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1. Minimal progress on PM's Asian unity vision, John Kerin, AFR*, 2009-12-07

Despite two days of talks involving 150 hand-picked government officials from 28 regional countries, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's "Asia-Pacific community" vision has barely inched forward. Mr. Rudd and his special envoy Dick Woolcott kept the talks – held in Sydney and involving mainly government officials, academics and media commentators – deliberately low key, emphasising the talkfest was neither a negotiation nor designed to produce concrete recommendations.
*[Subscription required]

- Australia's proposal for an 'Asia Pacific Community': issues and prospects, Frank Frost, Foreign Affairs, Defence and Security Section, Parliamentary Library, Parliament of Australia, Department of Parliamentary Services, 2009-12-07, [PDF, 235 KB]

2. AFP union attacks Afghanistan role for Australian police, Paul Maley, Australian, 2009-12-07

The Australian Federal Police Association has criticised a commitment by Kevin Rudd to send extra police to Afghanistan in lieu of fighting troops, saying Australia's top cops risk morphing into a quasi military force. Association chief executive Jim Torr questioned the government's motives in committing the extra officers, saying it appeared to be designed to avoid political embarrassment. In Washington last week, Mr Rudd announced Australia would boost its police training effort in Afghanistan and increase aid to the impoverished, violent country.

- Beheadings a Taliban warning to invaders, Australian, 2009-12-07
- AFP in Afghanistan, Australian Forces Abroad, Nautilus Institute, Global Collaborative

3. Diggers may be charged over child deaths, Jonathan Pearlman, Age, 2009-12-05

A raid in which five Afghan children were killed could result in combat-related charges against Australian soldiers for the first time since the Vietnam War. Two internal Defence Force investigations are understood to have raised serious concerns about whether the soldiers - reservists from the Sydney-based 1st Commando Regiment - breached their rules of engagement. Defence said the incident had been referred to the Director of Military Prosecutions after two internal investigations raised concerns about the operation.

- Afghanistan investigation referred to the director of military prosecutions, Department of Defence, 2009-11-30

4. Indonesian President lashes out at unnamed conspirators, Febriamy Hutapea and Camelia Pasandaran, Jakarta Globe, 2009-12-07

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono accused unnamed figures of using the Bank Century bailout scandal to topple his government and possibly force him from office. He also repeated claims he made last week that his political opponents were behind a planned demonstration at Monas to mark International Anti-Corruption Day. Yudhoyono, Vice President Boediono and Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati have been under fire over the government’s Rp 6.7 trillion ($710 million) bailout of Bank Century amid unsubstantiated allegations that some of the money was embezzled.

- Century scandal tops agenda of Democratic Party meeting, Jakarta Post, 2009-12-05

5. US 'comfortable' with Pakistan's nuclear arsenal, says Robert Gates, Declan Walsh, Guardian, 2009-12-06

The US is "comfortable" with the safety of Pakistan's nuclear weapons, in part thanks to American-sponsored safety mechanisms, the US defence secretary, Robert Gates, said. "We've given [the Pakistanis] assistance in improving their security arrangements over the past number of years … Based on the information available to us that gives us the comfort," he told CBS News. Gates's comments were intended to assuage US concerns about the vulnerability of Pakistan's nuclear stockpile at a time of growing militant violence.

- US takes hunt for al-Qaeda to Pakistan, Syed Saleem Shahzad, Asia Times, 2009-12-05

- India-Pakistan in Afghan spat, Imran Khan, Al Jazeera, 2009-12-06

6. Gates calls July 2011 the beginning, not end, of Afghan withdrawal, Brian Knowlton, NYT, 2009-12-06

Perhaps only a “handful” of American troops will be leaving Afghanistan in July 2011, the date President Obama has set to begin a gradual withdrawal, Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates said in an interview. “We will have 100,000 forces, troops there,” Mr. Gates said on ABC’s “This Week,” “and they are not leaving in July of 2011. Some, handful, or some small number, or whatever the conditions permit, will begin to withdraw at that time.” “I don’t consider this an exit strategy,” he continued, “This is a transition.” He said it would begin in less-contested parts of Afghanistan before expanding to the most obdurate Taliban strongholds, largely in the south and east.

- NATO pledges 7,000 troops, but avoids details, Mark Landler, NYT, 2009-12-04
- Turkish PM: no additional troops for Afghanistan, AP, 2009-12-06
- Money can't buy America love, Andrew Wilder and Stuart Gordon, FP, 2009-12-01

7. Japan: save the endangered tomahawk! Todd Crowell, Asia Sentinel, 2009-12-04

Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama has spoken about the necessity to reduce reliance on nuclear arms. He said at the United Nations that Japan has the "moral responsibility as the only country that has ever experienced atomic bombings." But Japan is caught in a box. On one hand, Tokyo is one of the strongest advocates of nuclear disarmament, while on the other hand it relies on US arms, including nuclear ones, for its own security. Lately, it has come to worry about whether it can count on America's extended nuclear deterrence, more commonly known as the nuclear umbrella.

- U.S. struggles to keep step with Japan's shifting foreign policy, John Pomfret and Blaine Harden, Washington Post, 2009-12-05

8. Australia, Indonesia investigate climate change options, Linda Mottram, Connect Asia, ABC, 2009-12-04

Mr Rudd will be going to the UN Copenhagen summit empty-handed, after the opposition blocked his proposed emissions trading legislation in the Senate. Mr Rudd says he'll reintroduce the legislation when parliament resumes in February, and played down suggestions of calling early elections. The Australian debate on cutting emissions turned to nuclear power. Meantime in Indonesia, hope is being pinned on exploiting geothermal energy, with a new paper out on how to achieve President Yudhoyono's plan to slow emissions growth by just over 40 per cent by the year 2020 without jeopardising development.

9. ‘Time is running out’ for Sumatra’s rainforest as demand for palm oil soars, Arwa Damon, Jakarta Globe, 2009-12-06

Clearing forests for agriculture isn’t exactly new, but palm is quickly becoming the crop of choice. It is fast growing with high yields, global demand now tops 40 million tons a year, and it’s central to the economies of Malaysia and Indonesia. But the rate at which Indonesia’s natural forests are being torn down has made this tropical nation one of the world’s largest contributors to greenhouse gas

emissions. Already, 85 percent of Sumatra’s forests are gone and what is left is disappearing at an alarming rate.

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