

Australia in the Asian Century is the theme of the January newsletter. Far reaching changes to the education studies curriculum will require all students to learn an Asian language. Australian students will be able to access grants to study in Asia and International students will benefit from an increased loans program, and travel concessions.

Independent Reviewer of Adverse Security Assessments

The Hon Margaret Stone has commenced work as the inaugural Independent Reviewer of Adverse Security Assessments, Attorney-General Nicola Roxon said. "Ms Stone will provide an independent review process for those assessed to be a refugee but not granted a permanent visa as a result of an ASIO adverse security assessment. Refugees in immigration detention who are the subject of an adverse security assessment will have access to this new independent review option.

I am pleased that Ms Stone can now start this important work. She is an eminent Australian with experience in legal, immigration and national security matters and will examine the materials used by ASIO and will provide a recommendation to the Director-General of Security as well as report these findings to the Attorney-General, Minister for Immigration and Citizenship and the Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security," Ms Roxon said.

Ms Stone will write to people eligible for review shortly, notifying them of their entitlement to seek review, and to provide further information on the application and review processes.

<http://www.attorneygeneral.gov.au>

Refugee's appeal for family is dismissed

The High Court has upheld an immigration official's decision to reject a bid by an Afghan refugee to bring his family to Australia partly on the basis that his father did not consent. Javed Tahiri was granted a protection visa after arriving in Australia aged 17 in 2009. But the immigration department rejected his subsequent application to bring his mother, and four siblings - all aged under 18 - from Pakistan to join him.

The department found the application did not meet its requirements because it was not satisfied the law of their home country Afghanistan would permit the children's removal. It also found it could not be satisfied the children's father consented to the application.

In refusing the application, the department's official said Mrs Tahiri "did not present any evidence to suggest that the husband is deceased" and there could be "several possible scenarios with regard to his current location". The High Court found the decision was on solid legal ground and did not breach the rules of natural justice.

<http://www.smh.com.au/national/refugees-appeal-for-family-is-dismissed-20121213-2bcp5.html#ixzz2HcCzyjpv>

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People smuggling organiser arrested in Sydney

A 31-year-old Fairfield man has been charged by the Australian Federal Police (AFP) with people smuggling, identity crime, money laundering and drug related offences.

The AFP arrested the man at the Sydney International Airport following a six month investigation by the AFP's People Smuggling Strike Team (PSST) into the man's illegal activities. They have charged the man with a total of 16 offences including:

- Five counts of organising the entry into Australia of people who had no lawful right to come into Australia, contrary to section 233A of the *Migration Act 1958*.
- One count of dealing in the proceeds of crime worth \$1000 or more, contrary to section 400.7(1) of the *Criminal Code Act 1995 (Cth)*.
- Six counts in dealing in the proceeds of crime contrary to section 400.9 of the *Criminal Code Act 1995 (Cth)*.
- Two counts of producing false documents to a reporting entity, contrary to the *Anti-Money Laundering and Counter Terrorism Financing Act 2006 (Cth)*.
- One count of possession of drug manufacture apparatus, contrary to Section 24A of the *Drug Misuse and Trafficking Act 1985 (NSW)*.
- One count of dealing in identification information, contrary to section 192J of the *Crimes Act 1900 (NSW)*.

The maximum penalty for the people smuggling offences is ten years imprisonment. This arrest brings the total number of alleged people smuggling organisers charged by the AFP in Australia to 20 since 2008

<http://www.afp.gov.au/media-centre/news/afp/2013/january/people-smuggling-organiser-arrested-in-sydney.aspx>

Immigration closes in on alleged Melbourne marriage scheme scam

Documents and computer equipment have been seized in an immigration operation targeting the business address of a well-known Melbourne migration agent linked to an alleged fake marriage and contrived relationship scam.

Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) investigators executed the search warrant following extensive investigation into the agent's activities, and will now forensically examine the seized materials.

"The department takes allegations of immigration fraud very seriously. Any activities that undermine the integrity of Australia's visa regime will not be tolerated by authorities. It's too early to speculate on the outcome of spouse visa applications that have been lodged, but all visa applications connected to this operation face significant scrutiny," a DIAC spokesman said.

