

Officials removed after fatal road accident in China

Three officials have been removed from their posts after a road accident in central China's Hunan Province Monday killed 12 people, local authorities said Tuesday.

A truck owned by a landscaping company overturned at about 5:50 p.m. Monday as it was transporting workers after they finished their tree planting work in Chenzhou City, the city's publicity department said.

Another 19 were injured and receiving treatment.

According to the department, Zhou Yong, deputy head of the city's Suxian District, who oversees the district's forestry work, has been removed from office on Tuesday night. The director and chief engineer of the district's forestry bureau were also removed from their posts.

The investigation continues.

Radio interview with Brian Carlton, 7AD

BRIAN CARLTON:

Prime Minister good morning

PRIME MINISTER:

Yeah great to be with you.

BRIAN CARLTON:

Now was this a hard deal, a hard agreement to reach? And to what extent were you sort of pressured into it with the threat of having to actually physically run the hospital if you'd not agreed to this deal?

PRIME MINISTER:

Oh look I think the most important thing is to celebrate the outcome. We were there, as you would have seen at the hospital, you can see how thrilled the community is and it's a wonderful hospital. You know, there are people there that have worked for 30, 40 years. Julie Duff, the Head of Nursing, working there for 42 years. When she started there as a 17-year-old she told me her

mother was a registered nurse there, so long ago they were wearing veils then. And, you know, the sense of relief in the community that the funding is now secure, the hospital will be owned again by Tasmania which was obviously the right level of Government to own it and the funding is secured there for ten years.

There's a real sense of joy and relief, I was delighted to be able to go there and meet with them and see the great work they're doing. It's a great team, it's not the biggest hospital in Australia but, gee, it's got a big heart.

BRIAN CARLTON:

It certainly does punch above its weight more often than not Prime Minister, no doubt about that. Tell me, did you have any interest whatsoever in maintaining ownership of the hospital?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well Brian, look I think the important thing is our interest is in ensuring that Tasmanians and indeed all Australians have access to the finest public health, finest hospital care that can be provided. And so the outcome, my focus and that of the Health Minister Greg Hunt, was very much on what is the right outcome for Tasmanians and clearly it is part of the Tasmanian Government's public health system, it clearly should be able, it shouldn't be operating in a silo.

And we were talking to the Head of the Emergency Department there and she made exactly that point, that this will make it so much easier for them to work and collaborate with the other hospitals in the region you know the North-West Regional Hospital and of course Launceston General and so that collaboration between the, you know, the professional medical teams is going to be made a lot easier, so I think that's good.

BRIAN CARLTON:

Now Prime Minister how did you manage to find \$730 million in one hit in the current budget period and with the current considerations?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well we'll set all that out in the Budget. I'm getting lots of questions on the Budget Brian at the moment and all I can say is the Budget is in May. But all of that will be set out in the Budget.

BRIAN CARLTON:

Okay, but you're guaranteeing that it will be delivered in one tranche not over a period of years?

PRIME MINISTER:

Yes.

No, no it's being paid, it's being paid. This represents the funding that would have been provided over ten years paid in one you know lump sum now and of course that gives the state great flexibility, it gives them greater freedom and it means this hospital is Tasmania's. They've made an absolutely iron clad commitment to maintaining the hospital and its services but they've now got, it gives the state greater flexibility and autonomy in managing the financial side of it and that's good because it's a great state led by a great Premier in Will Hodgman.

BRIAN CARLTON:

I know your time is short Prime Minister, just a quick one if I may – there was a good deal of consternation in the State a week or so ago, in fact two weeks ago when the announcement was made by Christopher Pyne to establish what's being seen as a parallel college in the marine space to the one we already have here, the AMC in Launceston, that \$24 million if I'm not mistaken to establish a similar operation in Adelaide was looked at as – hang on, why are we doing that? We could create the defense hub here and spoke it into Adelaide. We're already the hub, now we're becoming the spoke? A lot of people are a bit upset about that plan, pork barreling is a term that's been used.

