



Refugee Council of Australia

BULLETIN FOR MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS

18 May 2009

Welcome to the latest bulletin from the Refugee Council of Australia. We welcome feedback, ideas or information worth sharing. Please contact us at info@refugeecouncil.org.au.

Paul Power, CEO, Refugee Council of Australia

If you no longer wish to receive this bulletin, please email unsubscribe@refugeecouncil.org.au

NEWS FROM THE REFUGEE COUNCIL

Federal Budget brings further improvements to Australian refugee policy

The 2009-10 Federal Budget includes a series of positive changes for refugee policy in Australia. These include:

- expanding the Community Care Pilot (introduced in 2006) and Community Status Resolution Pilot (introduced in 2007) into a national Community Status Resolution Service and Assisted Voluntary Return Service, funded by savings in immigration detention arrangements;
- introducing a planned system of Complementary Protection, to enable Australia's non-refoulement obligations under treaties other than the Refugee Convention to be considered when reviewing Protection Visa applications;
- reforming the rules on access to employment and health care for asylum seekers, replacing the arbitrary "45-day rule" with a system which links employment and health care access to applicants' compliance with the Migration Act;
- introducing a four-year planning framework for the offshore refugee resettlement program;
- increasing the Refugee and Humanitarian Program by 250 places, to 13,750 – 6000 places for the Refugee program and 7750 for the Special Humanitarian Program and onshore protection;
- expanding opportunities for the resettlement of refugee women at risk and their children by increasing the Woman at Risk quota from 10.5% to 12% of the Refugee program.

The Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) welcomed these changes in a media release on May 13. RCOA has also released a more detailed summary of Budget measures relevant to refugee policy. Both of these can be found at www.refugeecouncil.org.au/current/index.html#2009-10_budget

RCOA calls for rational debate about asylum seekers arriving by boat

A number of recent boat arrivals, and the tragic loss of five lives following an explosion aboard one of the vessels (termed SIEV 36), have prompted renewed, intensive media and political controversy regarding Australia's reception and processing of asylum seekers. While the number of asylum seekers to have approached or entered Australian waters in recent months has increased on levels of recent years, the number remains very low by international standards and is much lower than the numbers of asylum seeker arrivals in the years immediately following introduction of the now abandoned Temporary Protection Visas. Statistics recently released by UNHCR indicate that, as in previous years, the fluctuation in numbers of asylum seekers arriving to Australia (a 19% increase in 2008) is consistent with global trends (a 12% increase in 2008) and reflects an escalation in crises within our region. RCOA's was one of many voices calling for a rational public debate and urging politicians and commentators to engage maturely with the complex global and regional issues surrounding the arrival of boats in Australia, including tackling the need for significantly improved conditions in countries of first asylum and in assisting UNHCR with support and processing of asylum seekers in countries like Indonesia. RCOA's public statements and links to other commentaries are available at

www.refugeecouncil.org.au/newsevents/media.html.

Investigation into child's removal ordered following Ombudsman's report

The Commonwealth Ombudsman has released a report into the circumstances of the 2003 removal from Australia of the seven-year-old daughter of an Iranian asylum seeker who was being held at Baxter Immigration Detention Centre (IDC). The child was return to Iran without permission of her father, who was her legal guardian and was being held in solitary confinement at Baxter IDC. In July 2005, the Immigration Department released the father from immigration detention on a Temporary Protection Visa and billed him \$288,608 for his four years in detention and for his daughter's detention and removal. The Ombudsman found that the Department deceived the child's father, acted against its own legal advice, failed to find out the child's wishes (possibly breaching its obligations under the Convention of the Rights of the Child), ignored advice from the then SA Department of Family and Youth Services, possibly breached the Australian Public Service Code of Conduct and acted at odds with the Migration Act by recording the removal as voluntary. In response, Immigration Minister Chris Evans has ordered an internal DIAC investigation of the case and of policies relating to the management of children of immigration detainees, apologise to both the father and the daughter, investigate compensation options and assist the daughter and her mother in any efforts to migrate from Iran to Australia. The Minister said that the father's \$288,608 detention debt (since written off) would be formally extinguished if his current legislation on detention debts was passed by the Parliament. For more details on this case, see our links at www.refugeecouncil.org.au/current/index.html#child_removal

Opposition to oppose scrapping of immigration detention debts

The Federal Liberal-National Coalition has decided to oppose the Federal Government's legislation to abolish the practice of charging immigration detainees for their time in detention. The abolition of immigration detention debts was recommended unanimously in a December report of the Joint Standing Committee on Migration (JSCM). The committee included four Liberal Parliamentarians, with immigration spokesperson Dr Sharman Stone MP joining the committee in November, replacing Don Randall MP. Dr Stone has told RCOA that she was not involved in the development of the report and there was no official "signing-off" process. Her opposition to the legislation is based on her concern about "positive marketing messages" to people smugglers. Committee deputy chair Danna Vale MP spoke in favour of the legislation in the Liberal-National joint party room and will consider supporting it when it comes before Parliament (now expected to be in June). Without Opposition support, the legislation will need the support of all crossbench Senators if it is to be passed by the Parliament.

