless uncertainty of a temporary protection visa was her punishment from the Australian government for not drowning. Up until her death, Amal would speak out fearlessly for the human rights of refugees and advocate for an end to the visa class that trapped her in unknowing. She campaigned to end the captivity of refugees in a cruel existence of temporary freedom, hopes and dreams.

FULL STORY AT <https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/opinion/topic/2016/06/18/the-humanity-crisis/14661720003385>

4. These are the people Australia didn't want — the controversial Tampa refugees reveal life now

Cindy Wockner
News Corp Australia Network
June 11, 2016 4:01pm

Ghulam Amiri smiles warmly.

Was it worth it, the terrifying days at sea in a broken down boat, fearing death at every wave, rescued by a Norwegian freighter then weeks spent at the centre of a political firestorm and two years in detention limbo on Nauru?

“Of course it was worth it, to have a beautiful life, having a business and being successful, of course it was worth it.

“This is my country,” Ghulam says with genuine affection. “I am happy, very happy with the life we have here. It is a luxurious life rather than living in a war-torn country.”

Najib Amin says there is no word to describe how grateful he is.

“This country has given us work and freedom and love and respect that I would never have had in Afghanistan. I can't say how lucky I am and how lucky my children and my wife are in this beautiful country.”

Rahmatullah Sharifi feels the same. He has travelled all over Australia working and says he has met only compassionate and kind people. Australia has been good to him.

Farid Ahmad Abdullah loves the place. His three small children were all born here.

But the love wasn't always there.

They are the people Australia didn't want, the people then Prime Minister John Howard declared would never set foot on our soil — the 438 Afghan asylum seekers Australia tried its hardest to reject.

Now, as the 15th anniversary of the controversial Tampa affair approaches, News Corporation speaks with some of those asylum seekers who have forged successful lives for themselves in Australia.

They were a political football back then, on the eve of a Federal election. A decade and a half later, on the eve of another Federal election, asylum seekers are still a political football as both sides remain determined to stop the boats at any cost.

Peter Dutton, Immigration Minister, recently opined on why increasing our refugee intake is not a good idea — “... they (asylum seekers) won't be numerate or literate in their own language, let alone English”.

“These people would be taking Australian jobs ... and for many of them that would be unemployed, they would languish in unemployment queues.” The incongruity of how these two things would happen at once has not been explained.

But numerous studies point to positive contributions of refugees.

“Experience suggests that refugees in Australia engage heavily in job searching and vocational education, often accept work below their levels of experience and education and commonly undertake voluntary work,” a 2013 study commissioned by the Multicultural Development Association found.

A report for the Immigration Department about the contributions of humanitarian arrivals in Australia points out that five of the eight billionaires in Australia in 2000 were of humanitarian settler background.

Beata Ostapiej-Piatkowski, the community engagement co-ordinator at the Romero Centre, a refugee and asylum seeker support agency in Brisbane, says that many asylum seekers arrive here well-educated and are an investment in our society. “They work, they do volunteering, they want to give back to the community, they have a culture of generosity,” she says.

Mr Dutton’s comments saddened people like Ghulam, Najib, Rahmatullah and Farid.

Fifteen years ago they fled Afghanistan and certain death from the Taliban, went to Pakistan and paid a people smuggler to get them to Indonesia to catch a boat to Australia. In August 2001 they were among 438 people loaded onto a wooden vessel in Indonesia, heading for Christmas Island.

Ghulam Amiri was just 18 when he left northern Afghanistan with a burning desire to find safety. But for three days the tiny wooden fishing boat the smugglers put them on was battered by the ocean after its engine failed.

People cried, screamed and prayed. “The waves were coming like a mountain, it was not small waves,” Ghulam recalls. He thought he would die.

Najib Amin still can’t fathom how they survived. He was so sure they would all perish that he threw off his life jacket, saying it would be useless.

Had the Norwegian freighter, the Tampa, not come along when it did, responding to a mayday call from Australian rescue authorities, all 438 on board would likely have died.

Rahmatullah Sharifi said that only hours after they were rescued and taken on board the Tampa, the storm whipped up the seas even more.

On the Tampa the asylum seekers believed the ordeal was almost over and that within hours they would be unloaded at Christmas Island and embarking on the next phase of a journey to a new life.

Australia was having none of it, ordering the Tampa and its Captain Arne Rinnan to take them back to Indonesia. He was equally as determined that would not be happening, as his human cargo languished on the Tampa’s deck, using buckets for toilets, many sick and dehydrated.

Farid Abdullah says they had no idea their story was front page news or why they were being turned away from Christmas Island. They were confused and thought they were being sent to Norway when in fact the word was Nauru. They were shown photos of palm trees.

“We were heartbroken,” Farid remembers. The asylum seekers asked why. The answer was blunt. “The Australian Government doesn’t want you, they want to send you there and process you there (Nauru).”

He remembers vividly the day Australian commandos, armed and pointing weapons at them, boarded the Tampa and ordered them to the navy ship, the HMAS Manoora. Everyone was so scared.

Loaded onto the Manoora however they remained there, in the sunless bowels of the boat for 20 days, as politicians and officials argued over their fate and authorities rushed to complete a detention centre on the tiny Pacific island nation of Nauru.

For two years the group was held on Nauru. Their time in detention was, they say, dreadful.

New Zealand had accepted more than 130 of them, others went to Europe and only a very small handful — less than 30 — ended up in Australia, having been granted five-year temporary protection visas.

Rahmatullah Sharifi remembers flying into Brisbane in 2003, their group loaded onto a bus and driven out a secret exit of the airport to avoid the waiting media. Australian officials suggested it best not to talk to the press.

From the moment he got to Australia Rahmatullah wanted to work. For the first three months he couldn’t find a job. Everyone asked for a resume. He didn’t have one, he’d never needed one.

So, after some English classes, he ventured into the countryside and moved around Australia picking fruit, saving as much as he could. Several years later he moved back to Brisbane and drove a taxi.

At the same time Najib Amin, who had also been fruit picking, was working as a boilermaker. The pair decided to investigate a car wrecking yard that was for sale.