The operation was part of an ongoing investigation into allegations a Melbourne-based migration agent was involved in a scheme to arrange fraudulent partner visas for Vietnamese nationals. The department estimates hundreds of visa

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applications may have been lodged on the basis of fake marriages and contrived relationships.

“The message from this story is clear. Do not lodge a partner application on the basis of a contract or non genuine relationship. It is illegal”, said Managing partner [David Bitel](#).

<http://www.newsroom.immi.gov.au/releases/immigration-closes-in-on-alleged-melbourne-marriage-scheme-scam>

Significant Recent Court Decisions

Minister for Immigration and Citizenship v MZYYL (2012) FCAFC 147 (24 October 2012)

The test of state protection for cases under the Complementary Protection is different to the state protection test adopted in relation to the Refugees Convention.

S36(2B)(b) does not, in its term or in its operation, require either the conclusion that it is inevitable that the non-citizen will suffer significant harm or the conclusion that it is certain that he or she will not. The express terms of the section require the Minister to be satisfied that, given the protection available to MZYYL in the receiving country, there would not be a *real risk* that he will suffer significant harm. There is nothing to suggest or warrant the imposition of some kind of guarantee of one or other outcome. And, indeed, such a guarantee is practically impossible.

<http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/cases/cth/FCAFC/2012/147.html>

1206698 (2012) RRTA 891 (16 October 2012)

The RRT dealt with the issue whether Australia owes protection obligations either under the Refugee Convention or under the Complementary Protection towards a Pakistani woman married against the wishes of her conservative society. The RRT decided to remit the case for reconsideration with the direction that the applicants satisfy the Complementary protection grounds under s.36(22)(aa) of the Migration Act having satisfied itself that there are substantial grounds for believing that as a necessary and foreseeable consequence of her removal to Pakistan there is a real risk that the applicant will suffer significant harm.

<http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/cases/cth/RRTA/2012/891.html>

Australia in the Asian Century

Target Asia: Education the Key

Launching the white paper *Australia in the Asian Century*, the Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, said that curriculum changes would be compulsory in return for state and territory governments and private school organisations receiving Commonwealth funding for education which was soon to be boosted.

“Success for an open Australia in a middle-class Asia starts in the classrooms, training centres and lecture theatres in our nation,” Ms Gillard said. Every school will be made to teach at least one priority Asian language under a national Asian studies curriculum, as part of a comprehensive embrace of the region aimed at

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exploiting its rapidly growing wealth over the next decade-and-a-half.

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The white paper, prepared by a team led by the former Treasury secretary, Ken Henry, aims at tapping into Asia's rising middle class wealth by 2025, well beyond Australia's present reliance on minerals.

It outlines 25 objectives covering opportunities for business, government, agriculture, tourism, banking and financial services, science and technology, sport, education, and manufacturing.

The paper says "the pace and scale of Asia's rise have been nothing short of staggering". Living standards for billions in Asia have improved and by 2025, it will be home to most of the world's middle class as the largest producer and consumer of goods and services.

Early next year the government will negotiate with the states a new education funding agreement taking into account the recommendations of the Gonski review which advocates billions more dollars be spent on education.

The white paper recommendation, adopted by the government, says every child must have the opportunity to learn one of Mandarin, Hindi, Japanese or Indonesian, and every school must be linked to a school in Asia to support the teaching process. In some instances this would require the national broadband network. "We are working to make this access a core requirement through new school funding arrangements," the paper says.

"For the first time in our history, Asia is not a threat to our high-skill, high-wage road - it is a reason to stay on it," Ms Gillard said. Cross-cultural exchanges are also important and Ms Gillard announced an expanded diplomatic presence in the region and 12,000 Australia awards to promote contact.

<http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/political-news/target-asia-education-the-key-20121029-28dsq.html#ixzz2HcIDYyI0>

Commonwealth Bank of Australia boss endorses vision for Asia

The Asian century white paper said the government needed to double the number of its universities in the global top 100 and introduce Asian languages in all Australian schools. The plan has been estimated to cost billions, but it was backed by the bank Chief Executive, Ian Narev, who said education was the key to maintaining sustainable ties to the region.