RCOA and A Just Australia have recently responded to the JSCM's December report (*'Report #1 Immigration detention in Australia: A new beginning'*). Our joint response can be viewed at www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/releases/2009/090512_AJA_RCOA_response_JSCIIDReport1.pdf

G4S retains Immigration Residential Housing and Transit Accommodation contracts

DIAC has announced that G4S Australia has won a five-year contract to run the Australian Government's Immigration Residential Housing (IRH) and Immigration Transit Accommodation (ITA) services. G4S, formerly known as GSL, is the current contractor for these services, as well as for Immigration Detention Centres. However, the five-year contract for Immigration Detention Centres was awarded in March to Serco Australia. For the announcement of the IRH and ITA contracts, see

www.newsroom.immi.gov.au/media_releases/702

New government inquiry to examine visa processing of people with disabilities

Immigration Minister Chris Evans and Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services, Bill Shorten, have announced the terms of reference for an inquiry relating to the health requirement in the *Migration Act*. The inquiry, to be conducted by the Joint Parliamentary Standing Committee on Migration, will examine the assessment of the health and community costs associated with a disability as part of the health test undertaken for visa processing. The announcement of the new inquiry can be found at www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/media-releases/2009/ce09039.htm

It's time to tell us about your Refugee Week events

With Refugee Week 2009 just four weeks away (June 14-20), we are expanding the information on our website about the week's planning, its theme ("Freedom from Fear") and events to be held. The Refugee Week section of our website includes:

- information on how to organise an event;
- details on where to pick up Refugee Week posters;

- a Refugee Week Resource Kit; and
- contacts for Refugee Week in each state and territory.

For organisations planning Refugee Week events, we need full details of your event by Friday, May 22, so that we can load details of events on our website and distribute details nationally to the media. Event details should be forwarded to info@refugeecouncil.org.au The Refugee Week section of our website is now at www.refugeecouncil.org.au/newsevents/rw_index.html

Thank you to our extraordinary volunteers

RCOA took the opportunity during National Volunteer Week 2009 (11-17 May) to thank our wonderful volunteers for their dedication and invaluable contribution. RCOA operates with only a small team of salaried staff, and the amount of work we are able to do is greatly attributable to the commitment and support of our volunteers. Often when people visit our office they are surprised at how small we actually are! Over the last year, volunteers have made contributions to research and policy, coordination of resources into a library, building membership and fundraising, assisting on coordination of Refugee Week and general administration. A special thank goes to our long-term volunteers Lucy Morgan, Jan Ho and Eileen Wahab.

COMING EVENTS

18 - 30 May 2009 - Adelaide

Launch of the UnderXposed Photographic Exhibition, MRC Arts

This exhibition will feature the works of young artists from new and emerging communities who live in South Australia. Poetic and thought provoking, from both a personal and global perspective, UnderXposed is a testament to strength, patience, endurance and the human desire to survive and re-imagine the future. Working with professional artists, young people from predominantly African and Middle Eastern backgrounds, share stories, experiences, thoughts, ideas and cultures through photography and video.

Details: Adelaide Town Hall Foyer Gallery, King William St, Adelaide. 9am-5pm.

Information: Keith Preston (08) 8217 9522 or keith@mrcsa.com.au

Wednesday 20 May 2009 - Sydney (St George and Sutherland)

Employment and Training Week 2009

This event aims to promote various local employment and training services to job seekers and provides an opportunity to learn about courses, support services, Job network and recruitment agencies and meet some employers. Open to all job seekers. There will be additional support for people of migrant and refugee backgrounds. The event will be followed by a number of workshops held on weekdays from 21 - 25 May at various locations.

Details: 10am -1pm, Hurstville Entertainment Centre, MacMahon St, Hurstville

Contact: Svetlana, St. George Migrant Resource Centre on (02) 9597 5455.

Saturday 23 May 2009 - Melbourne

Workshop Series on skills for advocacy on war and conflict

Humanitarian Crisis Hub invites community groups advocating on war and conflict to a free workshop series designed to improve their practical activism skills and outcomes. Strong emphasis will be placed on the sharing of information, skills and experiences among workshop participants in recognition of the expertise within community groups, and also of their expressed desire to make links with other groups. Each workshop will be open to 20-25 participants.

Details: 673 Bourke St, Melbourne. Lunch provided. Workshops free but bookings are essential.

Workshop 1: Saturday 23 May, 11am – 4pm, Introduction to Human Rights Advocacy

Workshop 2: Saturday 30 May, 11am – 4pm, Becoming an Effective Media Spokesperson

Workshop 3: Saturday 20 June, 11am – 4pm Introduction to International Humanitarian Law.