“I didn’t know anything, he knew a little bit and not much. We just took a chance because we knew this was a good business in my country,” Rahmatullah says of their combined knowledge of the car business. So, with their savings and with a \$20,000 loan from an Australian woman who had cared for them when they first arrived at the Romero Centre, they bought the yard in 2008. Four years later they paid her back every cent. They say she never asked for this.

“When we bought (the business) we struggled a lot. We didn’t know how to run it, we did it hard. We worked really hard.

“We bought an old tow truck and we used that to collect cars until 8-9 o’clock at night,” he says of the early days of the business.

Eight years later the business is still thriving and employs five people. Humayun Neikzada, known as Nick, works for them. He was just 17 when he left Ghazni and ended up on the Tampa. He initially went to Perth before moving back to Brisbane and recently married.

“We employ four to five people. We pay taxes. We pay GST and we pay super. I am not taking from the Government, I am giving back to the Government,” Rahmatullah says.

The only time Rahmatullah says he received anything from Centrelink was the first three months after arrival in Australia when he struggled to find work. Since then he has never been back.

In 2007 Rahmatullah’s wife and young son, whom he had left behind in Afghanistan, joined him in Australia. The oldest is now 17 and hopes to study medicine. The two little ones were born in Australia and are five and a half and three.

Najib too left his wife and child in Afghanistan. He was 21. They arrived here in 2007 and the couple has since had another two children. He feels blessed to be in Australia.

“I have been working since I have entered this country. Now I am working and I am employing about 10 people here,” Najib says. Only recently his accountant tallied up how much tax he has paid in the past six years. Najib says he was shocked. He now also owns a second wrecking yard.

Najib says it is unfair to blame asylum seekers for illiteracy. Many come from war torn regions where schools are closed or bombed and they have never had an opportunity to be educated.

When he first arrived Ghulam Amiri, then 20, made a point of going to TAFE and learning English before finding a factory job and working as a labourer. He now runs his own second hand car yard in Brisbane.

“I have never been to Centrelink since I first came here. I probably had one month when I first came and since then I have worked and paid taxes.”

Ghulam says all the Afghans he knows who have come to Australia are hardworking people fleeing war and persecution. “They didn’t come here to stay on benefits, they came here to get a job and work.” In 2003 Ghulam married in Pakistan and his wife Nasrin moved to Australia in 2009. The couple now has four children, aged seven to one, and he works hard to secure their future.

Back home in Afghanistan Farid Abdullah worked in his family’s grocery wholesale shop. When he got here he was desperate to do any work but for eight months he lucked out because potential employers wanted experience. He told them he was young and strong and he would learn and eventually got a job at a chicken factory before becoming a taxi driver.

“It is not true to say that we don’t want to work. When we came the next day we were thinking, where do we get a job.”

Farid eventually saved enough to buy himself a tow truck and now works for himself. He married on a trip home and his wife is now in Australia with him. They have three small children, six and two years and four months.

“My message is please don’t treat people so harshly. Treat people as humans.”

<http://www.news.com.au/national/these-are-the-people-australia-didnt-want--the-controversial-tampa-refugees-reveal-life-now/news-story/fa596f8167daf7e2641694c4b975f6bc>

5. Melbourne refugee Arif Hazara travels to Geneva to speak at UNHCR meeting

ABC News Online

By James Hancock

Posted Mon 13 Jun 2016, 10:22am

Five years ago, at the age of just 16, Arif Hazara left behind his family in Afghanistan and made the dangerous journey by boat to Australia to escape violence and persecution.

The third-year university student is among 30 people from across the globe attending a UNHCR meeting in Geneva this week aimed at giving young refugees and asylum seekers a voice.

Mr Hazara could not speak English when he arrived in the country in 2011.

Now aged 21, he is completing a university degree in Melbourne while working as an assistant accountant.

Mr Hazara has become a vocal advocate for others seeking a better life, and is keen to use his trip to Geneva to highlight the importance of education for young refugees and asylum seekers.

"Had it not been for the education that I had, or am having, I wouldn't be in a position to actually raise these issues to be an active citizen in Australia," he said.

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton sparked controversy last month after saying that many refugees seeking humanitarian visas had not completed high school and were illiterate in their own language.

He also suggested that a large percentage had no English skills at all.

Mr Hazara said asylum seekers living in the community on bridging visas could not complete studies beyond high school and were missing out on realising their full potential.

"Doing nothing means that there would be psychological impacts and they would be suffering severe mental health issues."

Education fees often unaffordable

Refugees and asylum seekers are treated like international students in that they have to pay university fees upfront.

Academics have previously called for refugees to be able to access the student loan scheme.

The situation is much worse for refugees living in camps elsewhere in the Asia Pacific region including Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand.

Mr Hazara said the prospect of spending years in a camp was made worse by the fact that, without work rights, school fees were unaffordable.

He said he would use the Global Refugee Youth Consultation meeting to urge the UNCHR and other aid organisations to facilitate greater opportunities for refugees to get an education.

Refugee made to feel 'very welcome'

Mr Hazara doubted whether he would ever make it to Australia alive as he travelled for eight days in rough seas on a people smuggler's boat.

He spent about half a year in detention on Christmas Island and in Darwin before settling in Melbourne.

He said he had no option but to flee his homeland as he is a member of the persecuted Hazara ethnic minority and the civil war was raging at the time.

His family also managed to escape Afghanistan but they are not living in Australia.

"Initially the feeling was that finally I am free, I can walk free without having been guarded," he said.

Despite recent clashes between anti-immigration and anti-racism protesters in Melbourne, Mr Hazara said he had been made to feel "very welcome" in Australia.

"My experience has been very positive in Melbourne," he said.

But he cautions: "That may not be the experience across the board."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-06-13/melbourne-refugee-travels-to-geneva-to-speak-at-unhcr-meeting/7505122>

6. 'A story that will stun Australia': A Current Affair gets rare access to Nauru

A virtual media blackout at the remote republic of Nauru is set to be temporarily broken, after tabloid television program A Current Affair announced it had gained exclusive access to the island's offshore detention centre.

Canberra Times
June 17 2016 - 4:44PM
Nicole Hasham

In a tweet on Friday, the Channel Nine program spruiked an episode to run on Monday night from "inside Nauru's detention centre", claiming the story would "stun Australia".

"We'll take you inside the Australian-run regional processing centre ... it marks the very first time that a television crew has been granted access to the controversial facility," the tweet said.

