

This newsletter summarises the record numbers of migrants, skilled workers, students and others arriving on our shores. It highlights the problems of asylum seekers and the measures being taken to deal with people smugglers.

Immigration

Record intake good for nation: Evans

The Immigration Minister, Chris Evans, defended the Government's record high immigration intake, saying migrants often have better job outcomes than Australians, buy property and have a positive impact on the economy.

The 2008-09 program of 190,300 migrants – with 133,500 places for permanent skilled migrants – has come under fire from the Opposition for putting unnecessary strain on Australia's infrastructure in the face of the global economic crisis. Sharman Stone, the Opposition's spokeswoman on immigration, called for a 25 per cent cut to immigration, back to 2005-06 levels. "Unemployment is beginning to rise [...] there are real issues with housing congestion and growing community concern about the road ahead," Dr Stone said.

See: <http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/record-intake-good-for-nation-evans/2008/10/26/1224955...>

Label free travel for Subclass 457 visa holders

As of 2 January 2009 Subclass 457 visa holders may travel label free to Australia if they hold a passport from an eligible country. The complete list of eligible label free countries for the Subclass 457 is available from the departmental website. This is to reduce the requirement for Subclass 457 visa holders to have their visa label placed in their passport prior to travel or on arrival to Australia. Specifically this is for ETA, e676, or eVisitor eligible passport holders. The visa and passport details of Subclass 457 visa holders will be electronically recorded.

See: <http://www.immi.gov.au/skilled/skilled-workers/sbs/visa-labels.htm>

Treatment of asylum seekers no better under Rudd: report

Asylum seekers are still being held in miserable conditions despite the softening of immigration policy, a new report finds. The Australian Human Rights Commission's annual report on detention found the Rudd Government has not made the changes to detention policy it announced last July. The report found asylum seekers, including children, continue to be held indefinitely. People being processed on Christmas Island do not have adequate access to basic services, the report says. And access to interpreters, translated documents, and recreational and educational activities at all detention centres is lacking.

The report calls for the Migration Act to be amended so detention is the exception rather than the norm, and any decision to detain a person be subject to prompt review by a

In this issue:

Immigration

[Record intake](#)

[Label free travel](#)

[Treatment of
asylum seekers](#)

[Villawood to be
knocked down](#)

[Sea rescue by Navy](#)

[Accused smugglers
In court](#)

[Kingpin held](#)

[Cap on detention](#)

[Asylum-seekers on
criminal database](#)

[Illegal worker
awareness](#)

[False passport
charge](#)

[Immigration
initiative](#)

court.

See: <http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/articles/2009/01/12/1231608620374.html>

Villawood to be knocked down

The ageing and cramped Villawood detention centre will be knocked down, with a new facility to be built on Commonwealth land either close to the existing site or the airport. Funding for the new centre is expected in next year's Budget following a \$1.1 million redevelopment study that is close to being finalised and believed to say the existing centre is no longer viable.

Human Rights Commissioner Graeme Innes said Villawood remained the most "prison-like" of all the detention centres on the mainland and should be demolished as a matter of urgency.

See: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2009/01/17/1231609053578.html>

Group at sea rescued by Navy

A group of 12 people has been rescued from their sinking boat by a Royal Australian Navy vessel in waters off northern Western Australia, the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship said. The group was taken on board the Navy patrol boat as a safety of life at sea situation, and given food and water.

See: <http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/media-releases/2008/ce08109.htm>

Accused smugglers in court

Three Indonesians accused of smuggling 35 Afghan and Iraqi asylum seekers to Australia have faced a Perth court. Sumarto, 51, Abdul Daeng Siga, 55, and Ibrahim Ferdi, 29, are accused of "recklessly" attempting to bring non-citizens to Australia. The men are believed to be the captain and crew members of a vessel intercepted by a navy patrol boat.

They face a maximum penalty of 20 years. A Perth magistrate, Richard Bailey, told them that they would be remanded in prison while a lawyer was assigned to them. The case will return to court on February 6.