Contact: (03) 9289 9226 or info@crisishub.org.au to register or for more information, or see www.crisishub.org.au

Tuesday 26 May 2009 - Sydney

Australian Premier Screening of 'Ghosts'

On 5 February 2004, 23 Chinese drowned in Morecambe Bay (UK). Their families in China are still paying off their debts. *Ghosts* offers a unique insight into the lives of people who risk their lives for a better life for their families. With an extraordinary debut performance from Ai Qin Lin, the cast of *Ghosts* is comprised primarily of former undocumented immigrants from China. View the trailer and film info at http://nickbroomfield.com/Ghosts_trailer.html. The Salvation Army Sydney East and Illawarra Division is pleased to sponsor the first public screening of *Ghosts* in Australia.

Details: 7 pm, Dendy Opera Quays. Tickets \$12 at the door. All profits from ticket sales will be contributed to the Morecambe Victim Fund. Please RSVP to trafficking@aue.salvationarmy.org

Thursday 28 May 2009 - Melbourne

Seminar: To Every Woman: Money, Power and Freedom

For health and allied professionals, welfare and community development workers, social workers, teachers, students and those with an interest in the health and wellbeing of immigrant and refugee women. The second seminar of 2009 will focus on healthy credit and financial wellbeing for immigrant and refugee women. It will look to answer a broad range of related questions including: What is healthy credit? How do immigrant and refugee women empower themselves to make wise credit choices? What information and services are available to immigrant and refugee women to support this process?

Details: Multicultural Centre for Women's Health, Suite 207, Lvl 2, Carringbush Building, 134 Cambridge St, Collingwood.. Time: 9am - 2pm. Price: \$65 per person (includes lunch)

Information: Dr Salma Al-Khudairi, (03) 9418 0999, Salma@mcwh.com.au

Thursday 28 - Friday 29 May 2009 - Canberra

National Conference on Settlement Services - Building a Future for Social Inclusion

The conference aims to promote the work of the Settlement Council of Australia (SCoA) and influence its strategic directions; progress the empowerment of new and emerging communities and agencies through community development approaches; showcase examples of good practice in settlement service delivery; and increase awareness of and contribute to the government's settlement and multicultural agenda. Details of the conference are on the News and Events page of the RCOA website or at www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/news&events/SCoA_Conference_May09.pdf

Details: Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre, 180 London Circuit, Canberra

Friday 29 May 2009 - Sydney

Asylum Seekers Centre of NSW Quiz Night

This is the Centre's annual fundraiser to raise much-needed capital to assist in its work with asylum seekers. HG Nelson and Tony Squires are back as the outrageous Quiz Masters. See the flyer and registration form on www.asylumseekerscentre.org.au.

Details: 7:30pm, North Sydney Leagues Club, Cammeray.

Saturday 30 May 2009 - Sydney

African Women's Dinner Dance

Invitation to all African Women to join the African Women's Group of NSW for a fun-filled evening with great food and entertainment by DJ Prince2000. Dress code: African Traditional /Formal. Cost: \$30 per head. RSVP and payment by 20 May to Rosemary on 0421 059 166 or kari1ros@police.nsw.gov.au or Fatma on 0407 904 526 or somaliwelfare@hotmail.com.

Details: Cabra Vale Diggers Club, 1 Bartley St, Canley Vale, NSW 2166

Monday 1 June 2009 - Sydney

Forum: Does Australia Need a Human Rights Act?

Amnesty International Australia and UNSW Law Society Speakers' Forum present an open community forum that will feature a moderated panel of highly distinguished speakers, who will discuss the state of human rights in Australia - from the experience of refugees and asylum seekers, to the effects of the anti-terrorism laws. Is it the case that if human rights aren't formally protected, they are at risk of being eroded? Australia is the only liberal democracy without a Human Rights Act or similar human rights protection. Submissions to a nationwide consultation on human rights in Australia close on 15 June.

Moderator: Dr Andrew Lynch (Director of the Centre of Public Law, UNSW). Speakers are Malcolm Fraser (former PM of Australia), Keith Mason QC (Former President of the NSW Court of Appeal),

Stephen Keim SC (Barrister for Dr Mohamed Haneef) and Edward Santow (Director of the Charter of Human Rights Project, Centre of Public Law, UNSW).

Details: 6 - 8 pm, Law Theatre G04, Law Building, UNSW. Free. RSVP: nswaia@amnesty.org.au (places are limited)

Monday 1 June 2009 - Adelaide

Free Forum: What matters in Australia today: Four perspectives

Experience four contemporary perspectives from four notable Australians, representing the rich diversity of our unique continent and its people. This is your chance to hear their views about our country and to consider your own. Speakers include Hieu Van Le (Lieutenant Governor of SA and Chairman of SA Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Commission), Lillian Holt (Aboriginal educator and public speaker on Reconciliation), Katrina Sedgwick (Festival Director, 2009 Adelaide Film Festival) and Matthew Cowdrey OAM (SA Young Australian of the Year 2009 and distinguished Paralympian).