"Our cameras will bring you exclusive footage on how asylum seekers and refugees are really living".

Foreign journalists must pay an \$8000 visa fee to visit Nauru, which is not refunded if the application is rejected. Al-Jazeera has reported that Nauruan officials have "banned all journalists from reporting from the country", however the Nauru government denies this.

Critics say the virtual ban on foreign media visiting the island is a blatant attempt by Australian and Nauruan authorities to prevent the emergence of damaging information about the plight of asylum seekers and refugees, who report frequent violence and discrimination, sex assaults, discrimination and poor living conditions.

On the ABC's Q&A program on Monday night, Opposition Leader Bill Shorten said a Labor government would allow journalists to visit Nauru and Manus Island detention centres, saying "this nation operates best if you treat people as smart and intelligent and tell them what's going on".

The government criticised the pledge, saying media access to the centres was determined by the Papua New Guinea and Nauru governments.

In October last year, Nauru police raided the offices of Save the Children workers who assist asylum seekers on the island, seizing computers and mobile phones.

It was understood the raid was connected to a Guardian Australia article involving an email to detention centre staff, which said Nauruan journalists would be allowed to enter the detention centre to "reinstate balance" in media reporting.

Later that month, The Australian journalist Chris Kenny became the first reporter allowed on to Nauru in 18 months.

Other media outlets, including Fairfax Media, have reported that the Nauru government has rejected or ignored their inquiries about obtaining a journalist visa.

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/a-story-that-will-stun-australia-a-current-affair-gets-rare-access-to-nauru-20160617-gplsj9.html>

7. Refugee Family Left Angry After A Current Affair Visits Nauru

New Matilda
By Max Chalmers
June 17, 2016

The tabloid news program has gained rare access to the island, but one family they attempted to speak to has been left unhappy by the interaction. Max Chalmers reports.

A family of refugees has been left anxious about their safety on Nauru after they were filmed by a media crew that appears to be from Channel Nine's A Current Affair program.

Refugee advocates began sharing images yesterday showing a female journalist recording a piece to camera with a cameraman and sound technician in front of the detention centre.

Though initially declining to answer questions, Channel Nine has now confirmed that A Current Affair was granted access to the Australian backed detention centre, and will broadcaster a story about the visit on Monday.

Rana Dayni, a Lebanese woman who set up a restaurant on Nauru after being released from detention, was surprised and distressed to see the film crew arrive at her outlet yesterday. She said the crew were accompanied by members of the Nauruan police force and a government official.

According to her account, backed by others who debriefed with her later, the crew left after it was made clear she did not want them filming. Dayni's family have had trouble from other refugees who did not agree with their decision to keep the restaurant open the day Omid Masoumali died. The family also previously had a bad experience with an Australian media outlet, and said the story was twisted to help portray Nauru as a pleasant place for refugees to live. Afraid of this happening again, Dayni declined to be filmed.

"I am sick now, and I have four boys, [life is]not easy here," she told New Matilda. "I am a strong lady but now I am sick."

Yet when the tv crew returned later in the day, ostensibly to interview men working on the restaurant's construction, they allegedly filmed Dayni and the restaurant as well. She was left distressed.

"I am very, very angry form yesterday. I can't sleep today. Tonight I am very sick," Dayni said.

Contacted for comment this morning, A Current Affair refused to confirm or deny if they had a crew on the island.

But Channel Nine has since confirmed that the show will broadcast a story about Nauru on Monday. At deadline, they had not responded to questions about the interaction with Dayni and her family.

"We'll take you inside the Australian-run regional processing centre on the Pacific island nation of Nauru," a Channel Nine media release said.

"It marks the very first time that a television crew has been granted access to the controversial facility."

"Our cameras will bring you exclusive footage on how asylum seekers and refugees are really living."

The network described it as "a story that will stun Australia".

Journalists, lawyers, and refugee advocates have been kept out of Nauru in recent years, with even those prepared to pay the exorbitant \$8,000 visa application fee for journalists refused entry. The last person working for a media outlet to visit the island was Chris Kenny, a former chief-of-staff to Malcolm Turnbull who is now a contributing editor to The Australian newspaper.

Earlier in the week, Coalition campaign spokesperson and Minister Mathias Cormann insisted that journalists should not be allowed to visit the detention camps on Nauru or Manus Island as this would allow information to be shared with people smugglers.

How exactly Nine managed to secure visas for its reporters remains unclear at this point in time.

<https://newmatilda.com/2016/06/17/refugee-family-left-angry-after-a-current-affair-visits-nauru/>

8. A Current Affair: story of visit to Nauru detention centre will 'stun Australia'

Detainees and advocates concerned after first TV news crew given access to Australian immigration detention centre

The Guardian
Helen Davidson
Saturday 18 June 2016 12.00 AEST

A news crew from Channel Nine's A Current Affair has been given rare access to Nauru and the Australian offshore immigration detention centre.

The tabloid TV show has billed its report as an exclusive look at "how asylum seekers and refugees are really living" but advocates and lawyers have raised concerns about its freedom and access on the island.

A teaser commercial for Monday's show says the story will "stun Australia", and claims to have already sent refugee advocates "into a frenzy".

It includes a short clip of an unidentified man saying "fuck Australia", and shows the inside of cramped, shared accommodation areas, and the protests which have been occurring daily for almost three months.

It also claims it had full access although people on the island have said the crew appeared to have Nauruan officials or police escorting them to particular places.

The arrival of the news crew has prompted concern among detainees, some whom have accused the group of filming them without permission.

Some advocates had warned refugees against speaking to the journalists.

Nauru is notoriously media averse, and this marks the first time a TV news crew has been allowed on the island to film the centre. The government charges media a non-refundable \$8,000 visa application fee. Since the centre opened only one journalist has legally reported from the island.

The Australian's Chris Kenny speculated at the time of his reports that his support for "strong border protection policies" had perhaps helped.

The Nauru government frequently refuses to comment on stories only to later comment through its Twitter account, and has conducted police raids following damaging leaks to media.

The human rights lawyer George Newhouse said he was concerned about the conditions under which the news team were granted visas, and that "they may not be seeing the harsh realities of the existence of many of the asylum seekers and refugees."

