Monash University is adamant that last month’s terrorist attacks in Mumbai will not deflect it from its joint research project with the Indian Institute of Technology in Bombay (IITB), or from its long-term commitment to international research collaboration.

This is a report in The Australian last week that "growing joint research deals between India and Australia will be under pressure and university marketing and promotional trips are likely to be reconsidered" following the attacks. A delegation of 25 senior executives from Monash were among the 30 or more Australian academics and university staff in Mumbai at the time (CR 02.12.08).

Monash vice-chancellor and Universities Australia chair Richard Larkins, who led the Monash delegation, told Campus Review that "it is essential that Australian universities engage internationally and tap into the international talent pool".

"There are risks all over the world, and these need to be managed on a case-by-case basis. In India, the risks posed by traffic are vastly greater than from terrorism," Larkins said.

"We will continue to take official warnings seriously and do what is necessary to mitigate risks, including building in extra emergency management and staff security measures," Larkins said.

"We believe that the Australian students and staff will be able to continue their studies and conduct research in India without a reduction in the quality of education or research." Larkins said.

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Fertilising ideas with Vietnam

Sydney University is also investing in joint research with a South Asian partner — in this case Vietnam — aimed at improving rice yields in a country that maintains rice yields in Vietnam white rice, a rich source of dietary fibre, is a staple food in Vietnam and is a major contributor to the country's economy.

"The rice in Vietnam is about 100 kilogram of nitrogen fertilizer per hectare, with the cost of fertiliser roughly halving over the past two years largely as a result of oil price rises, Bish Gives into increasing hardship for Vietnam's 30 million farmers," explains Kennedy.

"The research also involves the use of modern techniques to improve rice yields in Vietnam," Kennedy adds.

The projects were all based a long way away from the attacks in secure surroundings, and were never in danger.

Monash announced the launch of the joint IIT-Monash research academy last month, with construction of the $5 million facility starting on 26 November, the day the attacks began. Already 36 joint projects are under way, with a strong focus on environmental outcomes. These include investigating ways to blend cement with industrial by-products, thereby filling air cavities in the cement so it requires less energy — and reduced emissions — to heat to allow it to set at maximum strength in minimum time; protecting ground water from pollution by improving barrier systems in landfill; improving understanding of artificially engineered geothermal reservoirs; and developing new materials and optimisation of novel stem cell bioreactors.

Sridhar says the environmental projects have both practical and symbolic importance. "The world understands that acting effectively to mitigate climate change requires us to bring China and India along with us. Initiatives such as this — where research is conducted simultaneously and collaboratively in both countries — give ownership of the outcomes to both countries, and also that greater access to the environment in both countries."

Monash, says Sridhar, is way ahead of the international university pack — not just its Australian counterparts — in developing research links with India. "Every enterprise I'm talking to — including global corporations like Cisco and IBM — says our presence on the ground is well in advance of the rest. The 36 projects are just the start for us — we have several hundred similar projects in prospect, and multinational corporations are showing great interest in many research areas. Several universities, Australian and overseas, are looking at our model as a way of connecting with the region."

"Monash isn't investing in this program and this research facility to make money — although of course we don't plan to make a loss. We're here to make a difference; to advance the cause of science, to strengthen the pipeline between two countries, and also to recognise the international demographics of our student population."

Sridhar says Monash is happy to share the insights from the programs with other Australian universities that are aiming to raise their research profile in the region.
arrangements. It casts a shadow over our proceedings, of course. But the people involved in

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not just for those with the knowledge to assess the options and the capacity to pay the required costs.

My perspective is very much influenced by my time in aged care policy in the 1990s. I quickly learnt that with no other information but ownership to go on, you would choose a non-profit aged care service over a for-profit provider and both over a state provider. The data on standards showed this. The reason for the low rating of the state providers was low investment in old facilities as well as outdated approaches to caring that