Details: 5.45pm for 6pm start, Adelaide Town Hall, 128 King William St, Adelaide

Contact: Register online at: www.hawkecentre.unisa.edu.au or RSVP on (08) 8302 0215.

Monday 1 June 2009 - Sydney

Registrations close for Run for Darfur fundraiser

Raise much-needed funds for the ongoing projects and advocacy work of the not-for-profit Darfur Australia Network. DAN aims to raise awareness about the continuing tragedy in Darfur, assist in the resettlement of Darfuri refugees and build solidarity between the Australian people and the people of Darfur. Participants in the Run For Darfur will seek sponsorship for either a 5km or 10km run or walk.

Details: Run is on Saturday June 13, 10am, Sydney International Regatta Centre. Registration: By June 1, contact Gemma on gem_seymour@yahoo.com.au.

Wednesday 3 June 2009 - Sydney

Don't be Fooled by Painful Memories; It's the Traumatic Memories that Count

Free Clinical Master Class Evening at STARTTS. Presented by Dr Kamal Touma, Medical Psychotherapist and Chief Editor of Psychevisual.com.

Details: 6-8pm, STARTTS, 152-168 The Horsley Drive, Carramar NSW. Please register for this event on (02) 9794 1900 or by email: jacqueline.donosso@sswhs.nsw.gov.au

Until Sunday 7 June 2009 - Melbourne

Centre for Multicultural Youth 20th Anniversary Exhibition

Celebrate the work of the Centre for Multicultural Youth as it supports the needs of migrant and refugee young people. The exhibition will include: *Voices of Young Australia* (stories of strong, inspiring young people) and *Multicultural Youth-Led Futures* (a poster series of leadership initiatives by migrant and refugee young people).

Details: Melbourne Immigration Museum, www.museumvictoria.com.au/immigration_museum

Friday 15 June 2009

Deadline for submissions to the National Human Rights Consultation

This is an important opportunity to share your views on the safeguarding of human rights in Australia, including those of refugees and asylum seekers.

Information: www.humanrights.gov.au/human_rights/charter_of_rights/index.html

Sunday June 21 2009 - Melbourne

Multicultural Arts Victoria's Emerge Festival

An afternoon of music, dance, drumming, art and craft from Victoria's most recently arrived communities. Concerts and workshops free. Food and drink from around the world on sale.

Details: 12 - 5.30pm Fitzroy Town Hall. See www.multiculturalarts.com.au/events2009/emerge.shtml

Saturday 4 - Sunday 5 July 2009 - Adelaide

Human Development in the Context of Movement Within and Across National Boundaries

This workshop will examine the developmental implications and broad consequences of migration within the Asia-Pacific region, including forced migration, voluntary migration, temporary migration and within-border migration.

<http://guest.cvent.com/EVENTS/Info/Custom.aspx?cid=17&i=76820f08-2fc0-4c7a-8204-22ea702e90e2>

Friday 10 July 2009 - Sydney

Talk: Refugee Crisis - Promoting Humanity or Re-igniting Fear?

Professor Mary Crock and Mr David Bitel will be the speakers at this Politics in the Pub discussion. See www.politicsinthepub.org.au for more information.

Details: 6 pm, Gaelic Club, Lvl 1, 64 Devonshire St, Surry Hills 2010.

Friday 17 July 2009 – Melbourne

2009 Human Rights Conference

Venue: State Library of Victoria. Keynote speaker: Federal Attorney-General Robert McClelland.

Information: www.law.monash.edu.au/castancentre

Tuesday 21 – Thursday 23 July 2009 – Melbourne

Beyond the Refugee Journey: A Humanitarian Settlement Conference

The conference will focus on settlement models and refugee achievements and will present an opportunity to: explore innovative and effective models of settlement service provision; assess the impact of pre-arrival experience on settlement; and celebrate the lives of refugees who have made Australia their home.

Details: BMW Edge, Federation Square (21 July) and Melbourne Cricket Ground (22–23 July).

Information: www.ames.net.au/settlementconference

Wednesday 12 – Friday 14 August 2009 - Townsville

International Unity in Diversity Conference

The Conference will explore the potential benefits of diversity that bring rich outcomes and possibilities; develop a unified cohesive approach to address the current and emerging global crisis; and consider how cultural diversity must be seen as a key platform of the government's social inclusion agenda. Expressions of interest forms are due on 15 April and abstracts for papers by 30 April.