Newhouse told Guardian Australia he'd heard reports the film crew had visited the new hospital, which was not yet operating, and noted it was only last month that a man died "in disturbing circumstances" at the Nauru hospital.

"There are some offices that are being used for consultations but it's not operating as a hospital. What they're seeing is a papier mâché front," he said.

"It's important to note it's taken four years for Nauru to be in a state where journalists can actually be shown some of what's going on."

He said it was not just journalists who were denied access, but also lawyers.

"I have clients who have been raped on that island and we can't even get copies of their police statements," he said.

"I'm acting for the family of a man who died on the island and I can't get access to the island or their court system. It's a black site in the Pacific and one needs to question the basis on which particular journalists are being granted access to it."

On Wednesday, before the revelation that A Current Affair was on the island, the government of Nauru's information office tweeted there had been no change to the visa process.

"Entry into Nauru is at sole discretion of Nauru government and standard application procedures apply," it said.

The Greens senator Sarah Hanson-Young said the visit seemed like "a cynical political move on the eve of the election".

"The government has banned me from visiting all of Australia's detention centres during the caretaker period of government, but it seems this tabloid TV show has been given an all access pass," she told Guardian Australia.

"When I visit detention centres, including the one on Nauru, I'm told that the managers madly rush around cleaning things up and trying to hide the worst of the neglect before I arrive. I have no doubt that the same thing would have happened before this film crew were allowed into the camp and I'm worried the Australian people won't see the reality of life inside these camps."

A spokeswoman for the department of immigration said it was aware of the visit, but access was a matter for the government of Nauru. She said the Australian government did not facilitate A Current Affair's visit.

The Australian government has defended its media blackout inside detention centres. The Coalition's campaign spokesman, Mathias Cormann, this week said preventing access was part of "operational discipline" and suggested it prevented sharing intelligence information with people smugglers. He declined to give further explanation.

The comments were in response to the opposition leader, Bill Shorten, who said a Labor government would allow media access inside the centres.

A Current Affair and the Nauruan government have been contacted for comment.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/jun/18/a-current-affair-story-of-visit-to-nauru-detention-centre-will-stun-australia>

9. Tabloid declares open season on asylum seekers

Election 2016: according to Sydney's Daily Telegraph, Labor will give 'full work rights' to 30,000 people on temporary visas

The Guardian
Calla Wahlquist
Thursday 16 June 2016 07.55 AEST

It had to happen, I'm just surprised it took this long.

The Daily Telegraph has declared open season on asylum seekers.

Or rather, it has declared that Bill Shorten has declared open season for people smugglers by apparently laying out the welcome mat, a visual gag deployed to great effect on the Tele's front page, to asylum seekers.

According to the Tele, Labor will give permanent residency to all 30,000 people now languishing on temporary protection visas, which the immigration minister, Peter Dutton, warned will cause chaos.

Border protection has not really been the vote winner this election that it was in 2013. Indeed, the only parties really gaining traction on it are the Greens, who oppose Australia's offshore detention system as inhumane, and Pauline Hanson, who wants to ban all Muslims.

So the Coalition could probably use a little chaos.

As Game of Thrones watchers know: Chaos isn't a pit. Chaos is a ladder.
The big picture

First let's unpack that story in the Daily Telegraph article, which says Labor would give its legacy caseload of 30,000 asylum seekers permanent residency and "full work rights".

Labor's policy statement on asylum seekers says it would abolish temporary protection visas and "commit to processing people as quickly as possible and placing those found to be genuine refugees on permanent protection visas", which is not quite the same. Moving on.

Reporters Daniel Meers and Simon Benson write:

"Immigration minister Peter Dutton last night told the Daily Telegraph Labor's border security policy was now "weak, equivocal and constantly changing".

"The potential for post-election rebellion appears to be far more widespread than was revealed at the beginning of the campaign, with public records confirming a total of 50 candidates or MPs opposing strong border protection."

Border protection was a stronghold of the Abbott government that has been adopted wholeheartedly by the Turnbull government, so watch this space today.

Meanwhile, both leaders are out talking about the economy, with the jobless figures for May released today.

Labor has announced details of a \$68.6m policy to deliver "local jobs for local people" in 20 "communities of opportunity", which are as yet unnamed communities with high rates of disadvantage and unemployment and low levels of education.

FULL STORY AT <http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/jun/16/australian-election-2016-turnbull-shorten-coalition-greens-labor-briefing>

10. Sri Lankans reportedly bound for Australia and stranded off Aceh to be 'escorted' back

A pregnant woman and nine children are among the 44 on the boat, which has been drifting off the coast of Lhoknga

The Guardian
Australian Associated Press
Thursday 16 June 2016 13.42 AEST

A group of Sri Lankans who were reportedly trying to reach Australia when their boat became stranded off Indonesia during bad weather are set to be "escorted" back towards India, officials say.

A pregnant woman and nine children are among the 44 people on board the boat, which has been drifting about 300m off the coast of Lhoknga in Aceh since Saturday.

Following a meeting late on Wednesday between local and central government officials, including the Indonesian vice-president, Jusuf Kalla, authorities said those on board would be allowed ashore while their boat was fixed, refuelled and supplied with food. They would then have to leave for Sri Lanka.

Describing the Sri Lankans as "illegal immigrants", the head of the Aceh immigration division, A Samadan, said they had been rejected on four grounds, including a lack of travel documents and a failure to notify authorities of their intended arrival.

The boat would be escorted out of Indonesian waters towards India, Samadan said on Thursday. However, he could not confirm when this would happen.

Amnesty International hit out at Indonesia for not allowing those on board to be properly processed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

The boat, flying Indian flags, began a hazardous journey from India after those on board reportedly fled Sri Lanka, where members of the Tamil minority have suffered past persecution. The group had been at sea for 20 days in the hopes of seeking asylum in Australia before bad weather struck off Aceh.

"These people have endured a long and difficult journey already," Josef Benedict from Amnesty International said on Thursday.

"Refugees and asylum seekers frequently travel without identity documents, as often these documents are either difficult to obtain or get lost during the journey. This has no consequence on these people's right to seek asylum. UNHCR should be allowed to register them immediately."

The comments come just days after two men aboard the boat tried to swim to shore on Monday afternoon before they were picked up and sent back to the boat by the Indonesian navy.