See: <http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/articles/2009/01/19/1232213540913.html>

Alleged kingpin held as boat stopped

Indonesian and Australian police have arrested a man believed to be responsible for sending three boatloads of asylum seekers to Australia. The joint operation conducted in south-east Sulawesi resulted in a boat containing 40 Afghan and Pakistani asylum seekers being prevented from making the journey to Australia, the seizure of the boat and the arrest of its crew. The alleged people-smuggler, an Indonesian named Haji Tahir, from Kupang in West Timor, and his human cargo were detained after a sophisticated operation that included the use of aircraft.

See: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2009/02/03/1233423223277.html>

[Guest worker scheme](#)

[Guest workers arrive](#)

[Sacked workers on 457 visas](#)

Australia Day Awards

[Australian of the Year](#)

Human Rights

[Australian Charter of Rights](#)

[What Australia needs](#)

[Charter of human rights team](#)

[Fair treatment in detention](#)

[Meeting of Tibetans](#)

[Push to kill death penalty](#)

[Maternity leave](#)

[New law fails young families](#)

[Women's health](#)

Year in detention 'excessive'

Dissenters have broken away from a parliamentary group investigating Australia's immigration detention policy, arguing for more dramatic change including legal rights for detainees and a one-month cap on detention. Conservative Liberal senator Alan Eggleston joined party colleague Petro Georgiou and Greens senator Sarah Hanson-Young in criticising the majority's 18 recommendations for not going far enough.

The unlikely splinter group wanted detainees to be granted immediate access to the courts. This would allow them to appeal for release when there were "no reasonable grounds that their detention is justified", a supplementary report prepared by the group said. The lack of judicial review has meant that women and children had been held unreasonably, the report said.

See: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/12/01/1227979933051.html>

Asylum-seekers to go on criminal database

Asylum-seekers and their teenage children will be included in a criminal database, with their fingerprints to be rolled into the national system by mid-2009. The plan will give the National Automated Fingerprint Identification System (NAFIS) access to the Immigration Department's database of about 3000 detainee fingerprints. About 1000 of the prints would belong to asylum-seekers aged 15 and older.

The remainder are visa overstayers, foreign fishermen and other "unauthorised" residents. Under the Migration Act, no one younger than 15 is allowed to be fingerprinted. Police investigating a crime can seek information, including name, address and immigration history, about a current or former detainee from the department if they score a "hit" on the database, which holds 4.2 million sets of fingerprints. It is managed by the national criminal information agency, CrimTrac.

See: <http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/articles/2008/11/08/1225561202058.html>

Illegal worker awareness campaign to inform farmers

Officers from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), Centrelink and Workplace Ombudsman (WO) will conduct a multi-agency employment awareness campaign in the Robinvale region of north-western Victoria. The aim of the campaign is to inform local growers of their rights and responsibilities when hiring workers to harvest their crop during this picking season. Illegal workers are often associated with cash economy industries, characterised by abuses of taxation, employment and welfare laws.

See: <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/media-releases/2008/d08096.htm>

Man charged with possessing false passport – AFP

A 38-year-old Ghanaian man will face Perth Central Court charged with possessing a false passport. The man's visa was cancelled and he was charged with possessing a document knowing that it was a false foreign travel document contrary to section 21(2) of the Foreign Passports (Law Enforcement and Security) Act 2005.

See: http://www.afp.gov.au/media_releases/national/2008/man_charged_with_posessing_false_passport

[policy](#)

[Gay couples face discrimination](#)

[Justice for gay war widower](#)

[Social inclusion strategies in sport](#)

[Planned approach for disability](#)

[City of the future](#)

[Disability rights](#)

[Freedom of Information](#)

Multicultural Affairs

[Anti-racism campaign](#)

[Diverse Australia](#)

[Mount Gambier embraces Burmese](#)

Indigenous Affairs

[Reconciliation poll](#)

[Act closed wounds but not gap](#)

[Aboriginal students successful](#)

Immigration initiative

A world-leading immigration initiative for screening foreign seafarers travelling to Australia has won a Prime Minister's Award for Excellence in Public Sector Management. The Maritime Crew Visa (MCV) – an initiative of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) and the Australian Customs Service – won a special award for joint or whole-of-government activities and a commendation award in a ceremony in Canberra. "The MCV project is an excellent example of Customs and DIAC working together to achieve this aim," Customs CEO Michael Carmody said.