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I was actually just speaking to Christopher Pyne about this as I have done on several occasions. The big naval ship building program that we have and the bigger ships will be built in Osborne in South Australia.

It is an enormous boost for the Maritime College in Tasmania, an absolutely enormous boost because it's going to provide the demand for thousands of skilled workers in all of the areas of naval architecture and every trade and profession associated with that, and of course it's also going to require a lot more seafarers as well.

This is a very big opportunity, the technical college which is a trade technical college that will be set up at Osborne was designed to be there where the work is being done. So clearly you're going to have your trades training done in parallel with the construction but of course a lot of the work, a lot of the trainees, the students will be doing training in Launceston and indeed elsewhere in Australia. This is a huge national enterprise.

This ship building, naval ship building exercise is the biggest commitment to naval ship building in our peace time history.

You know for six years the Labor Party didn't commission one Australian ship from one Australian yard.

So what we're doing now is making this massive commitment. We need it to give our Navy the capability to keep us safe. But it is also providing the commitment to the advanced manufacturing, the skills, the long term manufacturing industry base that we need to secure our future.

And Tasmania and the Maritime College is going to play an enormous part in that. Believe me, this is a, this should, what's happening in Osborne should be seen as an opportunity, as a real opportunity for greater demand and greater growth from the Maritime College in Tasmania.

BRIAN CARLTON:

PM it was just a sense that the AMC here, the Maritime College could be the hub rather than the spoke.

Look I know your time is very short, one quick thing, very disturbing story – what are your briefings telling you about, intelligence briefings, about what's occurred in Syria in the past 24 hours? We're getting messages of a gas attack. The finger is already being pointed at the Assad regime. What are your intelligence briefings telling you this morning?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, let me just say this, this attack we absolutely condemn this horrendous attack. The, if the Assad regime has used chemical weapons as is being alleged, that constitutes a war crime. It constitutes a shocking war crime.

The Assad regime should abide by the laws of armed conflict and there should be and will be I've no doubt, a full investigation into the circumstances of what appears to, well what has been, appears to be, a horrendous use of chemical weapons which we condemn.

BRIAN CARLTON:

It's an interesting thing for the Syrians to do just when it was becoming the realpolitik of the regime that would have to stay in Damascus until at least the ISIS situation and the rebel situation is sorted out then we deal with them. It just doesn't make any logical sense for Assad to go on a chemical rampage, and 48 hours after that sort of determination has been made.

PRIME MINISTER:

Yeah, well again I can say that we absolutely condemn the use of chemical weapons. The Assad regime must end their production and the use of chemical weapons immediately. We co-sponsored a resolution of the UN General Assembly establishing an independent mechanism for collecting evidence on crimes of this kind committed in Syria and we absolutely support the measures to ensure that those responsible for this use of chemical weapons are held accountable.

Now the United States, well, as I said, I won't go any further than that. But this certainly has been condemned by Governments around the world. The United States has concluded that the attack was made by the Assad regime and both the President and the US Secretary of State have condemned these attacks in the same terms that I am condemning them now.

BRIAN CARLTON:

Will there be any kind of stronger response?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well that is the next step. There are already sanctions in relation to Syria and we'll be talking with our allies in this conflict to determine what the next step of response and sanctions can be.

BRIAN CARLTON:

Appreciate your time this morning Prime Minister, thank you.

PRIME MINISTER:

Thank you so much.

BRIAN CARLTON:

And appreciate also the deal, the \$730 million deal for the Mersey Hospital. That is absolutely a good outcome no doubt about that.

[ENDS]

No deal is better than a bad deal

The Prime Minister was right to say that. Those who think leaving is a complex negotiation should grasp that we would not have a negotiation unless we are willing to walk away. We would have dictation by the other side.

Fortunately the PM understands the strength of the UK position, and understands that No deal would work better for us than for them. It would be a lot better than a punishment deal of the kind some in the Commission have flirted with. In reality it need not be a negotiation at all. It is a series of choices for the rest of the EU, where a friendly and positive UK offers them various advantages which they may or may not want to take up.