The CBA has banking businesses in Indonesia and China, where it operates a number of joint ventures with local financial services groups. The CBA board recently toured its Indonesian operations. "When we were up there we met very senior people who had been educated in Australia and their kids were educated in Australia. Often we undervalue the quite individual human links between the two countries that are absolutely critical. To the extent that there is policy that can further the ties at that kind of level, I think education is one really critical one. It is definitely (something) we feel very strongly about." Mr Narev said.

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/cba-boss-endorses-vision-for-asia/story-fn59niix-1226507011746>

Cultural Council to rise again in Asian Century

The Australia International Cultural Council, a diplomacy body founded by the government in 1998, is expected to be revamped as part of renewed engagement with Asia. The council has not convened since February 2010, but the four-month OzFest of Australian culture in India is an AICC "focus country" program. Arts Minister Simon Crean and Foreign Minister Bob Carr are expected to meet to discuss how they will revitalise the AICC.

The Australia in the Asian Century white paper identified cultural diplomacy as a way to build deeper relationships with the nation's regional neighbours. It defines public and cultural diplomacy as "tools to help start conversations, share knowledge and convey nuanced messages" about Australia.

It is understood that Ministers Crean and Carr will discuss a new membership structure for the AICC that will link arts, trade and foreign affairs. The white paper proposed a greater role for external peers in planning cultural diplomacy.

With limited resources, the AICC historically has had a co-ordinating role and has directed cultural programs at particular countries and regions including the United States, Germany, China, Japan, Britain, France, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Southeast Asia and India.

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/cultural-council-to-rise-again-in-asian-century/story-e6frg8n6-1226507802712>

Asian axis gains momentum

The centre of gravity of the world's economy is rapidly shifting towards Asia. This has brought significant benefits to the Australian economy, mainly through the resources sector. But this is just the beginning. As the Asian Century progresses and the Asian middle classes expand, there will be many opportunities for Australia that extend well beyond mining.

While many international observers see Australia as little more than a giant quarry, this ignores the fact more than four-fifths of what Australia produces is services; much like most other developed economies. As Asia's middle classes become wealthier, demand for a broad range of goods and services is expected to rise rapidly. The HSBC bank estimates three billion people, or more than 40 per cent of the world's present population, will enter the middle classes by 2050.

The sheer size of these markets will mean Australia needs to be involved in only some part of this rapid change to benefit. Increased demand for recreation by Asian consumers is already having an effect on the Australian tourism industry as the number of short-term visitors from China has risen to more than 600,000 a year. Rapidly deepening financial markets in Asia also offer Australia opportunities in terms of sharing expertise. Australia's success in recent years provides lessons for financial development in the Asian region.

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/poised-to-benefit-as-asian-axis-gains-momentum/story-e6frg8zx-1226507017204>

Asian century Education

Attracting skilled migrants, tourists and students to Australia in the Asian Century.

Australia is set to capitalise on Asia's highly skilled population to create an educated, productive work force to bolster our economy in the future, the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Chris Bowen MP, said.

"Even with the government's unprecedented investment in tertiary education and up-skilling Australians, we need migrants who bring their specialist skills to Australia. The *Australia in the Asian Century* White Paper highlights the exciting opportunities for Australia's growth as our neighbours further build trade and industrial strength," Mr Bowen said.

Seven of the top 10 source countries in Australia's 2011–12 migration program are in the Asian region: India, China, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, South Korea and Vietnam. The Indian sub-continent is Australia's largest source region of migrants, providing 23 per cent of the migration program, while 18.3 per cent of migrants come from the north of Asia.

"More than a quarter of our nation's migrants were born in an Asian nation and nearly 1.5 million Australians are fluent in one or more Asian languages, including Mandarin, Cantonese, Vietnamese, Hindi, Punjabi, Indonesian, Korean, Tagalog and Japanese. This means that Australia is uniquely placed to strengthen ties with Asian nations. The Government's improvements to our migration systems and visa processes will mean that we are well prepared to welcome people from across Asia who will contribute to our economy and culture," Mr Bowen said.