See: <http://www.customs.gov.au/site/page.cfm?c=11118>

Guest worker scheme

The long-awaited trial to recruit guest workers from Pacific islands to pick fruit in areas short of labour has been hit by delays and could now be sunk by the economic downturn.

Six months ago the Government said the first migrant workers would arrive with the onset of the picking season before Christmas. As part of a trial, 100 workers were to go to Griffith in the Riverina and Swan Hill in Victoria to pick and pack fruit, the first wave in a migrant labour force expected to grow to 2500. The Government has signed agreements with Kiribati, Tonga and Vanuatu, but the arrival of workers from these countries is still subject to negotiations with labour hire companies and the Federal Government has declined to give a start-up date.

See: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2009/01/11/1231608523370.html>

Guest workers arrive

Fifty Tongans have finally arrived in Australia to pick fruit in NSW areas where farmers are unable to get enough workers. The men will be in the Riverina and Robinvale regions for seven months under a trial Federal Government seasonal workers' scheme.

More men will come from Vanuatu, Kiribati and Papua New Guinea when approved labour hire companies have completed all requirements, which include growers taking steps to first recruit Australians for the jobs. After the trial, 2400 seasonal work visas will be available from July.

See: <http://www.smh.com.au/national/island-fruit-pickers-on-way-20090214-87n3.html>

Sacked workers on 457 visas stay illegally

A blackmarket of workers will grow as mining and construction companies lay off migrants on 457 visas because of the financial crisis, unions are warning. Temporary workers, sacked before the maximum four years is up, have become trapped - unable to stay in Australia and not yet capable of paying debts to migration agents at home. Temporary overseas workers who stay more than 28 days after they are sacked do so illegally. This means they are likely to take jobs with poor conditions.

Employers are considered to have met their sponsorship obligations once they have bought a plane ticket for the migrant to return to their country of origin and told the Government that employment has ceased. The number of migrants found overstaying 457 visas grew by 12 per cent in the year to June 30. At that time, 326 such people had disappeared into the community.

See: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2009/01/22/1232471495739.html>

[Black scholarship fund](#)

United Nations

[Discrimination against women](#)

Foreign Affairs

[Fight against malaria](#)

[India in nuclear big league](#)

[Humanitarian relief in Gaza](#)

[High Commissioner to Brunei](#)

[Setting humanity adrift](#)

[Korean Minister visits Australia](#)

[Philippines exporter to list on ASX](#)

[Diary Dates](#)

[Resources](#)

[IELTS Training](#)

Australia Day Awards

Australian of the Year 2009

Aboriginal leader and academic Mick Dodson has been named Australian of the Year at a ceremony outside Parliament House in Canberra. Professor Dodson, a tireless campaigner for indigenous rights, was presented the award by the prime minister a year after Kevin Rudd apologised to the stolen generations. Mr Rudd thanked Prof Dodson for his lifetime commitment to improving the lives of Aboriginal people and in helping to close the gap between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. "His efforts truly show that if we work together, we can achieve real progress," Mr Rudd said.

Professor Dodson, 58, is the eighth Aborigine to receive the honour. A law professor at the Australian National University and director of the National Centre for Indigenous Studies, he is currently advising the federal government on a new national indigenous representative body. He is also a member of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

See: <http://www.news.com.au/story/0,23599,24960986-1702,00.html>

Human Rights

Australian Charter of Rights

On the 60th anniversary of the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights the federal Attorney-General, Robert McClelland, announced a nationwide consultation on the formulation of an Australian charter of rights. Among the rights most likely to be included would be things such as equality before the law; protection from torture, cruel or degrading treatment; freedom of movement; freedom of expression; privacy; freedom of association and assembly; protection of families and children; and property rights.

See: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/12/04/1228257224294.html>

What Australia needs is a charter of human rights

Catherine Branson is president of the Australian Human Rights Commission. This is an edited extract of her Human Rights Day oration.

