

EDITORIAL

Stop Sri Lanka, not its refugees

MICHAEL MULLINS | OCTOBER 19, 2009

In 2007, then opposition leader Kevin Rudd outfoxed prime minister John Howard in a game of political one-upmanship that was dubbed '**me-tooism**'. Copying popular government policies was arguably the decisive factor that took Labor to victory in the federal election.

Once the election was over, Rudd moved on and proceeded to implement policies based on principle. We had the ratification of Kyoto, the apology to Indigenous Australians, and more. But now his government has been caught by surprise with the rapid upsurge in the number of refugee boat arrivals, and political instinct is once again determining how it acts.

Rudd **said** last week: 'Our job, and I make no apology for it, is to take a hardline approach in dealing with the challenge of illegal immigration.' The media juxtaposed this with Howard's infamous hard **line** from the time of Tampa: 'We will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come.'



In intercepting refugee boats on the high seas to prevent them reaching Australia, the Rudd Government is pursuing the unprincipled strategy for which it criticised the Howard Government. Further, it has co-opted Indonesia. The people on the boats have a right to have their claims examined, and it should be a source of pride for us to honour them by listening to their stories.

On Thursday, *Crikey's* Guy Rundle **wrote** on 'the basic right to fight and kick and scream to find refuge'. He was encouraging public pressure, particularly from 'church groups who should be out loud and early on the matter'. After all, as Rundle said, 'you have to be a most un-Christlike Christian ... to believe that one can disregard the "when I was homeless you took me in" provision, whenever the visitors have brown skin'.

There are a number of positive measures the Government can take to assist these people in their fight for basic human rights. One is to make a strident attempt to seek answers from the Sri Lankan Government on why so many Tamils are fleeing the country, especially if the the war is over and peace has returned.

It does appear that the Sri Lankan Government has fresh blood on its hands, and doesn't want the world to know about it. Last month, the Sri Lankan Government **expelled** UNICEF spokesperson James Elder (pictured), who was outspoken on the plight of civilians displaced during Sri Lanka's civil war. After receiving death threats, he left the country earlier than his 21 September deadline.

Elder is an Australian but, as far as we know, Foreign Minister Stephen Smith has only **responded**

passively in a speech to Federal Parliament. To our knowledge, he has not even sought an explanation from his Sri Lankan counterpart Rohitha Bogollagama.

For his part, Kevin Rudd has said that Australia is merely 'monitoring human rights' in Sri Lanka. There is no talk of active questioning that could lead to an official fact finding mission that might subsequently prompt economic sanctions.

It is notable that this passive response to the Sri Lankan Government's apparent human rights violations is in stark contrast with the active interception of refugee boats. It is to be hoped that church and other groups who care about human rights do not follow the lead of their government and simply stand by where firm action is required.

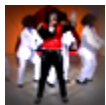


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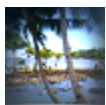
Hey hey it's a human rights violation



A majority of Australians seem to view the Black Faces segment on *Hey Hey* as benign, at worst. A Human Rights Charter might amplify the voice of the Koori woman who called a talkback radio station to say the segment had undermined her sense of equality.

EDITORIAL

Deadly tsunami and dangerous pride



The parochial Australian press reaction to last week's Samoan tsunami shows how editors play on people's sense of pride to sell newspapers. But the misuse and manipulation of information can have adverse consequences for third parties.

EDITORIAL

Empathy for paedophiles is not sympathy for the devil



A bill passed hastily by the NSW Parliament last week, specifically to force released paedophile Dennis Ferguson out of his home, effectively enshrined hate in legislation. Like drug addiction, paedophilia is a problem that requires community empathy, rather than ostracism.

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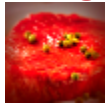
Telstra's price gouging is a sin



There is nothing wrong with mums and dads buying shares as an exercise in responsible stewardship of family assets. But they need to be ready to face consequences if profiting from their investments involves exploiting other Australians.

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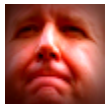
Thoughtful flesh consumption hard to swallow



Eating meat is a moral issue. We understand that sexual desires need to be met in a context of moral probity, or it's likely we will cause psychological damage to ourselves or others. But food consumption is wrongly regarded as morally neutral.

EDITORIAL

Sex and secrecy close doors to good policy



Last week's sex scandal provides lessons for leaders on both sides of politics. Those energised by quality 'open-source' conversation will speak to the electorate more effectively than those who derive their inspiration from behind the closed doors of either the faction meeting room or the bedroom.

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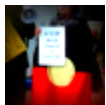
East Timor needs justice before reconciliation



There's good reason for East Timor to opt for a tribunal to deliver justice for past crimes. But Australia cannot expect to receive a special hearing. Our attempts to push for justice for the sake of stability would be perceived as a promotion of our own self-interest.

EDITORIAL

Yes we can achieve justice for Indigenous Australians



The death of a WA Aboriginal elder in a prison van last year was one of the worst human rights tragedies in Australian living memory. A recent speech by Governor-General Quentin Bryce evoked a more optimistic outlook for Indigenous justice.

EDITORIAL

Regulation could make Kyle a good boy



Kyle Sandilands and other shock jocks may want to behave well, but they are constrained by commercial logic, and need the helping hand of regulation. Even John Laws intimated this last week when he told VEGA 95.3: 'I never *wanted* to create mischief that would be damaging to people.'

EDITORIAL

In praise of slow arrests



Tasers are regarded as a fast and easy means for police to restrain alleged offenders. But that's not what's needed for a response that respects the rights of the individuals being apprehended.