Information: www.unityindiversityconference.com

OPPORTUNITIES

Sanctuary Refugee Foundation Appeal

Sanctuary Refugee Foundation is an Australian charity that sponsors refugees who are stuck in refugee camps and who don't have anyone to sponsor them, for Special Humanitarian 202 Visas. Sanctuary gives them the chance of a new life by providing an interest-free airfare loan and resettlement support. Once settled, the recipient gradually repays their airfare loan, and the money is then 'recycled' to assist other needy refugees. \$1500 can literally save a life. Sanctuary is now running its Appeal – for more details see www.sanctuaryrefugeefoundation.org.

Volunteer wanted by Australian Afghan Hassanali Youth Association

AAHYA provide a range of services for young refugees with Afghan/Hazara backgrounds including a Saturday school, group outings, information sessions (e.g. on health, driving in Australia, etc), advocacy and other services as needed by the community. They are looking for a volunteer to help with funding applications, letter writing and various other general administration tasks. Times are flexible but you would need to be able to give 2 - 3 hours per week, hopefully more. Much of the work could be completed from your home. For more information contact Karimi Gulbahar on 0421 567 397 or visit www.aahya.org.au.

Can you help create 'Tents of Hope'?

The Darfur Australia Network is creating an awareness campaign called 'Tents of Hope', to be erected on the lawn of Parliament House in Canberra during Refugee Week in June. It will involve the decorating of material with messages of hope, that we will then turn into tee-pee style tents. It will coincide with a photographic exhibition that the Darfur Australia Network is presenting. If you are able to help create 'Tents of Hope' please get further information at contact@darfuraustralia.org or Meagan on 0406 314 260.

REFUGEE ISSUES IN THE MEDIA

A busy person's digest of some recent media coverage of refugee issues:

(Inclusion in this summary does not imply that RCOA agrees with the article's content or vouches for its accuracy)

Immigration tricked detainee into giving up daughter

The Commonwealth Ombudsman has handed down shocking findings against the Immigration Department, after it tricked a detainee into handing over his daughter for deportation. The Iranian man was asked if his 7 year old daughter could be taken on a shopping trip, when she was really being put on a plane back to Iran. The man, who was granted a permanent protection visa last year and lives in Melbourne, arrived in Australia with his four-year-old daughter by boat in March 2001. The Ombudsman found the Department deceived the man, acted against its own legal advice, failing to consult the girl about her pending removal and ignoring the recommendations of child protection services that the pair be transferred to another facility. In a final insult, the man was billed \$288,608 for the cost of his detention, \$109,092 of which covered expenses incurred incarcerating his daughter. The debt has been written off and the Immigration Minister is considering compensation for the man. More importantly, DIAC is working to facilitate a reunion between father and daughter. (*ABC AM*, 15 May; *The Australian*, 15 May)

Turnbull may face revolt over detainee charges

Malcolm Turnbull may face a revolt from Liberal backbenchers in favour of a Rudd Government push to stop charging those immigration detainees who are ultimately found to be in Australia legally, for the cost of their detention. Australia is the only country in the world that charges for immigration detention. In March this year, the Government introduced legislation to overturn the 16-year-old policy. At a joint party room meeting yesterday, the Coalition decided to oppose the legislation. The decision is at odds with recommendations made last year by the Joint Standing Committee on Migration, including its Coalition members. In the party room meeting, about a dozen MPs are understood to have taken part in a lively debate in the party room about the decision to oppose the legislation, and at least one MP is understood to be planning to break from the party position. (*Launceston Examiner*, 13 May; *Warwick Daily News*, 13 May)

Reform of 45-day rule welcomed

One of the changes to asylum seeker policy announced in this year's Budget is the reform of the '45-day rule'. Under this rule, asylum seekers who applied for a protection visa after 45 days of arriving in Australia could not work or access Medicare while their application was being processed. People might not have applied within 45 days because they are on temporary visas, they cannot speak English or they are unaware of the process. Under the new system, asylum seekers will be able to work and will have access to Medicare, provided they can prove a legitimate reason for delaying an asylum application. DIAC numbers suggest the '45-day rule' affected 600 people a year, causing destitution and hardship for many. The cost of providing these services will be offset through cost cutting in the Immigration Department and spending on detention. (*The Age*, 14 May; *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 May)

New system of complementary protection

Tuesday's budget changes also stipulated that asylum seekers who are not officially classified as a 'refugee' but face danger at home, such as a woman who could face genital mutilation in her country of origin, will now be processed as a matter of course by the Department of Immigration under a new system of 'Complementary Protection', recognised worldwide as a necessary supplement to Refugee Convention provisions. Previously the Immigration Minister had to make a special intervention to grant a protection visa to such cases. (*The Age*, 14 May)

Budget to strengthen regional cooperation on irregular migration and people smuggling