What sort of Australia do we want to live in? I'm quite sure most people, like me, would say they want to live in a society where respect for the individual is recognised as precious. Where everyone is valued, whether they are male or female, young or old, an Aborigine or Torres Strait Islander, whatever their faith, whether or not they have a disability - everyone.

As Australians, there is much of which we can be proud. Ours is a robust democracy with an independent judiciary. There are low levels of official corruption. Most of our communities are safe and most Australians have access to health care. But we still have a long way to go. Contrary to popular opinion, the law does not always protect our human rights and Australian lawmakers can abolish most of the rights we have.

See: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/12/09/1228584832873.html>

Charter of human rights team

The Jesuit lawyer Frank Brennan, who calls himself a "fence-sitter" in the bill of rights debate, will head the Federal Government's public consultation on whether Australia needs a human rights charter. The Government, which expects the issue to generate

[Quote of the month](#)

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controversy, hopes the choice of Father Brennan will counter charges from the Opposition that it has already made up its mind on introducing a bill of rights before the results of the public consultation are known.

In a speech in May, Father Brennan said: "I am a long-term committed fence-sitter in the bill of rights debate." He said he favoured a "limited statutory bill of rights for all Australian jurisdictions" but it presented a number of difficult issues. The Federal Opposition is against a human rights charter, saying it will lead to a transfer of power away from the Parliament to the unelected judiciary.

Extension for Human Rights Consultation

A request by Father Frank Brennan, Chair of the National Human Rights Consultation Committee, for a one-month extension to the reporting date of the National Human Rights Consultation, has been agreed to. The National Human Rights Consultation will better inform Government of the range of community views about how we should protect human rights and responsibilities.

See: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/12/09/1228584839248.html>

Fair treatment of all people in detention

Releasing options for Australia to monitor conditions of detention, Human Rights Commissioner, Graeme Innes, emphasised the importance of Australia's responsibility to ensure that all people who are deprived of their liberty within our borders are treated fairly.

"When we are talking about the fair treatment of people who are deprived of their liberty, we are not only talking about prisoners," said Commissioner Innes. "We are also talking about people who have not been convicted of any crime – these are people in secure mental health facilities, people with dementia who live in secure sections of aged care homes, those in immigration detention and those held by the police."

The report is available online at www.humanrights.gov.au/human_rights/publications/opcat/index.html

Tibetans meet to find a new freedom path

The future of one of the world's best known freedom struggles is being reassessed by Tibetan refugees in exile. They recently attended an unprecedented meeting at the Indian hill town of Dharamsala. Tibet's spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, called for the gathering to determine the "best possible future course of action to advance the Tibetan cause".

About 500 legislators, former ministers in the government-in-exile, heads of Tibetan associations and other prominent Tibetans gathered at a school auditorium in upper Dharamsala, for the five-day meeting. For two decades the Dalai Lama has championed a "middle way" for the movement, incorporating a moderate demand for Tibetan "autonomy" under Chinese rule and a strict adherence to non-violent protest. But there is agitation, especially among many young Tibetans, for the movement to adopt a tougher stance.

See: <http://www.smh.com.au/news/world/tibetans-meet-to-find-a-new-freedom-path/2008/11/17/12267...>

Push to kill death penalty

There is a bipartisan push for Australia to pass laws entrenching its opposition to the death penalty, in a bid to send a strong message to the region and stave off the executions of three members of the Bali Nine. A cross-party working group against the death penalty was re-established in Parliament. The group wants Parliament to enact legislation making it impossible for the states to reintroduce the death penalty. While it is abolished in all states and territories, there is nothing to stop them reviving it.

The group hoped to gain support for a law based on the Second Operational Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Such laws could be passed if the states referred their powers to the Commonwealth, or the Government used its constitutional external affairs powers.