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) is expanding its network of service and delivery partners to support online visa lodgement, multiple entry visas and longer visa validity periods. Streamlining the student visa assessment process will make it easier for people who want to study

here, while post-study work rights for bachelor degree and PhD graduates will encourage skilled people to contribute to Australia's development.

A translated version of this media release is available in Mandarin.

See: [Attracting skilled migrants, tourists and students to Australia in the Asian Century in Mandarin](#)

<http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/cb/2012/cb191064.htm>

Key to Asian Century is already on campus

The Asia Century white paper is based on two fundamental propositions. First, by 2025 Asia will have transformed itself from the world's low-cost manufacturer into its biggest middle-class consumer. Second, Australia's future prosperity depends on being able to give increasingly sophisticated Asian consumers what they want.

Higher education is the one sector of our economy that is furthest advanced along this path. More Asian language instruction, more Asian studies programs, and more Australian students in Asian universities. The greatest asset of all when it comes to understanding Asia, the Asian citizens and recent Asian migrants already in our universities. About a quarter of all university students come from Asia, a much higher proportion than for any other English speaking country.

Asian students are young, ambitious people whose experiences and perspectives are an underappreciated but potentially invaluable resource when it comes to helping Australians understand Asia and to integrating Australia more fully into Asia.

Asian students come to Australia because they want the quality Western education our universities deliver. But it's time we did more for them. It is a cliché that Asian students are technically excellent but relatively passive. Yet they are fully aware they need to develop the kind of personal skills needed in all globally engaged professions these days, such as critical thinking, communication, teamwork and leadership. We can do a better job of helping Asian students develop these skills. We should position them to practise and enhance their personal skills in the classroom and on campus. The best way to give them this opportunity is by suffusing Asian content throughout our curriculums, and then inviting Asian students to help us better understand them, their home countries and their continent

Working with the Asian students to increase our Asian capabilities is thus a win-win-win. Asian students will balance their technical expertise with needed leadership skills. The Asian literacy of Australian students will increase dramatically. And the bonds among all our students forged on campus will stay with them for all their lives.

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/higher-education/key-to-asian-century-is-already-on-campus/story-e6frgcjx-1226506913544>

Welcome change: overseas student travel concessions

The University of Newcastle says it has long argued for the reintroduction of transport concessions for international students on the grounds of equity and safety. The State Government has announced international students will receive a discount of up to 35 per cent on tickets for trains, buses, and ferries in the Hunter, as well as Sydney and the Illawarra. The move could save students up to \$800 a year.

Vice-Chancellor, Professor Caroline McMillen says the concessions are long overdue. "All University's across the state have been clear that there should be available transport concessions for travel for international students." She says the discounted public transport fares will ensure New South Wales remains an attractive place to travel and study. "For parents overseas, thinking of supporting their son or daughter - accommodation, tuition fees, making sure they're in a good environment - having access to public transport is just so much a part of that."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-10-30/welcome-change3a-overseas-student-travel-concessions/4340592>

AsiaBound program puts dollars behind students in the Asian Century

The Government's \$37 million AsiaBound program will go a long way toward meeting the Government's ambitious *Australia in the Asian century* White Paper objective of substantially increasing the number of university students studying at least part of their degrees in Asia.

The AsiaBound program will award more than 10,000 Australian students grants to study in Asia. The Government has also broadened, simplified and increased its overseas student loans program, OS-HELP, to make studying in Asia more affordable. "This is a significant amount of money that the Government is investing, removing some of the cost-related impediments to students studying in Asia and providing an incentive for them to study abroad," said Belinda Robinson, Chief Executive of Universities Australia, the peak body representing the sector.

This program is well-targeted and could represent the tipping point in moving from relatively few Australian students studying in Asia, to overseas study being a normal part of the Australian university student experience. "The ability of Australia to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the Asian Century and embedding Australia into Asia will require tomorrow's workforce to have a deep understanding of Asian culture, languages, markets and networks. It is a big win for students contemplating an Asian study experience particularly given the challenging fiscal environment," Ms Robinson concluded.

