

One of our major hurdles is the absence of a broad understanding in Canada of Asia and its cultures.

Canadians simply don't know enough about Asia, its languages, history and culture. Only 1,200 post-secondary students in Canada are studying Japanese full-time. Australia with a population half as big as our own has 15,000 Japanese language students.

If we are to deal successfully with the region we need to become more Asia-literate. Only then can we understand clearly what we are being told and what we need to do. We need to become more attuned to the importance of personal contact and to the time taken to do business in Asia.

Your own report last year had among its conclusions the need to do more for the development of foreign languages in the private sector so that Canadians can be better equipped to compete in the international business marketplace.

Accordingly, we intend to establish a Pacific 2000 Languages And Awareness Fund. This would include support for academic institutions offering Asian languages for the private sector and for employees taking language and cultural awareness programs including those aimed at Doing Business in Asia. It would, as your Report recommends, encourage and support greater links between international business and Asian studies programs at the University level. We already have vibrant Asian studies programs at the University of Alberta, the University of British Columbia and at Simon Fraser University. Now McGill and the Centre for International Business Studies in Toronto are taking steps in this direction for next academic year, and I will be interested in learning of the plans of other universities.

In order to ensure that we expand the pool of Asia-literate graduates, we will, in cooperation with the provinces, support curriculum development and enhancement beginning at the secondary school level. We will create an employment clearing house through the Asia Pacific Foundation which would provide employers with lists of university graduates with both professional and Asian skills. Eventually it would also provide graduating students with the names of companies with an interest in employing them for activities in Japan and elsewhere in Asia.

Finally we need to sharpen Canada's image in the region, to strengthen our presence. Canada is still not familiar enough to Asians, the image is blurred. We need to convey a clear picture of who we are and what we can do.