See: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/12/03/1228257139007.html>

Maternity leave exposes 'culture of antagonism'

A new report says laws designed to protect pregnant women workers and women on maternity leave are not functioning as they should. "Employers can, and do, easily flout the existing regulations," it says. Pat McDonough, a co-author of the report, said a "'culture of antagonism' towards pregnant women workers and women on maternity leave is alive and well". In the economic downturn, these women workers would be more vulnerable than ever. "They're a soft touch," she said, "especially women on maternity leave who are out of sight." The report, A Pregnant Pause, is based on the experiences of 76 women who between February and June requested help from the Women's Employment Rights Project, part of the Inner City Legal Centre.

See: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/12/26/1229998733238.html>

New law fails young families

The Rudd Government's much-vaunted new right for working parents to seek flexible employment arrangements to help with their family responsibilities will turn out to be a "Clayton's right" because it cannot be legally enforced, according to labour law experts. The Government's Fair Work Bill - due to replace the Howard government's Work Choices - gives employees with preschool children a legislated right to request family-friendly work patterns such as different starting and finishing times or part-time employment.

While the bill says employers may refuse such requests only on "reasonable business grounds", the fine print confirms that where working parents believe their employer has breached this obligation, they will have no means to enforce their right. The framing of the bill comes as a report has found that pregnant women frequently lose their jobs, despite having had legal protection from discrimination for 30 years.

See: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/12/26/1229998733205.html>

Women's health policy

The development of a new National Women's Health Policy moved a step closer when the Rudd Government released a paper outlining the aims of the policy. The National Women's Health Policy is about ensuring that the planning and delivery of health services better meet the needs of Australian women – both today and in the future. The new National Women's Health Policy – a Federal Labor election commitment – will emphasise prevention, health inequalities in Australian society, and the social determinants of these inequalities.

Gay couples to face new era of financial discrimination

A major achievement of the Rudd Labor Government is the recent passage of historic legislation to remove discrimination against gay and lesbian couples from dozens of laws. As the celebrations die down, however, it is clear the win for human rights is a serious blow to many gay people.

Elderly gay couples will lose pension income, face Centrelink investigations into their sex lives and will be forced to "come out" of the closet and risk prosecution for fraud. Some in their late 60s, 70s and 80s have faced a lifetime of inequality; they missed out on benefits available to heterosexuals and many have felt the full force of the nation's homophobia. Now they are too old to gain from the new legal equality won in areas as diverse as family law and insurance entitlements. Instead, from July 1 next year, they will suffer pension losses through being treated as a couple rather than as two singles.

See: <http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/articles/2008/12/05/1228257316542.html>

Justice at last for gay war widower

Edward Young has finally proved he is entitled to a war pension. It has been 10 years since his partner, Larry Cains, died. They met in London in 1960 - he, a model, was introduced to Mr Cains, a photographer who had served with the Australian Army in Borneo during World War II. "He was desperately handsome," Mr Young said. "We spent two weeks together and I told him I wanted to spend my life with him." Now, after a decade of fighting to have the law recognise his and Mr Cains's love as equal, the Sydneysider will soon become the country's first recognised gay war widower.

See: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2009/01/02/1230681748875.html>

Forum to shed light on successful social inclusion strategies in sport

The Australian Human Rights Commission held a 'Sport and Cultural Diversity' forum in December. The Commission released a report which sheds light on the existing strategies and programs adopted by 17 national sporting organisations, federal and state governments, various non-government sporting agencies and human rights institutions to combat racism and prejudice within sport.

See: www.humanrights.gov.au/about/media/media_releases/2008/137_08.html

Planned approach for disability welcomed

"One in five Australians have a disability, and the time has arrived for us, as a nation, to take a planned approach to ensuring that this 20 per cent have equal access to all facets of Australian life," said Commissioner Innes. The Commissioner said that the Australian Human Rights Commission welcomed the consultation process on the strategy and encouraged Australians with a disability to put their views forward.

See: www.humanrights.gov.au/about/media/media_releases/2008/106_08.html

An accessible city of the future

Part of being a successful and visionary city of the future is striving to ensure that your buildings, services, information and employment opportunities are accessible to everyone who works, lives in and visits the city, including people who have a disability," Commissioner Innes said. The Action Plan commits Council to improve accessibility and to work with others to set Sydney on the path of becoming a global leader as an inclusive

and accessible city for people with a disability.