If they take up none of our offers when we leave we will be like most of the other 160 countries around the world that are not part of the EU. We will trade with the rest of the EU on WTO most favoured nation terms, just as we trade with China, India and the USA today. We will no longer have special sharing arrangements on defence and Intelligence, other than through our common partnership in NATO. We will impose WTO tariffs against their agricultural exports to us, with the options of growing more at home and inviting in more produce tariff free from elsewhere in the world where it suits our industry and consumers. We will reclaim our fishing grounds. We will spend our own money on our own priorities.

The UK is making a positive and generous set of offers. We are proposing that the rest of the EU keeps tariff free access to our lucrative market, with no new barriers of other kinds. They just need to agree the same for us, and they can carry on exporting so much more to us than we sell to them.

We are proposing that the UK continues to share its Intelligence with them, and to make a contribution to European defence and security initiatives and commitments.

We are proposing that the UK develops a number of friendly collaborations and partnerships in science, education, joint investments and the rest.

These need not be negotiations. They are choices for the EU to make. If they are sensible they will wish to maximise the contribution the UK makes and the access they have to our market. I remain an optimist, thinking well of our partners and expecting them to take the offers that are so manifestly in their own interest. If by any chance they do not, the UK will be just fine. Accepting the very limited tariffs on our exports allowed under WTO rules would be much cheaper than the mountainous bills some have in mind for us to pay. The tariffs we imposed on their exports to us would be much larger and could be given back to UK consumers and businesses as compensation.

If we get a decent free trade Agreement between the UK and the EU I do not expect them to ditch it at the last moment because they wish to advance Spain's claim to Gibraltar. Gibraltar's sovereignty rests with the Gibraltarians, who have made clear their wish by overwhelming vote to remain attached to the UK.

News story: Champions League policing bolstered by £1.4m UK Government grant

The security operation surrounding the Champions League final in Cardiff has been boosted by a £1.4million contribution from UK Government, Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns announced today.

The UK Government has confirmed that it has approved a Special Grant application made by the South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner to cover the additional costs of policing the biggest game in European club football on 3 June.

Cardiff's Principality Stadium will play host to the showpiece event which is expected to attract a worldwide audience of several hundred million and generate £45m for the Cardiff economy.

The City of Cardiff Stadium will also host the women's Champions League final (1 June) and around 250,000 people are expected to descend on the capital to

enjoy the four-day festival of events during the week.

Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns said:

Cardiff has consistently proven its calibre in delivering high profile events on an international stage. The eyes of the world will once again be upon us as we prepare to host the Champions League finals.

The safety and security of the hundreds of thousands of people set to flood into the city and surrounding areas at this time is of paramount importance. The UK Government is determined to ensure that Wales, and the UK, are seen in the best possible light on the worldwide stage and the policing of the event will be crucial in achieving this.

I am delighted that we have been able to provide this funding for South Wales Police. I know the whole city is looking forward to giving visiting supporters a wonderful welcome at what will be a safe and successful Champions League final later this year.

Minister for Policing and the Fire Service Brandon Lewis said:

I am pleased to confirm that £1.4million in special grant funding has been allocated to support South Wales Police at the Champions League final in Cardiff. I am sure it will be a fantastic event for the city of Cardiff to host.

The UK Government has protected police funding since the 2015 Spending Review and it is right that in exceptional circumstances we provide additional resources in order to make sure we keep our communities safe and secure.

Doorstop at the Mersey Community Hospital

PRIME MINISTER:

It is a beautiful here in Latrobe and it is great to be here at the Mersey. A hospital that is at the heart of this community.

It has been part of the community for so many years and generations. Julie Duff, the head of nursing, acting General Manager, while Eric has got broader

responsibilities – Julie's worked here for 42 years and you came here to work with your mum – isn't that right?

JULIE DUFF, ACTING-GENERAL MANAGER, MERSEY COMMUNITY HOSPITAL:

Yeah, that's correct.