There are currently more than 13,000 refugees and asylum seekers registered with the UNHCR in the archipelago and detention centres in Indonesia are above capacity.

In Indonesia alone, the number of Afghan asylum seekers awaiting a solution has increased from about 1300 in 2010 to more than 6000 in 2015.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jun/16/sri-lankans-reportedly-bound-for-australia-and-stranded-off-aceh-to-be-escorted-back>

11. Indonesian police fire warning shot as Sri Lankans attempt to leave boat stranded off Aceh

ABC/Wires

First posted Fri 17 Jun 2016, 6:34pm

Updated Fri 17 Jun 2016, 6:39pm

Indonesian police have fired a warning shot amid chaotic scenes on a beach in Aceh, where a boat carrying Sri Lankan asylum seekers has been stranded for a week.

The group, including women and children, have been stuck on the vessel resting in shallow waters of Lhoknga since it broke down on June 11.

Those on board apparently told local authorities they were heading to Christmas Island, more than 2,000 kilometres away, to seek asylum in Australia.

Aceh authorities have refused to allow the asylum seekers to disembark.

They said the boat will be towed out to international waters to continue on its journey after repairs are completed.

Lilianne Fan, international director of Aceh NGO the Geutanyoe Foundation, told the ABC that six women on Thursday jumped off the boat and a shot was fired into the air by police.

"That caused, of course, a lot of panic since that incident happened," she said.

Officials went to talk to the women and they climbed back aboard the boat.

Ms Fan said aid agencies and staff from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) cannot get to the asylum seekers.

"The most important thing at the moment is ... [to] allow access to UNHCR, so that they could interview and communicate properly with this group and try to identify what their protection needs are, what their asylum claims are," she said.

Aceh officials have defended their actions, saying the asylum seekers did not have proper documentation.

Their refusal came despite Indonesian Vice President Jusuf Kalla ordering local authorities to allow them to disembark.

Local immigration official Heri Sudiarto said authorities were fixing the engine and hoped to tow the boat out to international waters later if weather conditions improved.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-06-17/warning-shot-fired-in-indonesian-asylum-seeker-boat-standoff/7522010>

12. Indonesia waits for better weather before 'escorting' boat arrivals back to sea

Group of 44 Sri Lankans who hoped to reach Australia spends night ashore as advocates call for them to be processed as asylum seekers

The Guardian
Australian Associated Press
Saturday 18 June 2016 15.55 AEST

A boatload of Sri Lankans has spent a night ashore in a tent in Indonesia as authorities wait for the weather to improve before "escorting" the 44 back out to sea.

Human rights groups are becoming increasingly outspoken in their criticism of the Indonesian government, describing their handling of the group as "distressing", "gratuitous" and "intimidating".

The 44, including a pregnant woman and nine children, became stranded off Lhoknga in Aceh – on the northwest tip of Sumatra Island – last Saturday when their boat's engine failed amid bad weather.

They had left India 20 days before with hopes of getting to Australia.

On Thursday warning shots were fired into the air when six women jumped off the boat, which was beached near shore, and tried to make it to the land.

A spokesman for Human Rights Watch Asia division said the shots "added gratuitous insult to the injury of their plight".

"The Indonesian government's handling of this matter has been a distressing series of confusing and contradictory missteps that have failed to prioritise the rights and needs of that group of Sri Lankans," he said.

Authorities had planned to escort the boat out of Indonesian waters late on Friday, but due to bad weather and large surf, the Aceh provincial police chief, Husein Hamidi, said the boat people instead took shelter in a tent on shore and were provided with food.

Once the weather improved, they would be returned to the boat and escorted out of Indonesian waters, he said.

Amnesty International has called on the government to allow the group to be properly processed by the UN Refugee Agency rather than deploy "crude intimidation tactics".

"Indonesia risks squandering the goodwill it generated when it provided assistance last year to hundreds of refugees and migrants who had been stranded on the Andaman Sea," Josef Benedict from Amnesty International said.

This week's actions by Indonesia "invite comparisons with other countries that have a notorious record of setting desperate people adrift and at risk of death on the high seas", he added.

Australia's policy of turning back boats has come under criticism by the UNHCR which says its approach in the region has created a "bottleneck" and placed more pressure on countries like Indonesia.

More than 13,000 refugees and asylum seekers are registered with the UNHCR in the archipelago and detention centres in Indonesia are overflowing.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jun/18/indonesia-sri-lanka-boat-asylum-seekers>

13. Manus refugee having breakdown was beaten and jailed, say detainees

Refugees lodge complaint that Iranian man having a mental health episode was taken to Lorengau prison instead of being cared for, and allegedly assaulted

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Wednesday 15 June 2016 16.54 AEST

A refugee having a mental health breakdown in Manus Island detention centre was allegedly beaten and jailed instead of being cared for, according to a formal complaint lodged by more than a dozen refugees.

The man, a 30-year-old Iranian refugee whose first name is Hamed, was having a mental health episode, according to sources on Manus Island. The Guardian has chosen not to report the man's surname.

Hamed was found naked in Mike compound, yelling in an incoherent and distressed state on 12 June.

He was taken to Lorengau prison and then to the so-called "managed accommodation area" section of the Manus detention centre, where he was allegedly assaulted several times. The MAA is for people suffering mental health problems.

Refugees inside Manus said the man had significant injuries to his face.

Fourteen refugees and asylum seekers have signed a formal complaint to Broadspectrum, the operator of the centre, which reads:

"We, the signatories to this complaint form want to know why you are not providing mental health support to Hamed ... and instead you have subjected him to ill-treatment and corporal punishment because he is not behaving normally due to his mental ailment."

Broadspectrum and Wilson Security have not responded to queries from the Guardian over the alleged assault.

Manus sources said the man's mental health had deteriorated seriously in recent weeks.

Behrouz Bouchani, an Iranian refugee and journalist by profession, says he spoke with Hamed and saw wounds on his face.

"Some people have seen him in MAA and told me that they beat him extremely. I'm sure that they beat him because I myself saw his face."

"When I wanted to leave him, he said 'don't leave me, I am alone'. He said 'I scared'. He was not normal. When I left him he became crying."

Bouchani said imprisoning refugees for "non-compliant" behaviour had become a common practice in recent weeks, with more police inside the detention centre.