See: www.humanrights.gov.au/about/media/media_releases/2008/142_08.html

Raising the standard on disability rights

The Government has taken another step to ensure Australia remains an international leader on the issue of disability rights, by tabling a National Interest Analysis proposing that Australia become a party to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. "Today is an important day because it focuses attention on the challenges that people with disability face on a daily basis," Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services Bill Shorten said.

See: http://www.attorneygeneral.gov.au/www.ministers/RobertMc.nsf/Page/MediaReleases_2008_FourthQuarter_3December2008-RaisingTheStandardonDisabilityRights

Freedom of information

The first-ever review of secrecy clauses in all Commonwealth legislation has found 370 distinct provisions scattered through 166 laws that make it a criminal offence to disclose information. While secrecy provisions in laws dealing with national security, taxation and crime were hardly unexpected, the commission's president, Professor David Weisbrot, said he was surprised to find "the federal statute book has become riddled with secrecy provisions".

The commission yesterday released a community consultation paper as part of its inquiry into secrecy laws, which is attempting to work out a balance between secrecy needed for some documents and the Government's commitment to increased openness and transparency.

See: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/12/09/1228584839257.html>

Multicultural Affairs

Anti-racism campaign

The Federal Government will be able to respond more quickly to ugly flare-ups such as the Cronulla riots with a new anti-racism campaign. The Diverse Australia Program will replace grants by the Howard government to promote "living in harmony", after an internal review found the need for a stronger focus on racial tolerance. However Harmony Day, the annual event on March 21, will stay. The review found it had strong community support.

Under the "emerging issues" of the Diverse Australia Program, grants of up to \$150,000 will be available for projects in areas where racial intolerance is identified. Under the community projects component, smaller, inexperienced groups can apply for grants of up to \$5000, with a much simpler application process. The new name seeks to focus on respect and fair treatment.

See: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2009/01/27/1232818441654.html>

Diverse Australia

Race Discrimination Commissioner Tom Calma welcomed the new Diverse Australia program announced by the federal government. Commissioner Calma said the Diverse

Australia program was another milestone in efforts to ensure the diverse reality of Australian society was reflected in the way policies were developed to chart the future of this country.

See: http://www.humanrights.gov.au/about/media/media_releases/2009/5_09.html

Mount Gambier embraces Burmese seeking new life

Resettlement of Burmese refugees in Mount Gambier is a wonderful example of how local communities and government can work together to support successful settlement, the Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services, Laurie Ferguson, said. In Mount Gambier to meet the Burmese community, Mr Ferguson said the 50 people, about 10 families, were mainly minority Karen people who had been driven out of Burma into refugee camps in Thailand by ethnic troubles under successive military regimes.

Projects between police and Muslim communities

A second round of partnership funding is now available for groups wanting to build relationships and improve trust between Muslim communities and local police, national Race Discrimination Commissioner Tom Calma said. The Community Policing Partnerships Program (CPPP) encourages police and Muslim communities to work together in responding to current issues identified and agreed upon by Muslim communities and police.

“The time has come to focus all of our efforts on social, cultural and economic inclusion as the best way forward in helping all groups within our society feel like they are stakeholders in Australia’s future.” Mr Calma said that multiculturalism is a sound policy framework, a guiding set of norms and a major support to the ideals of a democratic society.

See: www.humanrights.gov.au/about/media/media_releases/2008/153_08.html
and www.humanrights.gov.au/about/media/media_releases/2008/154_08.html

Indigenous Affairs

Reconciliation poll

A year after Australia said sorry, there is still a lingering lack of trust and respect between the first Australians and those who came after. But we have more in common than we realise, and a love of sport is among our most common traits. For the first time, extensive research shows what Australians really think of themselves and each other.