PRIME MINISTER:

This is a treasured part of such a strong community, beloved part of the community.

There has been a lot of uncertainty over the future of the hospital for a long time. We have brought all of that to an end.

I am here with the Mayor and with Senator Duniam and we are delighted to announce that we have committed, we are paying \$730 million to the Tasmanian Government to secure the future of this hospital, the funding for this hospital for the next decade.

It will return formally to the ownership of the Tasmanian Government which is where it should be so that it can work seamlessly as part of Tasmania's One Health System, its public hospital system which of course we are providing substantial support for – \$2 billion over the next five years, increasing by 10 per cent over that period.

So this is an example of the commitment we have to strong public health, right across Australia but especially here, here in Latrobe today – assuring the future, the security of the Mersey Hospital.

It means so much to this community and we are delighted to be here to announce this.

The Premier is sorry he can't be standing with me today but as you know Parliament is sitting and his duties require him to be in Hobart. But Will and I have spoken a lot about this as we have reached this agreement in recent times. I have spoken with him this morning and he'll be making this announcement in due course in Hobart today.

So it is a wonderful day for the Mersey. You can see how pleased the community are, how pleased the staff are. 470 staff – is that right?

ERIC DANIELS, GROUP DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS NORTH/NORTH-WEST HEALTH SERVICES:

That's about right sir.

PRIME MINISTER:

470 staff. It is a great day. Julie do you want to say something about the importance of the hospital to you?

JULIE DUFF:

I think the most important part from my perspective is that certainly it

means a lot for the community. And the community has stepped forward on many occasions, it has endured many, many changes. We are a large population, I believe, in this area and certainly expanding as recent stats will prove, certainly, the Latrobe district is expanding. So it is essential the hospital does stay here. We have a 24/7 emergency department and having seen this hospital grow, expand and refurbishment completed over the years, I can only say that personally I am very grateful for the funding. I plan on being around for some of those ten years.

(Laughs)

And I am sure the community will be celebrating on this day.

PRIME MINISTER:

Thank you so much.

JULIE DUFF:

And thank you.

PRIME MINISTER:

Thank you for your extraordinary services – and two generations!

JULIE DUFF:

Yes, absolutely.

(Laughs)

Thank you.

PRIME MINISTER:

It's wonderful. Such love and such commitment to the community. Thank you.

Jono, did you want to say a few words?

SENATOR DUNIAM:

Thanks PM, yeah look thank you very much Malcolm for coming down to Tasmania and for reaching this agreement with the Tasmania Government. As you've seen inside the importance of this facility to this community cannot be underestimated. So the commitment you've made on behalf of the Australian Government to this community and to this hospital is just great and we thank you for coming down and for doing what you've done for Tasmania, so thank you very much.

PRIME MINISTER:

Very good. Your worship? The Acting Mayor –

RICK ROCKLIFF, ACTING MAYOR, LATROBE COUNCIL:

Look I think it is the best piece of news we've had in this area for a long, long time and I'm very positive about it. I think it will give people confidence to invest in other businesses that associate with the hospitals and with people coming from other parts of the state here for selective surgery – they'll stay in the town, coffee shops, overnight accommodation and things like that and I think it is just a wonderful step forward. I'd like to congratulate you.

PRIME MINISTER:

That's great. Thank you. Now you're the Director of the North and North West of Tasmania? So tell us about this. How important this is for you?

ERIC DANIELS:

Fantastic – thank you Prime Minister, we really are very pleased. I can now go to the supermarket and meet with local members of the community and now be able to say that we've got assured funding for ten years. They'll be very happy about having some stability and as you know the critical part of the Mersey as part of the Tasmanian health system. The sort of services that the Mersey provides will be a significant benefit to this community and elsewhere, so thank you very much – we really appreciate it.

PRIME MINISTER:

Thank you. Do we have some questions?