"There are psychologists in the medical centre. Instead of reporting his critical mental situation to the psychologists in the medical centre, the Wilson Security called police, and they did nothing but to put him in jail. These days they only know one way and that is put people in the Manus jail."

Violence by police and guards against refugees and asylum seekers has been a long-running and consistent issue on Manus.

A Wilson Security guard is also accused this week of assaulting a refugee in Port Moresby hospital, forcing him to the ground and standing on his head.

The man is one of 17 refugees and asylum seekers from the detention centre currently in Port Moresby for serious medical complaints.

In April, a former G4S guard, Louie Efi, was one of two men convicted of murdering asylum seeker Reza Barati in February 2014. The Australian government's report into the incident says up to 15 guards were involved in stomping on the prone Barati's head before he died.

During those February riots, police also stormed the detention centre compound, shooting some refugees and beating others with weapons including lengths of wood spiked with nails. Security guards have been fired for assaulting refugees who are handcuffed, while others have been accused of beating asylum seekers for missing curfew, for asking for more washing powder, or even for trying to move between compounds with permission.

Expatriate guards accused of assault are usually flown off Manus Island before they can be charged by police. In May, the PNG supreme court ruled that the Manus Island detention centre was illegal, because it arbitrarily deprived the asylum seekers and refugees of their liberty without any charge or trial.

Since then, some cosmetic changes have been made to the detention regime – including more police inside the compounds and buses to Lorengau town – but the men are still detained behind razor wire, and are not free to leave of their own volition.

The detention regime faces further challenge in the supreme court on 16 June. The latest challenge, brought by PNG lawyer Ben Lomai, seeks a court order that the detention regime is illegal; compensation for those held – some for more than 1,000 days – and the men's return to Australia.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/jun/15/manus-refugee-having-breakdown-was-beaten-and-jailed-say-reports>

14. Manus Island: calls for asylum seeker to be brought to Australia for psychological help

Fears for life of young man who suffers from debilitating panic attacks and was allegedly sexually assaulted

The Guardian

Helen Davidson

Thursday 16 June 2016 11.22 AEST

Advocates have called for an asylum seeker on Manus Island who is suffering from worsening obsessive compulsive disorder, debilitating panic attacks, and was allegedly sexually assaulted to be brought to Australia for treatment.

His Australian-based advocate, Janet Galbraith, has said she and others hold fears for the life of the young man, whom Guardian Australia is not naming. While some detainees have been moved from the detention centre for medical care, the man has not, despite serious psychological illnesses.

“He arrived in Manus as a young man who was already quite a vulnerable person and I remember being told by some of the workers there that this guy just doesn’t fit here at all, it’s so dangerous for him,” Galbraith told Guardian Australia.

“That has played out. He has severe OCD, he will wash his clothes or body for hours and still feel like it’s disgusting. He will wash himself until he’s bleeding.”

Galbraith said he has been frequently targeted by some guards and occasionally by some detainees.

Medical records obtained by Guardian Australia note he has been a victim of bullying, with others provoking his OCD as a “game”.

According to one note he was also told by two PNG nurses they believed he was inhabited by demons, which severely exacerbated his anxiety. The two nurses said they would pray for him.

The Department of Immigration and Border Protection said it was aware of the case but would not provide specific details on the health care of individuals or comment on transfer arrangements for individuals.

“The department can assure you its contracted health services provider is providing appropriate care that is broadly comparable with health services available within the Australian community,” a spokesman said.

“General practitioner, nursing and mental health care clinics are open at the Manus RPC seven days a week, including psychologists, counsellors and a psychiatrist currently at the Manus RPC. There is also after-hours medical staffing to respond to any after-hours medical emergencies. These services are supplemented by visiting health practitioners and a tele-health service, where required.”

Galbraith said the process of getting daily medication – which takes hours of lining up – was difficult, particularly because he suffered incontinence, and he had stopped taking it. He suffers frequent panic attacks.

The man has been the subject of several “code blues”, found spasming and hyperventilating with panic attacks which sometimes left him temporarily paralysed.

“The workers seem to know there’s nothing they can do there and they can’t get him off [the island] and people are just angry and there’s a lot of blaming him for not complying with their ideas of what he should be doing,” said Galbraith, adding that he was seen as a “behavioural issue”.

The mental health team have observed behaviour suggesting he is “improving”, his advocates said, but they believe that assessment included his decision to stop taking his medication.

The man said he had told authorities he did not feel safe where he was, to no avail. He told the Guardian he did not feel his situation could get any worse and he wanted to escape.

Another friend said: “He was always pretty fraught, but he was always lucid and fairly together, but also told fairly harrowing stories of his condition and the treatment there. It clearly started to get worse whatever was happening for him, the longer it went on.”

Dr Helen Driscoll, who has not seen the man in a clinical capacity but assessed his case, has also called for him to be transferred. Driscoll said she had been told she would be sent the man’s records but had not received them.

A spokesman for the Department of Immigration said records were passed on to third parties “as soon as practicable” once the detainee “gives informed and valid consent”.

The concerns come amid reports of an Iranian man having a mental health breakdown being beaten by guards and jailed, and allegations another refugee was assaulted inside a Port Moresby hospital.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/jun/16/manus-island-calls-for-asylum-seeker-to-be-brought-to-australia-for-psychological-help>

15. Manus refugee allegedly assaulted by guards while having breakdown needs help, friends say

Thirty-year-old Iranian refugee was forcibly removed from the detention centre after being found naked, yelling and distressed

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Friday 17 June 2016 15.00 AEST

Friends of a refugee allegedly assaulted by guards and police on Manus Island as he was having a mental breakdown have pleaded for him to be given adequate medical treatment.

The 30-year-old Iranian refugee whose first name is Hamed was forcibly removed from the detention centre by police and Wilson Security's emergency response team last Sunday after he was found naked, yelling and distressed.

Initially, he was imprisoned at Lorengau jail – without being charged – before being removed back to the detention centre's managed accommodation area, known as MAA. According to witnesses, he was beaten several times by police and Wilson Security guards because he was "noncompliant".

Control of the MAA – where people who are suffering mental health episodes are sent – is no longer under the auspices of Wilson Security or camp manager Broadspectrum, but has been ceded to the Papua New Guinea police.

