

Kevin Rudd: Understanding “the minds of Asia” is crucial for Australia

MELBOURNE, 16 April, 2012 – Australia must devote more resources to understanding the “minds of Asia” and their diverse cultures, said the **Hon Kevin Rudd**, Member for Griffith.

Rudd told listeners that Australia’s engagement with the cultures of the Asian region was crucial to contributing to its “increasingly dynamic cultural melting pot.”

“More work needs to be done in our national understanding of the languages, cultures and the arts of the high civilisations of our wider region,” he said.

Rudd made the comments at the launch of the Platform Paper ‘Finding a Place on the Asian Stage’ by **Alison Carroll** and **Carrillo Gantner**.

The launch of the paper included a roundtable discussion between Rudd, Asian art collector **Jason Yeap**, and the paper’s authors.

Rudd expanded on the paper’s ideas by highlighting concerns over Australia’s Asia literacy and the state of Asian language learning in schools.

He called for a better understanding in Australia of increasingly important major Asian languages.

“The bulk of the intellectual discourse, political and policy debate as well as economic exchange within Asia occurs in languages other than English.”

“How much is literally being ‘lost in translation’ in straightforward transactions between individuals, corporations and governments, not to mention the media, everyday around China, Asia and the world?”, he asked. “The capacity for misunderstandings and missed opportunities are profound.”

Rudd highlighted the concerning recent decline in Australian schools of education in the four principal languages of Asia (Chinese, Japanese, Indonesian and Korean). In general, the number of Australian schools and students taking up these languages has dropped between 2000 and 2008.

Rudd believes this has fuelled a similarly worrying trend of Australians neglecting to study in top academic institutions in our region.

He said that Australia must “lift its national game” to create common futures with the Asian region that are “inspiring, innovative and creative.”

In addition to the four notable speakers, **Bailieu Myer**, Patron of Asialink, also attended the launch.

Mr Rudd’s speech is available [here](#).