<http://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/page/media-centre/2012-media-releases/asiabound-program-puts-dollars-behind-students-in-the-asian-century/>

Human Rights

Olympian Ian Thorpe wins 2012 Human Right Medal

Fighting for better services for Indigenous children in remote communities across Australia has delivered the prestigious Human Rights Medal for 2012 to Ian Thorpe OAM. For over a decade, Ian has worked as a passionate advocate for Indigenous people with his Fountain for Youth charity, which works with twenty-one remote communities in the Northern Territory.

Ian Thorpe's Fountain for Youth began in 2000 and focuses on raising awareness and funds to bring positive change to the lives of Indigenous children and their communities by supporting education and cultural programs. "I believe that all children should be given the opportunity to live a healthy and fulfilling life. I want Indigenous children afforded the same opportunities as all children in Australia." If we want to become the great nation that we potentially can be, we have to look after the first Australians and we have to look after the neediest people in this country above all else."

Commission President Professor Gillian Triggs said, "Ian Thorpe is more than a great Olympian - he has demonstrated a strong and enduring commitment to ensuring that vulnerable children are given the opportunity to realise their full potential."

http://www.humanrights.gov.au/about/media/news/2012/131_12.html

National Human Rights Action Plan released

Australia's National Human Rights Action Plan was released – on International Human Rights Day - highlighting the steps our country is taking to protect and promote human rights.

Attorney-General Nicola Roxon said the Action Plan focuses on both the continuing and new priorities for Australia's human rights across the Commonwealth, States and Territories.

"The Government has a vision for Australia that is free, democratic, just and tolerant, where people have opportunities to make a decent life for themselves, and a community that supports those who are disadvantaged.

"While we can be proud of our human rights record, Australians should know that this Government will continue working to better secure their rights, and meet our international obligations.

"The Action Plan includes:

- a new National Disability Insurance Scheme
- an Act of Recognition acknowledging the unique and special place of Australia's First Peoples as an important step towards holding a successful referendum to change the constitution to recognise Indigenous people
- a new Federal Children's Commissioner
- ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture, and
- a review of federal legislation for barriers to older people participating in productive work.

More information is available at <http://www.ag.gov.au/nhrap>

<http://www.attorneygeneral.gov.au/Media-releases/Pages/2012/Fourth%20Quarter/10-December-2012-National-Human-Rights-Action-Plan-released.aspx>

Australia to join global human rights and mining initiative

Foreign Minister Bob Carr announced on Human Rights Day that Australia will join a global initiative to promote human rights while ensuring the security of mining projects. This will provide practical guidance to mining, oil and gas companies on managing security while respecting human rights and preventing conflict.

"Australian mining companies are expanding overseas, often into unstable environments. This can help these companies lower risks and manage mine security in a way that respects the human rights and freedoms of local communities. As a country with renowned expertise in responsible mining, Australia has a lot to offer. Many Australian companies, such as BHP Billiton and Rio Tinto, already use the Voluntary Principles and the number is expected to grow as more companies realise the benefits," Senator Carr said.

The Voluntary Principles provide guidance to companies on:

- Conducting assessments of human rights risks associated with security
- Screening and training public and private security forces in human rights issues
- Ensuring that the use of force is proportional and lawful

- Developing systems for reporting and investigating allegations of human rights abuses.

[Voluntary Principles \(www.voluntaryprinciples.org/\)](http://www.voluntaryprinciples.org/)

http://foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2012/bc_mr_121211.html

Government to act on Female Genital Mutilation in Australia

The Government will boost community awareness and education campaigns and review Australia's legal framework in an effort to stop the barbaric practice of female genital mutilation in this country.

Following recent reports, the Prime Minister and the Minister for Health have been investigating additional measures that can be undertaken to address this horrific practice.

The stories told were truly tragic. These are stories all Australians should heed – governments, police, the medical profession, communities, families and individuals. It is a violation of the human rights of women and girls and there is no place for it here in Australia. Its occurrence in this country cannot be excused by culture.