The government has announced a range of new measures worth about \$1.3 billion in this year's budget to strengthen regional and national capacity to manage irregular migration flows, tackle people smuggling and tighten border security. The measures include the extension of people-smuggling intelligence operations and programs with Indonesian authorities and other international organisations, increasing surveillance of Australia's northern approaches and bolstering Australia's presence in source and transit countries (such as establishing customs and border protection posts in Sri Lanka and Malaysia). (*The Age*, 13 May; *The West Australian*, 13 May; *The Australian*, 13 May)

New Cabinet committee on border protection

In the aftermath of the explosion on the SIEV 36 on April 16, the government has established a cabinet committee to oversee a whole-of-government strategy to combat people smuggling. The committee, chaired by the Immigration Minister, Chris Evans, had its first meeting a week ago and is due to meet again next week. It includes the Foreign Affairs Minister, Stephen Smith, the Defence Minister, Joel Fitzgibbon, the Home Affairs Minister, Bob Debus, the Attorney-General, Robert McClelland, and the National Security Adviser, Duncan Lewis. (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 May)

Budget plans for continued redevelopment of Villawood IDC

Villawood, Australia's largest detention centre on the mainland, will be redeveloped for \$186.3 million using existing infrastructure in Sydney's west as a base. The dilapidated centre came under sharp attack for two years running by the Human Rights Commissioner, Graeme Innes, who said its maximum security zone was "shameful" and conditions were "utterly miserable". The project will be complete by 2014. \$6 million will be spent on the project this financial year, \$25 million next year and \$63.1 million the year after. (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 May; *The Daily Telegraph*, 13 May)

Indonesia detains 27 Afghans

Indonesian authorities yesterday detained 27 Afghan migrants near a Java port where they were trying to arrange passage to Australia. The all-male group had just arrived from Sumatra. (*The Australian*, 13 May)

Experts fear for health of pregnant woman detained on island

Medical professionals have warned of potential health repercussions for a pregnant woman in community detention on Christmas Island. Professor of Developmental Psychiatry at Monash University, Louise Newman, said "In no way should someone who is pregnant be in such a remote location." Christmas Island is now home to at least 45 children aged one to 17. (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 May)

'Esky men' granted visas to stay

Two Burmese men who were found after 25 days at sea in an industrial-sized Esky flew out of Christmas Island yesterday after being granted refugee status. The men, aged 23 and 24, had been forced to work on a 10m wooden Thai fishing boat that sank on December 23 in a squall southeast of Indonesia. No one had life jackets and their 18 fellow crew members were lost at sea. The pair survived on rainwater collected from the bottom of their Esky and six or seven small fish regurgitated by seabirds. They feared they would be killed if they were returned to Burma under the military dictatorship. (*The Australian*, 9 May)

Boat intercepted north of Tiwi Islands

A boat carrying 31 passengers and 3 crew members was intercepted on 11 May approximately 23 nautical miles north of the Tiwi Islands. (*Minister for Home Affairs Media Release*, 11 May)

Humanitarian groups fearing Pakistan refugee crisis

The prospect of half a million more refugees fleeing the Swat Valley in the north-west of Pakistan is alarming humanitarian agencies. They say the situation is very quickly becoming critical. Pakistan is sending in more troops and threatening a major military offensive but the International Crisis Group has warned that force alone won't stop the Taliban's expansion, nor the flood of refugees who'll be forced out of the region. (*ABC Radio AM*, 7 May)

People smuggler arrested in Indonesia

A key people smuggler Ali Basa was arrested on Monday night in a raid in the eastern port city of Makassar. Indonesian authorities allege that Ali Basa, 30, organized the breakout of 18 Afghani, Pakistani and Burmese refugees from an immigration detention centre in Kupang, West Timor, on January 14. The group, which included children as young as nine, was then put aboard a fishing boat which then sank off Rote island, southwest of Timor. 14 of the asylum seekers on board are thought to have died. Another suspected people smuggler, Sajjad Hussein, was also arrested this week. (*ABC Radio Australia*, 7 May; *The Australian*, 8 May)

Skipper's plea to open eyes, hearts to refugees

A Cairns skipper is urging people to think twice before condemning asylum seekers, after a first-hand encounter with an unseaworthy vessel carrying nearly 60 Afghans. Paul Smith, the skipper of The Lady Sandra, an offshore oil rig support ship, came to the rescue of an overloaded boat on April 25. He said the encounter had changed his view about asylum seekers after seeing the "sheer desperation" and "personal risks taken" by those on board. "All crew onboard were touched by this experience and were moved by the plight of these people who could be so desperate to set sail with so very little..... These people did not have suitcases or bags and their worldly possessions were what they were wearing." Mr Smith said the cramped boat had no toilets or safety equipment, little food and water, inadequate navigation equipment and was 120 miles off course but had no communication facilities. It had nearly run out of fuel and it was leaking badly. "Their desperate situation is a tragedy and before we condemn the refugee problem on our northern shores, we need to fully understand the plight of these people," he said. (*Cairns Post*, 7 May)

