

# Crashing through Chinese walls

## ScoMo lavishes praise in repair job on vital Aussie relationship

ANNABEL HENNESSY  
IN BANGKOK

Scott Morrison has laid down the foundation of Australia's future relationship with China during a one-on-one meeting with the nation's second most powerful official overnight.

In a bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the East Asia Summit with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang in Bangkok, the PM vowed to improve Australia's relationship with the economic powerhouse.

Trade was a central focus of the meeting which was scheduled to run for half an hour but went 15 minutes over time.

They spoke about opportunities to partner on energy

including renewable projects.

The success of the meeting is the clearest indication yet Mr Morrison might soon receive an invitation to visit China. He is the first Australian prime minister in recent history who has not visited China in their first 12 months in office or shortly after.

The meeting with Mr Li comes amid considerable strains in the Australia-China relationship after the communist state scolded Foreign Minister Marise Payne last week for saying it should be held accountable for its human rights abuses.

The Prime Minister and Mr Li shared a warm embrace, with the Premier saying he wanted to extend economic ties.

"Between our two countries there are extensive common interests on the economic co-operation and trade front," Mr Li said.

"There is a solid foundation for co-operation and strong potential in the face of downward economic pressure and a complex international situation.

"We are ready to work with the Australian side to keep our relationship on the right track, deepen our mutual trust and jointly maintain regional and global peace.

"We are ready to work with Australia to fully unlock the potential of our relationship and expand our business ties and people-to-people exchange."

Mr Morrison praised the

economic powerhouse. "As you've no doubt heard me say on many occasions, in particular, the development of China and the economic development of China is one of the modern-day successes," he said.

"This is a partnership of which we value greatly as I know you do also. This is our opportunity, amongst others, to talk about that relationship and, like you, I feel very strongly committed to improving that relationship and ensuring it reaches its full potential."

Mr Morrison will today give a speech to Thai business leaders where he will announce a deal with Thailand to quadruple the number of working

holiday visas from 500 to 2000.

"I'm delighted that we've recently agreed to increase the number of young Australians and Thais who can visit the others' country under our Work and Holiday Visa Program, from 500 to 2000 places, from mid-next year," Mr Morrison will say in his speech.

"I can think of plenty of young Aussies who will be thrilled to take up an opportunity like that, because we love Thailand."

The PM will also spruik Australia's economic relationship with Thailand, pointing to a gas station in Kemerton in WA as an example of the country's growing investment in Australia.



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**Scott Morrison**

Scott Morrison with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang last night in Thailand and left, Foreign Minister Marise Payne.

Picture: AAP



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Treasury is refusing to say how long it expects an investigation of Deputy Secretary Matt Flavel to continue or if he is being paid his taxpayer-funded, six-figure salary while on leave.

The Weekend West reported that Mr Flavel was no longer in active service in his position as Deputy Secretary in charge of the Corporate Services and Business Strategy Group while an investigation of an incident in which he is alleged to have been involved at the Treasury Ball last month was ongoing.

The ball was attended by many Treasury employees, from the executive to graduates.

Last night, Treasury was remaining tight-lipped on the investigation and if Mr Flavel's salary was still being paid.

The Treasury website states that during the 2017-18 reporting period deputy secretaries at Treasury earned an average total remuneration of between \$477,669 and \$336,479.

It is not known where Mr Flavel sits on that range. However, he has been in the role of Deputy Secretary since July 2017.

A Treasury spokeswoman said last night: "Treasury does not comment on individual staffing matters."

She also would not say how long the investigation was expected to go for, but that there were "established processes" for these types of incidents.

"The time taken to complete a

It is understood Mr Flavel strongly disputes the allegations made against him.

Both Treasurer Josh Frydenberg and his Opposition counterpart Jim Chalmers refused to comment on the matter publicly.

Mr Flavel, who as part of his role has oversight of the Perth office, was Acting Secretary of the Commonwealth Treasury at the time of the alleged incident.

Newly appointed Treasury Secretary Stephen

Kennedy was overseas with Mr Frydenberg for meetings in Washington DC with the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and G20 finance ministers.

The West Australian understands a report of the incident required Mr Kennedy to be formally notified during the trip. Mr Frydenberg was also made aware of the report during the overseas visit.

Shortly after their return, Mr Kennedy launched an investigation into the alleged incident and Mr Flavel took leave.

His email address has an out-of-office notice that reads he is "currently on leave".

He also has been replaced on the official Treasury organisational chart, with chief national security adviser Damien White acting in his role.

Mr Flavel and Mr Kennedy have both been contacted for comment.

The West Australian

EXCLUSIVE

## Treasury probe top official

Saturday's front page.

# China sale gets green light

EXCLUSIVE LANAI SCARR  
FEDERAL POLITICAL EDITOR

Treasurer Josh Frydenberg personally ticked off on a Chinese state-owned entity buying a stake last month in the long-stalled Oakajee Port and Rail project in WA's Mid West.

The West Australian has confirmed Mr Frydenberg gave foreign investment approval for Sinosteel's acquisition of Japanese giant Mitsubishi's interests in Oakajee, north of Geraldton, two weeks ago, after a long campaign from those within the Government.

The move lays the ground-

work for a repair of relations between China and Australia. News of the approval came as Prime Minister Scott Morrison sat down last night with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang in Thailand.

It is understood the approval of two transactions by subsidiaries of Sinosteel last month makes it increasingly likely any future application for development of the site will be looked on favourably.

Sinosteel's assets in the region now include Sinosteel Midwest Corp Ltd (Weld Range Iron Ore Project), Crosslands Resources and Oakajee Port and Rail, making it the major force in the

Mid West region of WA. The \$10 billion Oakajee mining rail and port project has the potential to unlock a new iron ore province, boosting jobs and the local economy at a time when iron ore prices are the highest since 2014.

A Sinosteel spokesman said last night the company was undertaking a "comprehensive review of the project ... that will consider any potential development plans in future".

"Any future announcements will be made as and when milestones or decisions are confirmed," he said.

Resources Minister Matt

Canavan will visit Perth today to fire a rocket up the major players in the Browse Basin.

Senator Canavan will convene a meeting with WA Resources Minister Bill Johnston and representatives from Woodside, BP, Shell, MIMI and PetroChina.

Browse is Australia's largest untapped conventional gas resource and Senator Canavan says the time for talking is over.

"We have given the Browse joint venture partners enough time to get this project moving. My message today will be very clear — we don't expect any more delays," he told The West Australian. "The Browse

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## Aged care 'a cultural issue'

Australia has to take responsibility to overcome its "cultural" problems around aged care, Federal Health Minister Greg Hunt says.

Mr Hunt said a damning interim report from the aged care royal commission, released last week, revealed a "national cultural issue".

Labor has set a "deadline" for the Government to take action on the commission's interim recommendations before the Senate returns on November 11.

In its report, the commission called for an overhaul of the system, labelling it a "cruel lottery" and a "shocking tale of neglect".

It wants immediate action to cut home care waiting lists, stop the overuse of drugs to sedate residents and to stop younger

people with disabilities living in aged care.

Mr Hunt said the Government and community needed to draw a "line in the sand" on ageism in Australian society.

"What the commission found, which went beyond anything that I had expected, was a national cultural issue," he said.

The country had a challenge: to deal with an "ageist society".

Prime Minister Scott Morrison has already promised more money for the sector before Christmas. Mr Hunt would not elaborate, but promised it would be a "significant" amount.

The Health Department has estimated that about \$2.5 billion is needed a year to address a 120,000 person-long waiting list for home care packages.