The Government today announced it would immediately implement the following measures:

- Provide \$500,000 in grants to fund organisations to run education and awareness activities and support change within communities, as we know public education and awareness is key to change.
- New research and data collection on female genital mutilation will be undertaken as a priority. This will help us build the evidence needed to support women and girls affected by female genital mutilation.
- Minister Plibersek will hold a national summit on this subject early next year, bringing together community, health, legal and policing experts to discuss how we can increase awareness and support and reduce incidence in Australia.
- The Attorney-General will review the current legal framework in Australia, and provide advice on whether any changes are required to ensure full protection against female genital mutilation, at home or abroad.

These measures will be led by the Minister for Health, who will coordinate efforts across the Government at the request of the Prime Minister. The Minister has been meeting with experts and key stakeholders over the last few weeks.

All Australian states and territories have already enacted legislation making female genital mutilation a criminal offence, with penalties in some states of up to 20 years imprisonment. Australia will stand firm with the International community and support all necessary measures to eliminate the practice of female genital mutilation.

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/ministers/publishing.nsf/Content/mr-yr12-tp-tp111.htm>

National Disability Insurance Scheme in New South Wales

The Australian and NSW governments have reached an historic agreement that will allow for the full roll out of a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) in New South Wales by July 2018. The agreement will provide care and support to around 140,000 NSW residents with significant disability, and provide coverage in the event of disability to around one third of the Australian population.

Under the agreement:

- The Commonwealth will provide funding of \$3.32 billion in 2018 – 51.4 per cent of the funding needed. This will cover the administration of the scheme and contribute to the cost of

individual care and support packages and other supports for people with disability, their carers and their families.

- New South Wales will provide more than \$3.13 billion in 2018 – 48.6 per cent of the funding needed. This will contribute to the cost of individual packages and other supports for people with disability, their carers and their families.
- The full scheme costs will be reviewed by the Productivity Commission in 2018-19 to inform COAG agreement on final scheme funding arrangements.

<http://jennymacklin.fahcsia.gov.au/node/2183>

Helping those who help others in the Chinese community

Nineteen Chinese community organisations will benefit from the Australian Government's \$16 million Volunteer Grants 2012 initiative. The Minister for Community Services, Julie Collins, said the Government's investment was delivering much-needed support to local volunteers.

"We know that volunteers give their time, energy and expertise to support our community and these grants are in recognition of their valuable contribution. Organisations will receive a grant of between \$1,000 and \$5,000 to contribute to their volunteers' fuel costs and purchase much-needed equipment. These include \$2,000 for Chinese Welfare Services of South Australia for training courses for their volunteers and \$5,000 for Chinese Christian Community Services for air conditioning and computer hardware and software. The Government is committed to supporting our army of volunteers and this year's volunteer grants will help them undertake their selfless work in supporting local communities," Ms Collins said.

To find out more about Volunteer Grants 2012 visit www.fahcsia.gov.au or call 1800 183 374.

<http://juliecollins.fahcsia.gov.au/node/271>

New Workplace Gender Equality Act lays a strong foundation

The Australian Human Rights Commission and the Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Elizabeth Broderick, have welcomed the passing of the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Amendment Bill in Parliament, saying it is a strong step toward both improving women's workforce participation and closing the gender gap in Australia's workforce.

"This is an important piece of legislation that will provide a solid foundation for improving gender equality in employment and in the workplace," Commissioner Broderick said. "It applies to both men and women in the workplace."

To reflect its expanded scope, the *Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act 1999* has been renamed the *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012*. The principal objects of the Act have been amended to promote and improve workplace gender equality, with specific recognition that equal remuneration and family and caring responsibilities are central to improving the workforce participation of women.

"Recognition in the Act of equal remuneration strengthens capacity for closing the gender pay gap," said Commissioner Broderick. "Enabling greater participation of women in the workforce will also make a significant contribution to strengthening Australia's productivity."

http://www.humanrights.gov.au/about/media/media_releases/2012/101_12.html

Foreign Affairs and Trade

Prime Minister Gillard talks trade in Cambodia at East Asian Summit

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement – which would bring down trade barriers and cut customs duties across the region – is set to involve the 10 countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as well as China, Japan, South Korea, India, Australia and New Zealand.