Budget predictions include cuts to DIAC staff and boost to border control

The government is expected to announce a \$400 million package to combat people smuggling in next week's budget. Spread over four years, the extra money will assist various government departments and agencies, including Customs and Defence, Immigration, Foreign Affairs, Attorney-General's, the Australian Federal Police and the Director of Public Prosecutions. However, DIAC may be forced to cut 700 jobs, or 10% of their staff. It is also expected that DIAC will be forced to shave more than \$50 million from its \$1.1 billion annual budget (*The Age*, 7 May; *The Australian*, 7 May; *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 May)

Bishop weighs in on asylum seeker debate

A 'brawl' broke out within coalition ranks yesterday as to how it should approach the boat people problem, with Liberal backbencher Bronwyn Bishop complaining that Opposition Leader Malcolm Turnbull had gone soft on the issue. Ms Bishop told her local newspaper, Sydney's Manly Daily, that her party leader needed to toughen his stance. "Malcolm seems to have been strong at the beginning but now he has gone soft," she said. Turnbull has rejected her criticism. (*West Australian*, 6 April; *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 May; *The Canberra Times*, 6 May)

Asylum boat of 50 intercepted off WA

The Navy has intercepted a boat carrying around 50 people, 370 nautical miles north-west of Broome. The boat was taking on water when stopped and was low on food and fuel. The passengers are believed to be from Iraq and Afghanistan. (*ABC News*, 5 April; *The Age*, 6 April)

More accommodation needed on Christmas Island

The recent increase in asylum seekers on Christmas Island has forced DIAC to operate in 'surge capacity' mode and to negotiate for extra housing in the community for staff and asylum seekers. When this article went to print, there were 262 asylum seekers in various forms of detention on the remote island - the highest number since the mass arrivals that preceded the Tampa stand-off in 2001 - with 193 single men held in the main detention centre. Another 136 people were expected to arrive on the weekend on HMAS Tobruk. To prepare for the new arrivals, rows of bunk beds have been set up inside dual-use rooms that can be opened up for recreation space or closed off as dormitories. The old detention centre is also being used to accommodate DIAC staff. Just across the road, the 'family compound' (the 'old worker's camp') houses 41 adults and children. Some families and minors have been granted 'community detention' and are living in the community. Home Affairs Minister Bob Debus has denied that there is a shortage of accommodation. (*The Australian*, 4 May; *Australian Network News*, 6 May)

Families described as the world's first climate change refugees relocated in PNG

Members of five families being described as the world's first climate change refugees have moved from the Carteret Islands in Papua New Guinea to the site of their new homes in Tinputz on the island of Bougainville. Fathers and sons of the families have gone ahead to prepare the housing sites for their families to move to permanently. The land was donated by the Catholic Church of Bougainville. (*ABC Radio Australia News*, 1 May)

Asylum seekers say explosion occurred during refueling

An Afghan community group is questioning speculation that asylum seekers on a boat which exploded on April 16 near Ashmore Reef poured fuel on the deck deliberately. The head of the Afghan community in Western Australia, Farad Popal, says some of the survivors now in immigration detention say it was an accident. "Their understanding is that it was during the time of the refueling, when they were refueling, putting the fuel to the engine," he said. (ABC News, 1 May)

Refugee numbers 'triple' in Sri Lanka

Government refugee camps in and around the Sri Lanka battle zone now hold about 200,000 civilians, three times the number of only seven to 10 days ago, according to the UN Children's Fund. (ABC News, 29 April)

Two boats intercepted

A boat with seven people on board was intercepted one nautical mile north of Ashmore Island, and a second boat with 72 people on board, including men, women and possibly children, was intercepted roughly 27 nautical miles west of Bathurst Island. Passengers from both vessels were transferred to Christmas Island. (ABC News, 29 April, *Minister for Homeland Affairs Media Release*, 29 April; *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 April)

Survey backs Rudd's asylum seeker stance

Some 46% of Australians say they trust Mr Rudd and Labor to handle border protection. Only 34% said they'd be more comfortable with Malcolm Turnbull and the coalition in charge of immigration policy, giving the government a 12 point lead on the issue. The Essential Research poll also found 45% of voters agree with Mr Rudd's argument that the influx is due to global security and economic "push factors" rather than more relaxed border protection. By contrast, a third say Mr Turnbull is right to say Labor has gone "soft" on asylum seekers and that is the reason for the spike in arrivals. (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 April)

Asylum seekers found stranded on remote island

Four asylum seekers were found on Deliverance Island in the Torres Strait, about 30 nautical miles off the coast of Papua New Guinea. They were spotted by a surveillance flight and were picked up by customs officials. The four adult men have been transferred to a detention centre on Horn Island, where they will undergo health and security checks. There was no indication of a boat on the island and authorities are investigating how the men ended up there. Deliverance Island is located within the geographical area excised from Australia's migration zone. (*Cairns Post*, 29 April; *Minister for Homeland Affairs Media Release*, 28 April)