The Reconciliation Barometer tested four areas: our awareness of indigenous people, attitudes to them, perceptions of them and actions towards them. The answers of indigenous people were then compared with the general population. In some ways, the self-image of all Australians is similar - we see ourselves as good at sport, good-humoured and friendly. We also see ourselves as family oriented; Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders particularly so. But indigenous people were seen to be less co-operative, disciplined and hard-working than the general population. Indigenous people thought white Australians were less respectful. The Barometer, an initiative of Reconciliation Australia, will be updated every two years to test whether Australia is any more reconciled.

See: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2009/02/08/1234027855704.html>

Act closed wounds but not the gap

In 1994 Paul Keating was facing a difficult subject - introducing into Federal Parliament what would become the Native Title Act. The High Court's Mabo decision, which finally recognised that Australia was not terra nullius when the British arrived, had forced the country to face up to a history of policies that had devastated the indigenous population. In response to Mabo, after months of negotiations and the longest parliamentary debate in Australia's history, the legislation was finally passed and entered into force on January 1, 1994.

But 15 years on, things are changing. The Federal Government promises a new relationship of partnership and respect for indigenous peoples. We have had the Prime Minister's national apology to the stolen generations, and he has committed to closing the gap between indigenous and non-indigenous Australia. Now might be the moment native title has been waiting for. It is on the agenda for the Council of Australian Governments' Close the Gap meeting in March, and the Attorney-General, Robert McClelland, wants to make native title work better, and ensure all parties are focused on open and flexible negotiations, avoid litigation, and achieve better and enduring results.

See: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2009/01/06/1231004015191.html>

Aboriginal students make short work of success

A Sydney private school's investment in Aboriginal children is starting to pay off, with dramatically improved literacy and numeracy results. St Andrew's Cathedral School in the central business district established a special school called Gawura for Aborigines just under two years ago in a spare classroom on its rooftop. The school, established with donations, has reached its maximum number of enrolments of 25 pupils in kindergarten to year 6 for this year and next. A snapshot of results for this year's first national literacy and numeracy tests shows the year 5 Gawura pupils achieved results in writing that bettered the state average and were less than one point below the school average.

See: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/11/28/1227491827201.html>

Black scholarship fund

The Federal Government will fund a big expansion of the country's main indigenous boarding school scholarship scheme to allow an extra 2000 Aboriginal students to attend top secondary schools. The Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, announced last night the Government would contribute \$20 million to the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation and said it would be matched by business contributions. The extra funding will increase the foundation's existing \$5 million in endowments almost tenfold, increasing the numbers of indigenous children who would be supported.

Mr Rudd said a quality education was the key to expanding the life chances of young people. It was also critical to the Government's commitment to halving the gap between indigenous and non-indigenous students in attaining year 12-level schooling qualifications.

The scholarships would cover tuition and boarding fees, as well as other school expenses that are unable to be met by families such as uniforms, sporting equipment and pocket money.

See: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/10/30/1224956238396.html>

United Nations

Report on discrimination against women

The Australian Government has lodged the sixth and seventh reports on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) with the United Nations.

See: http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/internet/tanyaplibersek.nsf/content/dedaw_18dec08.htm

Foreign Affairs

Fight against malaria

Australia has launched a new regional network established to vigorously scale up efforts to fight malaria in the Asia Pacific region.

The Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance, Bob McMullan said: "Australia has committed \$210 million dollars to the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and we are working with Solomon Islands and Vanuatu to eliminate malaria. These two countries have amongst the highest incidence of malaria outside of Africa. Australia also supports malaria programs in Papua New Guinea and the Philippines."

According to the latest World Malaria Report, 250 million people suffered from malaria in 2006, and nearly 1 million people died as a result of the disease. Outside of Africa, about 62 per cent of malaria cases are believed to occur in the Asia-Pacific region.

See: http://www.aid.gov.au/media/release.cfm?BC=Latest&ID=4885_328_8999_5530_3310

Nuclear compromise puts India in the big league

India's emergence as a great power has been cemented by the decision of the 45-nation Nuclear Suppliers Group to grant it access to nuclear fuel and technology, the Foreign Affairs Minister, Stephen Smith, says. Mr Smith and India's Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, met in New Delhi. Even though Australia bans uranium exports to India because it has not signed the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, the Rudd Government supported India's bid to gain access to global nuclear commerce. Mr Singh "warmly thanked" Australia for supporting India's campaign to achieve a waiver that allows India to join the elite group of nations that have nuclear weapons and can trade nuclear fuel and technology. "As time unfolds I think it will be regarded as a decision which crystallised the emergence of a great power this century," Mr Smith said.

