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PRIME MINISTER

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JOURNALIST: Will you be making any attempt to ...
Senator Graham Richardson to stay in politics after 1993?

PM: Well, I'd certainly like to see Graham staying as long as possible. He's brought a very unique quality I think. He came in with the reputation, deservedly, of a good hard numbers man, and a commitment to winning power for the Party in New South Wales and federally. That was the image that he brought and it was a justified one. But he's also, since he's been in the Federal Parliament, shown a great commitment to environmental issues which surprised many people but it's an absolutely foundational commitment he has. And I think not only the Government, but the people of Australia, owe him a great debt for the way in which he has, I think, helped to shape political thinking in this area. I hope that he stays around for some time.

JOURNALIST: Do you think he wants another job?

PM: No, no. I was with him last night. We had a yarn as we often do and he's enjoying the job he's got.

JOURNALIST: Would you consider offering him another portfolio at some point -

PM: We've just had an election, just had an election and we have just established a portfolio structure. That's only two months ago. You don't establish a portfolio structure two months ago and then start thinking about a reshuffle.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, can you clarify finally the position of the Chinese students?

PM: Now, look, I've got very little more to say on this. I've made it quite clear that as far as these students are concerned this country, as you would expect of Australia, will be making particular arrangements to ensure the proper welfare and protection of these people. And when I said that at the beginning, that there'd be a particular category, special category, people then wrote all sorts of things into that. I repeat that I and my

Government will be making sure that these people get the appropriate protection and consideration their circumstances deserve. I've said that from the beginning. I think it's appropriate that we, right now, because as I've said at the beginning, there are particulars about this that have to be considered and determined by the Cabinet. That'll be done in the week after next. But the students themselves can rest assured that their interests will be fully protected. There won't be any question of people being returned against their will, this category of people who came here before the Tienanmen Square. Their interests and the interests of this country will be properly protected. But as I've said, there are details in this special categorisation that have to be considered by the Cabinet and there could be some areas of that in which there may be a slight difference of opinion. But the basic principles that I have alluded to will be followed and I'll have that considered by the Cabinet the week after next.

JOURNALIST: Will those pre-Tienanmen Square be forced to return at any stage at all?

PM: I've just indicated that it's my belief that no-one in that category will be forced to return against their will. Now the details of this whole matter, as I say, require some consideration and I don't think it's in anyone's interests now to, ... having spelt out those principles, those people can rest safe and content. This country will certainly do no less, no less than is being done in major countries like the United States and Canada. And as I say, there are certain details about this that will need to be considered by Cabinet and it's not appropriate that there be any more canvassing of this now that I've spelt those broad principles out.

JOURNALIST: On the Cambodian refugee question, are you concerned by the statements of one of the Indonesian Ministers that they seem to be actively encouraging boat people to come to this country?

PM: I think you'll appreciate that in these matters it's best that our relations with both Indonesia and, for that matter, Cambodia be conducted directly between them and not by the public media.

JOURNALIST: Have you had any clarification on those remarks by Admiral Sudomo though?

PM: No, I haven't had any clarification or explanation. I've seen the remarks, but in matters like this you conduct these relations between the two governments and the appropriate levels of ministers. That will be done.

JOURNALIST: Has there been a lack of effective communication on this issue though, in that relationship?

PM: No.

JOURNALIST: Are you aware of any scheme that's being investigated to smuggle these boat people into other countries, including Australia?

PM: No, not of smuggling. We're aware, as I've said before, that as far as the situation in Cambodia is concerned there is an organised scheme obviously underway there. That's part of the reason why I've made the remarks that I've had to make before that there mustn't be some assumption that Australia is simply going to stand idly by and allow our immigration policy, and our autonomous right to determine our immigration policy, in fact be determined outside this country.

JOURNALIST: Is that one of the reasons why you adopted such a tough line on that issue?

PM: It's not a tough line, it's not a different line. It's a position which any Prime Minister of Australia would and should adopt. That is that we have the great advantage that we speak from a position of the most compassionate record of any government in the world. We have taken, on a per capita basis, more refugees from Indo China than any other country. Now that has been done under a specific program where we allocate a category of our total immigration intake for refugees and we speak from a position of strength. Having ensured that we've done that in the past and that we'll continue to play our part in the future in settling refugees, we're not, as I say, going to have a situation where people imagine that they can just determine our immigration content simply by getting in boats and coming here. At no point have I indicated, nor would I, that if people actually arrive here, that they're not going to have open to them the actual processes of the law that are available to them. I've made that clear.

JOURNALIST: Why aren't you going to the ALP State Conference this weekend in Victoria?

PM: Well, look I've been Prime Minister now since the beginning of '83. At the best count that I can recall, I would have been there two or three times in that period. It's not a regular feature on my calendar.

JOURNALIST: It doesn't have anything to do with the current situation with the Victorian Government ...?

PM: Well, I have not been there when the ALP was riding very, very high in the polls here, both the Government and the Premier. So it really is a continuation of the fact over seven years it hasn't been a regular event in my diary. We're going through a poor news period are we? I mean we've really got to dredge up a story somewhere. Isn't anything happening anywhere?

JOURNALIST: The Multi-Function Polis is going to be decided in the next 48 hours or so. Have you got a preference -

PM: No wait a ... Multi-Function Polis is about to be decided in the next 48 hours -

JOURNALIST: (inaudible)

PM: Yes. The recommendation will be made to the Government within a very short period, this week.

JOURNALIST: Do you have a personal preference?

PM: Just let me answer the question. That recommendation will be made and we will have a look at that recommendation. Because we will have had the experts looking at it in detail and obviously whatever they recommend will carry a very very great deal of weight. But just so that there'll be a clear understanding of the processes, that's the first step. That's the Australian part of the committee making that recommendation to us. Then at some time within the next couple of months, I think probably during July, we'll get then a report from the combined committee, that is the Japanese-Australian committee. They will then be setting out their assessment of the pros and cons, the potential of the Multi-Function Polis concept. Cabinet then will be making its decision.

JOURNALIST: Do you have a preference for a site?

PM: No I don't actually. I think it's very good sense in Government when you have the responsibility of Government to utilise experts from Government and from the private sector to advise you on matters like that. That's precisely what we'll be doing. These are people of competence and commitment and they will, I believe, have taken everything that's relevant to be taken into account. So I approach it with a totally open mind. I say that I will prima facie be inclined to accept their recommendation.

JOURNALIST: Is it going to become a political liability at all?

PM: Is what going to become a political -

JOURNALIST: The issue itself.

PM: No. I wouldn't have thought so.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, on foreign ownership, is the Government prepared to legislate about 20% foreign ownership of Australian newspapers?

PM: No, there is no proposal on our plate about that. I've simply indicated that if Ministers involved were

wanting to bring something up for consideration by Government, it would be done. But as far as I know there is no such proposal.

JOURNALIST: ... Chairman of the Caucus Committee has said that Caucus would look favourably at such a proposal.

PM: Mr O'Keefe said a number of things on this. Nothing that he has said is inconsistent with what I've just put.

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