JOURNALIST:

Why does Northern Tasmania need three public hospitals an hour apart to service the population the size of a couple of Melbourne or Sydney suburbs?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well these hospitals provide a vital service to the community. You've just heard from the head of nursing and the commitment that they have made, the support from the community is absolutely critical. So this is a vital part of supporting the public health of Tasmanians.

JOURNALIST:

Isn't three public hospitals in this area excessive?

PRIME MINISTER:

I don't think anyone has ever, I have never heard anyone make that suggestion before.

JOURNALIST:

Our State Government has already turned back some services here by getting rid of birthing. Do you think giving it back to the State Government is in the best interest of the community?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well the State Government manages the public health system of Tasmania. Our role right across Australia is to provide support which is activity based funding as you know. The funding for Tasmania over the next five years is growing, around 10 per cent, it will be \$2 billion over the next five years. So we are partners in delivering first class public health and hospital services for Tasmanians here.

JOURNALIST:

The Federal Government took over the Mersey to stop the state government at the time downgrading. This Liberal Government is basically doing what that failed state Labor government tried to do. So how does you handing it back to the state protect it against more cuts?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well the State Government has made it very clear that they are committed to the future of the Mersey. They've invested in it. The management of the, well perhaps Eric could answer this better – but the manager, we were just talking, I don't know whether you were with us inside the hospital, but we were talking with the head of emergency about how the three hospitals in this area, North-West, Launceston and Mersey public hospitals work together as they should. You've got the ability to video conference with other hospitals in Tasmania. You've got the ability to share the expertise. That's pulling it all together. That's the One Health Strategy isn't Eric?

ERIC DANIELS:

Correct, that's part of the white paper implementation, as you know.

And the services at the Mersey, there are still a significant level of services at the Mersey associated with birthing but not the actual birthing because the clinical leadership of obstetrics and gynecology determined that they needed to have all of their resources for the actual birthing part in one area. That is critical for the recruitment of obstetric and maternity staff but the Mersey is still providing an extended midwifery care service, significant anti-natal services and midwifery group practice.

So there is still a lot of involvement in the birthing process.

JOURNALIST:

We're told that women are having babies in ambulances because they can't, the capacity isn't there in Launceston or Bernie to cope.

ERIC DANIELS:

Well we have investigated that and provided a response previously and there's no evidence that supports that. We actually had a meeting with the contracted provider earlier in the week and when the State Health Minister was visiting and there was no evidence. We're happy to investigate any

consolidated reports of that but anecdotally yes, but we've not get any evidence that supports that.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister the Mersey is the only hospital in Australia that's federally funded, the fact that you're handing it back to the State Government in ten years, is that a recognition of the fact that the federal-funded model doesn't work?

PRIME MINISTER:

You're right. It was a special case. Actually all public hospitals receive federal funding but the Mersey was a unique case where the Commonwealth Government acquired it, as you know, in 2007 and it has provided for the funding for the cost of running the hospital ever since.

In fact, over \$500 million has been provided over that time.

So what this does is bring forward in one payment the funding that would have been provided over 10 years so that it gives Tasmania the funding, the flexibility and, of course, that's matched with their commitment to maintain the hospital here in Mersey and continue to provide these outstanding services.

JOURNALIST:

So the federally funded model is not an option anymore?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I say all hospitals, all public hospitals receive federal funding. So they all do under the activity-based funding model. The federal funding is seen, is represented right across the state.

I mean here in Tasmania, leaving aside Mersey, putting it to one side, the rest of the public hospital system over the next five years will receive over \$2 billion of federal funding.

But, yes, federal ownership of a public hospital, that was one case here in Mersey and now it is returning to the ownership of the state where, I think where it properly should be and I think most people recognise that that's the best place for it to be.

JOURNALIST:

How long have you been in negotiations with the government for over this deal?

PRIME MINISTER:

Negotiations have continued for some months so there's been discussions between health ministers and discussions between the Premier and myself. But

the agreement, this agreement was reached recently.