“Australia will be supporting a regional comprehensive economic partnership that is comprehensive, covering trade in goods and services as well as investment, which is ambitious and which has a door open to new entrants to join should they choose to do so,” Ms Gillard told reporters in Phnom Penh.

Officials say it is possible the agreement, covering around \$17 trillion in gross domestic product and three billion people, could be in place as early as 2015, with talks on protocols to start early next year. The existing Australia-New Zealand-ASEAN free trade agreement is being used as a model for the new deal. ASEAN nations are expected to average an annual rate of 5.5 per cent growth over the 2013/17 period, the OECD said. The ASEAN countries are Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, Burma, Cambodia, Brunei and Laos.

<http://www.australiantimes.co.uk/news/australia-world-news/gillard-talks-trade-in-cambodia.htm>

Australia-Sri Lanka Talks

Foreign Minister Bob Carr has announced a four-point plan to fight people-smuggling – to be discussed with Sri Lankan government and naval authorities and including increased on-water co-operation, intelligence sharing and reducing incentives for smuggling ventures.

He was in Colombo for the inaugural Joint Working Group on People Smuggling and Transnational Crime, chaired by Sri Lanka's Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa. "We're setting a clear agenda for intelligence sharing, naval co-operation and helping rebuild Sri Lanka," Senator Carr said.

The talks focused on:

- Information and intelligence sharing
- On-water disruption
- Sending the message
- Reducing demand

http://foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2012/bc_mr_121217.html

Australia's Aid Budget

Minister for Foreign Affairs, Bob Carr, has announced that Australia's aid expenditure for the financial year 2012/13 will be a record \$5.2 billion - \$300 million more than the previous year. He said that even for a big aid budget like Australia's there are always competing priorities that must be considered. Supporting refugees and potential refugees around the world is a regular part of Australia's aid effort.

It is what we do when we provide assistance for refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Sudan when people flee from violence or natural disasters. And it is what we do when refugees are in our region or in our

country. This year we will report up to \$375 million for basic subsistence for refugees waiting to have their claims heard in Australia. This will cover food, shelter and other essential items.

http://foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2012/bc_mr_121217a.html

China's rise dominates yearly trade round-up

China's growing importance as an export destination is the leading feature piece in this year's *Composition of Trade*, released recently. New research by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade shows that while minerals and fuels top the list of Australian exports to China, the agriculture, manufacturing and services industries have also expanded. Major exports in these sectors include education, wool, cotton and pharmaceutical products. China remained Australia's top trading partner in the 2011-12 financial year, Japan and the United States followed. China was also Australia's largest merchandise trading partner while the United States was the largest services trading partner in 2011-12. The report also shows:

- Australia's trade volumes grew by nearly 8 per cent over the previous year
- Australia's terms of trade increased slightly, up 0.4 per cent.
- Exports of insurance and pension services, as well as financial services grew strongly. They were both up around 30 per cent.

http://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/stats-pubs/composition_trade.html

<http://www.dfat.gov.au/media/releases/department/2012/dfat-release-20121221a.html>

Australia to raise Syria medical plan at UN Security Council

Australia will present its plan to protect medical workers and maintain access to hospitals for families caught in Syria's civil war, at a meeting of the United Nations Security Council in New York.

Senator Carr said this would be the first formal opportunity to raise the plan at the UN peak body, and fulfilled a commitment made to UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon at the time of Australia's election to the UNSC. "In October last year I advised UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon that helping medical workers in Syria was Australia's first priority following our election to the UNSC. Australia is not naive enough to think that we alone can achieve UNSC action to deliver a ceasefire in Syria. But we believe we can at least persuade others with influence in that country to press for measures allowing doctors and other medical workers to do their job," Senator Carr said.

http://foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2013/bc_mr_130117.html

Resources

Australia In The Asian Century White Paper: Australia's Roadmap For Navigating The Asian Century.

Inquiries regarding the documents are welcome at:

Australia in the Asian Century Task Force
Email: asian century@pmc.gov.au

<http://www.pm.gov.au/press-office/australia-asian-century-white-paper-australias-roadmap-navigating-asian-century>

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