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PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

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I welcomed the opportunity this morning to meet a delegation of representatives of Australia's Chinese community and to hear their views about the problems facing the community, and their relations and friends in China, as a result of the current tragic situation there.

I used the opportunity provided by this meeting to announce a range of important new Government initiatives designed to help ameliorate some of these problems.

The Government has now decided to extend all temporary entry permits on application for a further 12 months (i.e. until July 31 1990), for all PRC nationals legally in Australia on June 4 this year. In order to help them financially the students will be entitled to work for up to 20 hours per week and will be allowed to work full time should their courses finish during the 12 month period.

The Government appreciates the financial and other problems which could face some Chinese nationals in Australia who do not have access to social security, or Medicare. We are therefore looking at ways in which these people's needs can be assisted by access to the "special benefits" program administered by the Minister for Social Security.

I warmly applaud the fund raising efforts of Australia's Chinese community. To help further these efforts the Government has now given in-principle agreement to a \$100,000 grant to provide humanitarian assistance in China. That grant is on top of the \$200,000 already put aside for use in a possible Red Cross Appeal.

I told the delegation that while visa processing, including of student applications, is currently suspended, we hope that processing will be resumed as soon as visa-issuing staff can safely return to China. Arrangements are being made in the meantime for abbreviated visa processing for urgent migrant cases involving immediate family of Australian citizens and permanent residents.

A Cabinet Submission is now being developed as a priority matter, to deal with all aspects of PRC nationals in Australia (including refugee status, grant of residence permit on humanitarian grounds, family reunion issues and the possibility of refugee resettlement for some PRC nationals overseas). There is a number of complex matters that need to be addressed and these require Cabinet's deliberation.

The Government will continue to monitor developments in China and their implications for our bilateral relationship carefully, and to assess the possibility of further appropriate action, particularly in regard to the human rights situation.