I thought it was important, given the anxiety, the uncertainty it produced in the community it was important to announce it as soon as possible and to announce it here at the Mersey, here in Latrobe because this is the community the hospital serves and this is the community who have been concerned and are now relieved by knowing that the future of the hospital is secure.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister, do you believe the state government will be able to fund this after the ten years?

PRIME MINSITER:

Well, after the ten years, the federal funding formula that applies to every other hospital will continue so the answer to that is yes.

JOURNALIST:

Are you considering changes to capital gains tax to help increase housing supply?

PRIME MINISTER:

Look, thank you. The budget is in May. We don't have long to wait.

JOURNALIST:

Is the Government considering a proposal to allow Australians to access their super to save for a house deposit?

PRIME MINSITER:

Again, thank you for your inquiry. As we get closer to the Budget, there's more speculation and as we get closer to the Budget the best thing for me to do is to say wait until the Budget.

JOURNALIST:

Jacqui Lambie was on breakfast television this morning saying the Liberal Party is divisive and that you're gone. What's your response to that?

PRIME MINISTER:

Thanks for the headline.

JOURNALIST:

Will you give us an update on the drug bust in Melbourne?

PRIME MINISTER:

Yes, thank you. Look, this was nearly a tonne of ice so this is a great

credit to our Border Protection and our police in confiscating this enormous shipment and this follows hard on the heels of a previous interception of nearly three quarters of a tonne of ice.

Now, our response to ice is ruthless interception of trafficking, of smuggling, of dealing. We are working domestically and internationally to catch these merchants of death, these people who traffic in ice, to catch them and intercept their deadly cargoes and we're successful in doing that.

At the same time, we're working with compassion with the community and with people who have become subject to ice addiction to help them.

So our ice program right across the country is working with front-line services to ensure, in line with Ken Lay's recommendations and his task force that they get the support they need.

Ice is a scourge, it destroys lives, it destroys families and communities. So whether it is at the border and dealing with the traffickers and the criminals that peddle this poison or whether it is dealing with the victims, we are focused on that and working hand in glove with the states and territories to ensure that we provide the support that victims of ice addiction receive so they can recover. And also, as I said, we will be ruthless in our efforts to stop the smuggling and the trafficking of this drug and it's been a great credit to the police and our security services with this interception today.

I know the Minister, Michael Keenan, will have more to say about it in the course of the day.

JOURNALIST:

Was the funding here at the Mersey today contingent on the state government taking it back in ten years? Was it a case of you don't get the money unless you take it back?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well part of the arrangement is that the state is taking back the ownership of the hospital which I think is, clearly this is a public hospital in Tasmania, and the right owner for it is clearly the state government of Tasmania.

JOURNALIST:

Just one more from Canberra, what do you make of the RBA Governor's warning the Australian economy could be at risk due to the combination of low wage growth and rising property debt?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, I've read the Governor's speech. I've noticed some of the commentary appears to have been based on reports of the speech rather than reading the speech.

Look, it is a timely warning. There is always a concern about, you know when property prices rise too quickly and this is particularly an issue in Sydney and in Melbourne.

The prudential controls that the regulators are requiring the banks to impose to limit the amount of interest-only loans for investors is timely again and I think the Governor's speech should be heeded very carefully, but it is always a, it is, you know, this is the role of the central bank, to monitor these movements in prices and ensure that there is some restraint and you can see that the restraint or the restriction in the amount of interest-only loans made to investors is a very timely one.

JOURNALIST:

Should young people be able to use their superannuation savings to help them buy their first house?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well thank you. This is an issue that's been debated for a long time and I know there's a lot of speculation about that. But I think all of these matters that are being debated in the context of the Budget, I'll await, and encourage everyone to wait for the Budget. Okay –

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister, the Hobart City Council voted this week to examine moving its Australia Day celebrations. Do you have any thoughts on that at all?

PRIME MINISTER:

Australia Day should remain exactly where it is on January 26. It's Australia Day and it is our national day and I don't think, with all due respects to the council, I think that the vast majority of Australians expect our national day to remain exactly where it is.

Thank you all very much.

[ENDS]