

Lindsay Anderson on his farm in Gippsland.
Photo: Paul Jeffers



Children face separation if Fijian parents deported

■ Heath Aston

Two Australian children face being separated from their parents after the Turnbull government made final moves to deport the couple back to Fiji.

Assistant Immigration Minister Alex Hawke has declined to intervene in the case of the Prasad family, despite Jasmita, 15, and her brother Jasneel, 12, being Australian citizens who would be forced to uproot from school in suburban Sydney and move to a village in Fiji they have never visited if the family is to remain together.

The ethnic Indian family has been living in Australia for nearly 17 years and all three Prasad children were born at Randwick Women's Hospital. Three-year-old Jashwin is not yet an Australian citizen.

Jasmita, who attends Randwick Girls' High School, and Jasneel, who is at Mascot Public School, have Australian passports and the family's migration agent has warned the government it could knowingly be sending two Australians to a life of poverty and possibly homelessness in Fiji.

Jitend Prasad and his wife Joytika arrived in Australia in June 2000 shortly after the military coup in which George Speight overthrew the elected government of ethnic Indian prime minister Mahendra Chaudhry.

The Prasads say they were caught up in threats and violence by indigenous Fijians from a neighbouring village and applied for a protection visa shortly after arriving in Australia, claiming they would suffer discrimination and

degrading treatment on the grounds of their ethnicity if they returned.

The Refugee Review Tribunal has found that the couple can safely return to Fiji but the family has asked the government to exercise discretion in keeping them together in Australia.

"If we have to go back to Fiji, where will our children live?" Mrs Prasad asked. "They have never stayed with anyone else. My daughter has been so upset that she wouldn't eat."

Jasmita, who wants to become a doctor, told Fairfax Media she would not move.

'We're Australians. We were born here and there is nothing for us in Fiji.'

Jasmita Prasad

"We're Australians," she said. "We were born here and there is nothing for us in Fiji."

In a letter dated March 3, a Department of Immigration and Border Protection official told the Prasads that Mr Hawke had declined to use discretionary powers contained in the Migration Act, saying he did not believe it would be in the public interest to do so.

The Prasads could be sent to immigration detention or forcibly removed from Australia after April 4.

Migration agent Farnam Razzaghipour said in his two decades of experience, it was unusual for the federal government not to come down in favour of Australian

citizens directly affected by a related immigration matter.

According to the law, the minister can use discretionary power if there are "strong compassionate circumstances that, if not recognised, would result in serious, ongoing and irreversible harm and continuing hardship to an Australian citizen or an Australian family unit, where at least one member of the family is an Australian citizen or Australian permanent resident."

"Forced removal of Mr and Mrs Prasad will cause irreparable harm and suffering to this family of five, two of whom are Australian citizens," Mr Razzaghipour said in a letter to Immigration Minister Peter Dutton.

The Prasads, who are financially supported by extended family in Australia, have not claimed any welfare benefits and, despite receiving Australian citizenship, Jasmita and Jasneel have not been given the right to access Medicare.

In a statement, the department said ministerial intervention was "not an extension of the visa process".

"The minister cannot be compelled to exercise his powers and he is not required to explain his decisions on any case," a spokeswoman said. "The minister only intervenes in a relatively small number of cases that present unique and exceptional circumstances."

"It would be inappropriate to confirm further details, including individual circumstances, relating to this case. People whose requests for intervention have been unsuccessful and who do not have other matters before the department are expected to depart Australia."

"They're paid off and I'm making money," he says of the system, which was designed to export power to the grid.

"It was about reducing my farm's (power) bill. This was pure economics, about how to go about putting in solar and making a dollar out of it, or reducing my costs."

This system cost about \$22,800. The cost including installation was \$60,000.

The tracking panel system delivers about 8500 kilowatt hours of electricity per year, he says. Tracking the sun boosts yield by 25-30 per cent.

He estimated that fixed solar panels on a Queensland house roof would deliver about 7000-7500

kilowatt hours per year.

"[So] we're outperforming (a Queensland house)."

Mr Anderson, who worked on the construction of Loy Yang A power station and helped design Loy Yang B power station, says he understands the environmental push to close Hazelwood power station.

"It is a 1950s design, built in the 1960s. How many of us are still driving around in that sort of car," he says.

Mr Anderson fears Hazelwood's closure will push up power prices and increase the threat of power supply problems.

"The shutting of it will have a big effect on the grid," he says.



Parents Joytiki and Jitend Prasad (right) at dinner with their three children, from left, Jansel, Jasmita and Jashwin. Photo: Kate Geraghty

Australian medical experts lead mercy bid in Iraq

■ Michael Gorey

Australian health professionals are on the ground in northern Iraq as part of a global humanitarian relief effort to assist civilians in the war-ravaged region.

Canberra-based Aspen Medical has been engaged to manage and run a 48-bed hospital and is recruiting more than 70 staff.

The latest World Health Organisation report says at least 250,000 people have been displaced from Mosul since October and 2.7 million need health services.

The report cites concern with access to care in recently liberated areas due to volatile security,

movement restrictions, water and fuel shortages.

Disease surveillance has been stepped up in response to poor sanitation.

WHO contracted Aspen Medical to run the new facility south of Mosul at the request of the Iraqi Government.

Aspen Medical co-executive chairmen Glenn Keys and Andrew Walker said the Australian firm was well equipped for the challenges following successful missions in the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea and West Africa.

Mr Keys said there had been a significant increase in trauma casualties around Mosul.

"Those casualties aren't coming just from being involved in the conflict. There's also dehydration and malnutrition," he said. "The casualties, particularly women and children, are very high."

'The casualties, particularly women and children, are very high.'

Glenn Keys, Aspen Medical

Dr Walker said the facility would provide trauma care, maternity and paediatric services.

A former Australian Army officer, Dr Walker said security

was paramount. "The first thought we had was that if we can't ensure the security of our personnel, we won't deploy," he said.

"We've taken every step possible to make sure there's personal protection of our staff. There are Iraqi forces between us and the frontline, which is comforting."

"It's not for the fainthearted, but the people going are well aware of the risks and we'll do everything we can to assure their protection."

Victorian nurse Vesna Courtot is on her second overseas mission, her first in a war zone. She went to West Africa with Aspen Medical in 2014-15 during the Ebola outbreak. "When I told my family and

friends I was heading to a conflict zone their responses ranged from support to some questioning my sanity," she said.

"The dreadful situation for the people of Mosul has been unfolding before our eyes over the past weeks and as a nurse it is difficult not to want to help no matter what the environment is like."

"I'm expecting to deal with mass casualties including burns, orthopaedic injuries and surgical emergencies."

"I am also expecting an opportunity to learn from Iraqi healthcare professionals who have been dealing with this day-in-day-out for years."