



Call to turn Jolimont rail yards into PM residence State seeks to redevelop precinct

By **JASON DOWLING,**
CLAY LUCAS
 and **DAVID ROOD**

JOLIMONT railway yards should be covered and turned into a stunning new residence for Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and visiting dignitaries, a leading Victorian business group has urged.

The Victorian Employers' Chamber of Commerce and Industry said the location would be ideal "for a permanent and contemporary Melbourne address where Australian prime ministers can stay, as well as hosting visiting heads of state and business delegations".

Premier John Brumby announced yesterday the State Government was seeking to cover and develop the rail yards.

The Premier also announced, as part of a river bank revamp of the area, the demolition of the historic Olympic Park stands and \$50 million in next week's state budget to fund a new athletics stadium at Albert Park Lake.

Olympic Park will be turned into a professional sports precinct, with Collingwood and Melbourne football teams to be based there.

The new stadium, to be located at the Lakeside Oval with a capacity of 10,000, will be shared between Athletics Victoria and the South Melbourne Soccer Club.

While Athletics Victoria has been in discussions with the State Government over a new stadium, it said the first it had heard of the new Albert Park track was through calls from the media. It had yet to sign off on a relocation and declined to comment on the new stadium until it

received further information.

Chamber president Jeremy Johnson said the rail yards site was an ideal new home for the Prime Minister because of its symbolism in being adjacent to Federation Square, which celebrates Australia's nationhood.

He said business would relish a stronger prime ministerial presence in Melbourne and its impact on inward investment and increasing the city's status.

"Sydney has long had an unfair advantage over Melbourne with both a prime ministerial and vice-regal residence — this needs to change, particularly given that projections indicate that Melbourne becomes Australia's most populous and most significant city in the next few decades," he said.

A Rudd spokesman said last night that when the Prime Minister was in Melbourne, he stayed in hotels.

Last year it was reported that prominent Melbourne business people were lobbying for an official prime ministerial residence in Melbourne, with Stonington Mansion considered.

Victorian senator and Labor power broker Stephen Conroy last year said he supported a Melbourne residence for the PM.

"If you look at who goes to all of the Prime Minister's functions at Kirribilli that he holds ... if you look at who goes there, it's essentially a Sydney clique," he said.

"If we have a national leader, they have to have a capacity to meet and talk with more than

just a Sydney group of people. So I support the proposal," he told ABC TV's *Insiders* program.

Mr Brumby said any redevelopment of the Jolimont rail yards would have to contain open spaces and not impede access to the banks of the Yarra. But he would not be drawn on the cost of the redevelopment.

Yesterday's announcement did not impress everyone. Catherine Ng, planning chairwoman at Melbourne City Council for the past seven years, said Mr Brumby's announcement was little more than a re-announcement of a pledge by former premier Steve Bracks in 2004 to complete a master plan for the area.

Acting Opposition Leader Peter Ryan said the move would "undo a lot of the good work done by the (Kennett) Government in opening up that whole area going down to the river".

"What we don't want now is the construction of additional facilities over the rail lines that are going to be able to block the magnificent views over the river," he said.

SPORT

► Track and field loses out **PAGE 6**

COMMENT & DEBATE

► Letters **PAGE 10**

KEY POINTS

- The residence would spur inward investment, business leaders say.
- Olympic Park will be turned into a training precinct for Collingwood and Melbourne.