Hamed has since been released back into the general population of Mike compound in the Manus detention centre, but friends said his mental health was continuing to deteriorate.

Recordings sent to Guardian Australia showed Hamed overnight on Thursday rambling incoherently in English and yelling in distress inside the compound.

Friends said Hamed was delusional.

"I am worried about him," one told Guardian Australia. "He has lost his balance and is not normal. His situation is critical.

"Last night people asked officers 'please take Hamed to outside, we are here for three years, we cannot see a crazy man with us. He is making us angry and distressed'.

"People were angry with psychologists last night. Even some guys were shouting on [sic] officers that this man needs care. I think they have ignored him and did not care about him. People were in shock last night, even officers were wondering why he was not getting help."

Staff on Manus Island have told Guardian Australia Hamed has previously had altercations with guards and police. One staff member said it was "just wrong" he had been returned to the general population of the detention centre. "The man is very sick," he said.

Hamed had previously been in Australia for several months, but was returned to Manus. He has been found to be a refugee, facing a "well-founded fear" of persecution in his homeland.

On Wednesday, Guardian Australia published details of the man's alleged assault, including the formal complain lodged by fellow refugees.

Wilson Security has not answered questions about Hamed's treatment.

A department of immigration and border protection spokeswoman, in response to questions from Guardian Australia, said it was not aware of any evidence to support the assault claims.

"The Department is aware of this allegation and is monitoring the situation in consultation with its contracted service providers in Manus. Allegations of assault, or other inappropriate behaviour, are reported to and are a matter for the Papua New Guinean authorities."

The spokeswoman said the department did not provide specific details on the health care of individuals.

"Considerable health and medical resources are provided for care for refugees at the Manus regional processing centre."

The Australian Lawyers Alliance said that Australia's Department of Immigration and Border Protection bore ultimate responsibility for the welfare of those in offshore detention, and that jailing somebody instead of providing medical treatment would appear to be a breach of workplace health and safety laws.

The Work Health and Safety Act requires that the department not do anything to compromise the psychological health of anyone in immigration detention – workers or detainees.

"While contractors such as Broadspectrum and Wilson may be directly involved in risky conduct, ultimate responsibility rests with the department," ALA spokesman Greg Barns said.

"The department is well aware of its obligations under the [Work Health and Safety] Act. They have been reporting health and safety incidents occurring on Manus Island to the regulator, Comcare, for years."

However a freedom of information investigation by ALA showed that of 1,092 injuries and assaults in onshore and offshore immigration detention reported to Comcare by the department and its contractors over 2013-14 and 2014-15, 845 – or 77% – were not investigated.

The ALA said the documents reveal that sexual abuse, suicides and other serious injuries in immigration detention have been systematically underreported and possibly concealed.

A department spokeswoman, responding to the ALA allegations, said: "the Department takes seriously its obligations to meet the legal requirements of the WHS Act and other relevant legislation".

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/jun/17/manus-refugee-allegedly-assaulted-by-guards-while-having-breakdown-needs-help-friends-say>

16. Bill Shorten says Labor would allow journalists back into asylum seeker detention camps

Canberra Times
June 14 2016 - 7:54AM
Latika Bourke

"Yeah."

With that one-word answer Opposition Leader Bill Shorten agreed to let journalists and independent observers to monitor the situation of asylum seekers detained at the offshore camps on Nauru and Manus Island, if elected on July 2.

Mr Shorten was appearing on the ABC's Q&A program in Penrith, in the Western Sydney seat of Lindsay, when he was asked by audience member Mark McIver if he would reform tough new secrecy laws aimed at preventing independent reporting of events on the remote islands.

"We'd like to know what's going on, whether it be on Manus Island, Christmas Island or anywhere else," Mr McIver said.

"If I was prime minister it would have to be an amazing set of circumstances where we're not prepared to tell you what's going on," Mr Shorten responded.

"As a general rule this nation operates best if you treat people as smart and intelligent and tell them what's going on, full stop," he said.

"I find its the easiest way to get consensus on tough issues, if you treat people like mushrooms and keep them in the dark, well, you can't be surprised if people don't back in government policies."

When pressed by host Tony Jones if he would let journalists and other independent observers back into the detention camps to report on conditions there.

Mr Shorten responded simply: "Yeah," to strong applause.

"I don't want to see the people smugglers back in business, before the Libs run their attack ads," Mr Shorten added.

The Coalition's spokesman Mathias Cormann, who was live tweeting Mr Shorten's appearance, immediately accused the Labor party of wanting to put the people smugglers back in business.

"Kevin Rudd also talked tough on border protection before an election only to put people smugglers back into business after election," Senator Cormann added.

But Mr Shorten said greater transparency around how asylum seekers are treated in detention would not undermine Australia's efforts to stop people smugglers.

"When it comes to transparency and the way that people are directly or indirectly in Australia's care are treated, I do not see why that has to be a secret," he said.

The union representing journalists, the MEAA, welcomed Mr Shorten's commitment.

In 2014, just months after Tony Abbott won office for the Coalition, the Nauruan government raised the visa fee for journalists from \$200 to \$8000. The cost is non-refundable even if a journalist's bid to travel to the Island is not allowed.

Mr Shorten also promised to lift draconian provisions in the Border Force Act which threatens to jail for up to two years any teacher, doctor or social worker working with asylum seekers who discloses confidential information.

Both the Border Force Commissioner Roman Quaedvlieg and the Immigration Minister Peter Dutton have said the provisions, introduced in July 2015, are not aimed at the media and would not stop whistleblowers who can speak out on the Public Interest Disclosure Act.

But it followed the actions of Mr Dutton's predecessor Scott Morrison, who in 2014, accused the NGO Save The Children of leaking information and encouraging asylum seekers to self-harm and ordered 14 staff off Nauru.

In May 2016, the Department of Immigration announced the government had paid compensation to Save The Children but both the Department and Mr Morrison have refused to apologise to the organisation.

In 2014 the private security company contracted to run the detention facility on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea, G4S, confiscated Fairfax Media photographer Nick Moir's camera and deleted images, 14km from the site of the centre.