<http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/09/12/1220857836086.html>

Humanitarian relief in Gaza

The Australian Government is providing \$2 million for Australian NGOs to deliver immediate emergency assistance to Gaza. The NGOs, including the Red Cross, CARE and Oxfam, will distribute family emergency hygiene kits, baby hygiene kits and cleaning kits to 5,000 conflict-affected households across Gaza, which will meet the immediate food and hygiene needs of 2,150 vulnerable families that have been affected by the recent conflict in Gaza.

See: http://www.aid.gov.au/media/release.cfm?BC=Latest&ID=6739_7885_2733_54_9670

Diplomatic appointment of High Commissioner to Brunei

Mr Mark Sawers is to be Australia's new High Commissioner to Brunei Darussalam succeeding Dr Ruth Adler, who has been High Commissioner since February 2006. His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam visited Australia in February 2005 and again in 2007 to attend the APEC Economic Leaders Meeting. Strong people-to-people links date back to 1945 when Australian troops were involved in operations in Brunei during the final stages of World War II. These links were given formal recognition through the completion in 2008 of a Memorial in Brunei to commemorate the 1945 landings of Australian troops.

See: http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2009/090122_fa006_brunei.html

Setting humanity adrift

The Rohingyas are one of the Asian minorities no country wants. About 750,000 in number, of Indian race and Muslim faith, they live in poverty on the Arakan coast of north-western Burma. The Burmese military regime doesn't want them: they don't fit into its mental picture of a nation of South-East Asian ethnicity, Buddhist religion, and Tibeto-Burman language. Bangladesh doesn't want any more mouths to feed, however culturally akin. When 250,000 Rohingyas fled across its border in 1992, they ended up in refugee camps and squatter slums, where about 120,000 remain in misery.

Those who stayed in Burma and those who returned live as non-citizens, tightly watched by the army, obliged to seek permission for even local travel around Arakan state. Not surprisingly, some opt for the third option of seeking work and shelter in other countries.

Last October, Senator Evans announced Australia would take some Rohingya in future years as part of the Offshore Refugee Resettlement programme.

See: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2009/02/04/1233423303463.html>

Visit to Australia by Republic of Korea Foreign Minister Yu Myung-hwan

The Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Republic of Korea, His Excellency Mr Yu Myung-hwan, visited Australia recently. This is only the second bilateral visit to Australia by a South Korean Foreign Minister in 25 years, and the first visit by a South Korean Minister since the inauguration of the Government of President Lee Myung-bak in February 2008.

See: http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2009/090122_fa007_skorea.html

Philippines exporter to list, raise cash

Philippines-based Agrinurture will list in Australia to advance its expansion plans. The agribusiness will list on the National Stock Exchange and raise funds within six months. It intends to import fresh dairy products from Australia and New Zealand, as well as export food products from the Philippines.

See: <https://www.businessspectator.com.au/bs.nsf/Article/Philippines-exporter-to-list-raise-cash-NESJ...>

Diary Dates

Big Skills Conference

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace relations is hosting the Big Skills Conference.

When: 2-5 March 2009

Where: Sydney Convention Centre

2009 Constitutional Law Conference and Dinner

A major conference on constitutional law, the eighth in a series, will be held.

When: 20 February 2009

Where: Australian National Maritime Museum

Resources

New Books – Well worth reading

Title: **Forced Migration, Human Rights and Security**

Editor: Dr Jane McAdam, Director of International Law Programs, Faculty of Law, University of New South Wales

This collection responds to some of the contemporary challenges faced by the international protection regime, with a particular focus on the human rights of those displaced.

Contributing authors include: Guy S Goodwin-Gill, Savitri Taylor, Susan Kneebone and Erika Feller. Published by Hart Publishing, Oxford. Further information: Hart Publishing.

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