Tensions force Christmas Island school to segregate teen arrivals

The recent increase in the number of asylum-seeker students enrolling at Christmas Island's only school has concerned the parents of local children and led the principal to establish an offsite classroom to teach mostly male Afghan teenagers. Older asylum-seeker students will now undertake lessons on the site of the island's old detention centre at Phosphate Hill, while younger asylum seekers, including a six-year-old boy, will remain at the school with almost 300 other children of residents. Principal Ian Francis said the behaviour of the asylum-seeker youths already at the school had been exemplary and they were well-liked. (*The Australian*, 27 April)

Intelligence officers may have been pressured to take harsher line on asylum seekers

Intelligence officers from the Office of National Assessments complained to the nation's intelligence watchdog in 2007 that senior Immigration Department officials were "bullying" them into taking a harsher position on the asylum-seeker issue. ONA staff complained to the Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security, Ian Carnell, that they were being improperly pressured to modify their assessments on asylum seekers. The ONA is an independent intelligence agency directly accountable to the prime minister that provides classified assessments on international political, strategic and economic developments. (*The Australian*, 24 April)

32 Sri Lankans intercepted off WA coast

A boat carrying 32 Sri Lankans was intercepted 47 nautical miles southwest of Barrow Island (near Exmouth) on 22 April by the patrol boat HMAS Wollongong. The passengers were taken to Christmas Island for processing. (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 April)

Legal limbo for asylum seekers

29 asylum seekers who were taken to an oil rig in the Indian Ocean after last week's boat explosion will not get the same access to a range of legal safeguards as those who were brought to the Australian mainland for medical help. The *Front Puffin*, an offshore oil facility, was excised along with thousands of islands from Australia's migration zone. Because of Australia's controversial excision laws, the group of 29 "are essentially going to be precluded from accessing Australian law when they make their claim for refugee status" and will not have access to Australian appeals processes. (*ABC Radio*, 22 April)

Australia 'barely rates' for refugees

Pakistan's top immigration official has dismissed suggestions that more South Asian asylum seekers are heading to Australia. The Director of Pakistan's Federal Investigation Agency, Captain Zafar Iqbal, said "Australia doesn't really figure" as a destination compared with Europe. "The networks are not strong enough to make people reach Australia. It's not very easy." His comments contradicted recent statements by politicians and the media in Australian and Indonesia. (*The Australian*, 22 April)

NT police reject speculation and suggestions of cover-up over boat explosion

NT police, leading the probe into the boat blast at Ashmore Reef, have forcefully rejected suggestions of a cover-up as well as attempts by the media and politicians to politicise their investigation. Acting Commander Peter Bravos, head of the Northern Territory police investigation, said there was "no cover-up, there are no secrets and all findings will be in the public domain as part of the coronial process in due course..... The least [the victims] deserve is a thorough and impartial investigation." He said it may be months before details on the cause of the explosion were released. (*Gold Coast Bulletin*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Canberra Times*, 21 April)

Liberal moderates resist Turnbull's push for TPVs

Liberal moderates are resisting a push by their leader, Malcolm Turnbull, to put temporary protection visas back on the agenda. Victorian backbenchers Russell Broadbent and Petro Georgiou, West Australian MP Judi Moylan and former federal MP Bruce Baird, have all spoken out strongly against the former TPV regime. (*The Age*, 21 April).

Turnbull calls for a return to Temporary Protection Visas

Federal Opposition Leader Malcolm Turnbull wants the Government to bring back temporary protection visas to discourage people smugglers as he continues to accuse the Government of making its asylum seeker policies too soft. "The reintroduction of temporary protection visas should be high on the [Government] agenda," he told Radio National. (*ABC News*, 20 April; *Australian Financial Review*, 21 April)

Explosion kills five, injures 31, on boat in Ashmore Reef

The fishing vessel intercepted on 14 April (referred to as SIEV 36) was being escorted by the Australian Navy to Christmas Island when an explosion occurred on board. Five passengers were killed (three drowned, two are missing presumed dead) and 31 were injured, many with severe burns. 22 casualties were flown to Perth for treatment; eight to Darwin; and one to Broome. Authorities say most of the seriously injured patients are males from Afghanistan. The Government has said the explosion was fuel-related but will not confirm further details until the NT police inquiry is complete. (*ABC News*, 17 April; *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 April; *The Australian*, 20 April)

47 asylum seekers intercepted off Ashmore Reef

The Navy patrol boat HMAS Albany intercepted 47 asylum seekers and two crew members on a small fishing boat, two nautical miles off Ashmore Reef (610km north of Broome) on 14 April. The asylum seekers were thought to be from Afghanistan (*Western Australia Today*, 15 April)