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/federal-election-2016/bill-shorten-says-labor-would-allow-journalists-back-into-asylum-seeker-detention-camps-20160613-gpi97v.html>

17. Keeping journalists out of detention centres helps stop boats, says Cormann

Coalition's campaign spokesman says reporting would give information to people smugglers in response to to Bill Shorten's pledge to offer access

The Guardian
Paul Karp
Tuesday 14 June 2016 10.38 AEST

Barring journalists from going to Nauru and Manus Island detention camps is necessary to prevent "sharing intelligence with people smugglers", Coalition campaign spokesman Mathias Cormann has suggested.

Cormann said refusing to allow journalists to attend the camps was part of the "operational discipline" that had stopped asylum seeker boats.

On Monday on a special one-person Q&A panel the opposition leader, Bill Shorten, promised greater transparency for the offshore asylum seeker detention centres including allowing journalists onto Manus Island and Nauru. He quickly added that Labor was as committed as the Coalition to "stopping the boats."

Speaking at his morning doorstep on Tuesday, Cormann said Bill Shorten had "crab walk[ed] away from our strong border protection policy framework".

"What a return to a Labor-Green minority government would mean would be weaker borders."

Cormann said the government's track record included "clear disciplines in terms of how you manage certain aspects [of border protection]".

Asked why the government believed it needed to keep journalists out of detention camps, Cormann said it was one of a number of "certain operational disciplines that have been central to our success in keeping our borders secure".

"We are not in the business to share intelligence with people smugglers."

Journalists are not allowed regular access to Australia's offshore detention camps. They face a non-refundable fee of \$8,000 to apply for a visa to Nauru, which has proved a major deterrent to scrutiny. According to reports the Australian's Chris Kenny is the only journalist to have been allowed into Nauru since a BBC visit in 2013.

Cormann repeatedly refused to say what information journalists might report that would undermine the government's border protection policy, only saying it was part of "operational discipline" that had stopped asylum seeker boats.

When asked why barring journalists was necessary, Cormann said that operational discipline included “not providing a running commentary on all aspects of our border protection policy framework”.

“That is the approach that has been successful, that is the approach that we are committed to.”

Conditions in detention centres have come under scrutiny after two asylum seekers held there self-immolated, leading to the death of one.

After the incidents Catherine Stubberfield, the spokeswoman for the United Nations high commissioner for refugees regional representation in Canberra, said there was “no doubt that the current policy of offshore processing and prolonged detention is immensely harmful”.

Speaking on 2GB on Tuesday the treasurer and former immigration minister, Scott Morrison, said Nauru and Papua New Guinea were sovereign governments. “They are the ones that ultimately decide what happens, for [Shorten] to make that unilateral decree shows he doesn’t understand how it works.”

Cormann said: “Our track record is there for all to see. Under Labor more than 50,000 people arrived here illegally on hundreds and hundreds of boats. Clearly the efforts of the Coalition in government, sorting out the mess Labor has made at our borders has clearly been successful.”

Labor has said it will “not allow policy which sees the mass drowning of vulnerable people”, in effect replicating the government’s policy including use of controversial boat towbacks. Labor supports offshore detention but has said it should not be, in practice, indefinite.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/jun/14/keeping-journalists-out-of-detention-centres-helps-stop-asylum-boats-mathias-cormann-bill-shorten-election>

18. Turnbull government attacks Bill Shorten's Q&A detention camp promise

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Michael Koziol and Nicole Hasham

Senior government ministers have rubbished Opposition Leader Bill Shorten's pledge to allow journalists to visit offshore immigration detention centres, arguing it is impractical and puts "operational discipline" at risk.

Coalition campaign spokesman Mathias Cormann insisted the government would not "share intelligence with people smugglers" and accused Mr Shorten of kowtowing to the Labor Party's left-wing, which remains uneasy about offshore detention.

"Operational discipline when it comes to managing our border protection framework has been central to our success and that includes not providing a running commentary," Senator Cormann said. "Don't put that at risk. This is not the time to weaken our strong border protection network."

On Monday night, Mr Shorten indicated he wanted to allow reporters and independent observers into the Australian-run immigration detention centres on Manus Island and Nauru, if Labor wins the July 2 election.

The matter is complicated by the Nauruan government's refusal to grant journalist visas, in an apparent attempt to make visiting the centre all but impossible.

In 2014, the country hiked the cost of a media visa to \$8000 from \$200, payable even if the application is rejected. Last year, the only journalist granted permission to visit Nauru was The Australian's conservative columnist Chris Kenny.

The Nauruan government, through its official Twitter account @Republic_Nauru, has repeatedly bashed Australian media outlets such as the ABC and Fairfax Media for what it calls "political agendas".

But Treasurer Scott Morrison, a former immigration minister, said Mr Shorten's vow demonstrated the Labor leader did not understand the system.

"Nauru and Papua New Guinea are sovereign governments, they're the ones who actually ultimately decide what happens," he told 2GB radio.

"For him to unilaterally decide that he's going to make that decree really just highlights the fact he doesn't understand how it works."

Mr Shorten had been asked about the secrecy that shrouds the offshore camps by a questioner on the ABC's Q&A program in Penrith.

"If I was prime minister it would have to be an amazing set of circumstances where we're not prepared to tell you what's going on," Mr Shorten said. "As a general rule this nation operates best if you treat people as smart and intelligent and tell them what's going on, full stop."

Asked by host Tony Jones if that meant allowing journalists into the camps, the Labor leader replied: "Yeah."

Both Senator Cormann and Mr Morrison argued Labor was not committed to the Coalition's tough border protection policies and would fail to keep the boats stopped.

But Senator Cormann was unable to explain how the presence of journalists at the centres would assist people smugglers looking to ferry asylum seekers to Australia.

Labor has long promised to introduce independent oversight of Australian-funded offshore detention facilities, with bilateral support from the governments of Papua New Guinea and Nauru.

The party has also pledged to empower the Commonwealth Ombudsman to provide independent oversight of the offshore network, and ensure those working in the immigration system continue to receive whistleblower protections if speaking out.

Fairfax Media has asked Immigration Minister Peter Dutton whether the Australian government has asked Nauru to make it easier for journalists to visit the Australian-run camps.

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/federal-election-2016/election-2016-turnbull-government-attacks-bill-shortens-qa-detention-camp-promise-20160614-gpiefu.html>