

## Businessmen give Apec, Asean the thumbs-up

Their vote vindicates Thai, Australian premiers' praise of the groupings, push to expand their roles

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CLOSE to 90 per cent of the 1,500 businessmen attending the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation CEO Summit yesterday agreed that Apec and Asean have played a useful role in Asia.



Over half of the businessmen, who voted via PDAs given to them, backed an Asia-Pacific Community that covers not just economic cooperation, but a broader mandate that includes security and political matters as well.

### OPEN

Mr Rudd (left) and Mr Abhisit (right) see the US as still having a key role in the Asia-Pacific; Mr Calderon slams the US for betraying free trade

the groupings to expand their roles.

### DIALOGUE

Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva and his Australian counterpart, Kevin Rudd, should feel vindicated.

The vote came just after both leaders praised the work and achievements of Apec and Asean, and pushed for

They were speaking at a dialogue moderated by Tommy Koh, Singapore's Ambassador-At-Large. The dialogue tackled the question: Are our present models of regionalism, such as Apec and Asean, adequate?

Ticking off Apec's feats in reducing protectionism and expanding trade in the Asia-Pacific region, Mr Rudd said that Apec has been an 'extraordinary success'.

Asean, which started as an 'inconceivable' concept, has turned out to be an 'outstanding success story' in maintaining peace and stability in the region, he said, adding that Asean also planted the seeds of a regional community.

Mr Abhisit said that despite Asean being a messy grouping at times, it has served the region well and continued to evolve in dealing with new challenges.

And he gave Apec a pat on the back for pushing for the wrap-up of the Uruguay Round of trade talks. The Thai leader also agreed with Mr Rudd's view that there should be an expanded regional grouping.

The Australian leader continued to push for an Asia-Pacific Community by 2020. His proposal 'seeks to bring together in a single institution, over time, the economies with an agenda which covers the entire space, political cooperation, security cooperation, economic cooperation as well as the climate change'. Mr Rudd said that current cross-Pacific groupings such as Apec lack strong political or security goals.

'Often, we assume that somehow peace and security are delivered by some deterministic means, that they are inevitable,' he said. 'That is not the case. Peace and cooperation across our region has been fought for by the institutions over recent decades.'

Both the Thai and Australian leaders recognise that the United States would still have a key role in the Asia-Pacific region.

'There's no way we can achieve any agenda without the US,' Mr Abhisit said.

But the US is currently not Mexican President Felipe Calderon's favourite country. Speaking at the same session, he hit out at the US for yielding to domestic political pressures, and betraying free trade.

Calling for strong governments to fight trade protectionism, Mr Calderon said that there would be a 'quick and efficient' recovery from the recent global recession, only when free trade prevails.