



## **Submission No 13a**

**Inquiry into Australia's relationship with India as an emerging world power**

**Organisation:** The Australia National University

**Contact Person:** Professor Robin Jeffrey  
Director  
Research School of Pacific & Asian Studies

**Address:** Building 9  
Canberra ACT 0200

Robin Jeffrey FAHA, FASSA  
Professor  
Dean, ANU College of Asia and the Pacific  
Director, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies  
Building No. 9

Canberra ACT 0200 Australia  
Telephone: +61 2 6125 2221  
Facsimile: +61 2 6125 4214  
Email: [director.rspas@anu.edu.au](mailto:director.rspas@anu.edu.au)  
[www.anu.edu.au](http://www.anu.edu.au)

22 August 2008

Dr Margot Kerley  
Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade  
Parliament House  
Canberra, ACT 2600

Dear Dr Kerley,

Thank you for your letter of 24 July about the Inquiry into Australia's Relations with India and the submission I made in May 2006. Please let me add a few updates.

*Study of modern India*

ANU has somewhat expanded its teaching about modern India's history, politics and society; but such teaching has gone from La Trobe University. I think, too, that it has now gone from Curtin University.

La Trobe University is also giving up its Hindi program, and this will probably mean the end of the Hindi offerings made through Open Universities Australia. As a full-scale program, Hindi and Urdu will remain only at ANU.

As you will be able to confirm from the Office of National Assessment, ONA has not found it easy to employ a suitably qualified analyst of India.

In spite of the excitement about India in the business pages of newspapers, Australian capacity to research and teach about the South Asian region is miniscule.

*Media*

India's print and electronic media continue to expand spectacularly. Nalin Mehta's new book, *India on Television* (HarperCollins, 2008), captures much of the television story and updates the remarks from Mehta quoted in my letter of 31 May 2006.

Indian-language newspapers, particularly Hindi, continue to grow rapidly, as does the advertising industry that works in Indian languages.

*Languages and local knowledge*

India's 12 big languages (Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu) all have reading publics larger than the total population of Australia.

The peoples who make up these publics conduct their daily lives in the subtleties of their mother tongues, even though a small percentage (perhaps 5 per cent) also read and work in English. Australia needs a larger proportion of Australians capable at least of understanding these nuances and complexities, if not of speaking one of the languages.

In the lamentable interrogation of Dr Haneef last year, the interrogators had little ability to cope with his accent, vocabulary or references (and Dr Haneef appears to have found it difficult sometimes to understand questions posed in Australian-style and accented English).

Such an example underlines the need for more teaching about India at all levels of education and the involvement of more Australians in regular research and study of India. Ideally, such research and study would be in collaboration with colleagues in the best Indian institutions.

I attach two documents:

1. "*South Asia: Government and Human Development - Three Options to Improve Australian Capacity*," 5 April 2008, a document prepared for Senator McMullan. It outlines policy measures that would begin to tackle our deficiencies.

2. "*India Update brochure\_1*," an announcement of "India in Australia, India and Australia," an India Update being held 6-7 November in Canberra, jointly sponsored by ANU and the University of Canberra. The thrust of the Update is to draw attention to the changing and expanding relationship between the two countries and the growing Indian presence in various aspects of Australian life.

I would be happy to try to elaborate on this letter or on other matters relating to India that your committee might be investigating.

Yours sincerely,

Robin Jeffrey

## **South Asia: Government and Human Development Three Options to Improve Australian Capacity**

5 April 2008

Australia's capacity to research, teach about and understand South Asia has shrunk strikingly in the past 15 years. Of the 37 Australian universities, no more than five or six offer semester courses on India or its neighbours (Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the Maldives).<sup>1</sup>

The costs of ignorance are high. South Asia is home to one-quarter of the world's population, a thundering Indian economy and some of the most taxing issues of government, human development and environment in the world. The botched arrest of Mohammed Haneef in 2007, in which the interrogators were unable fully to understand even Haneef's English-language replies (much less any deeper meanings), is one illustration.

How might Australia improve its research capacity on South Asia?

### **Option 1 – Endowed Chair**

A fully endowed chair in an Australian university in 2008 requires about \$4.5 million in the endowment. The advantages are that funds are available in perpetuity to pay for a senior scholar and the research needs of the program. This means that a regular series of projects, workshops and exchanges can be predicted and financed.

Australia has one partially endowed chair devoted to South Asia – the Rajiv Gandhi Chair of South Asian Economics at the Australian National University. This sustains the Australia-South Asia Research Centre (ASARC), which has produced a flow of excellent economic analysis of India (<http://rspas.anu.edu.au/asarc/>).

A model similar to ASARC – which began with joint contributions from Indian and Australian governments and from the ANU – is one method of establishing a research presence on development and governance in South Asia.

### **Option 2 – Resource Centre on South Asia**

The model is similar to the UK's DIFID Health Resource Centre (<http://www.dfidhealthrc.org/index.html>), except that the brief is to provide a resource for Development and Governance in South Asia.

Such a resource provides a website which links to relevant reports, documents and analysis, produces its own analysis and research, provides quick briefings on request (and payment), acts as a clearing-house for expertise and contracts for larger research projects.

---

<sup>1</sup> The point is nicely made by a Google search of Australian websites for "politics of South Asia" on 2 April 2008: among 120 hits was the handbook of the University of Sydney's Dept of Economics – for 1995! See also *Maximizing Australia's Asia Knowledge* (2002) <http://coombs.anu.edu.au/SpecialProj/ASAA/asia-knowledge-book-v70.pdf>

The advantage of the resource-centre model lies in reactive capacity, its accessibility and its economy. The Web makes resources widely and quickly available and permits interaction with users. Initially, such a resource can be run at a modest level by two people and can be expanded as demand dictates. It has the potential to earn income through fee-for-service research.

Two well-qualified analysts (\$120,00 each including oncosts), plus an administrator (\$80,000 including oncosts) and operating expenses (\$50,000), costs about \$370,000 a year.

Such a model can also be given a limited life – e.g., a five-year contract, renewable if the results warrant.

### **3. Option 3 – South Asia Government and Human Development Project**

This follows the model of the Indonesia Project, established at the ANU in 1965 (<http://rspas.anu.edu.au/economics/ip/>).

The model mirrors aspects of an academic department, but the project is dedicated to research on government and human development related to South Asia. It requires at least two staff and an administrator.

It is multi-faceted. It conducts research commissioned by government agencies or other bodies, publishes the results in various forms (from traditional journals and working papers to web-based blogs and newsletters). It seeks additional external research funds, trains PhD students and takes a limited role in undergraduate and Masters teaching.

The advantages of this model are that the project

- can grow, depending on the initiative of its core staff, from its initial base
- is contracted for a fixed (though renewable) term
- renews and improves Australian expertise by teaching and supervising students
- must show measurable results

Initial cost is similar to that of the Resource Centre model, but, in addition, the Project model needs two or three PhD scholarships (approximately \$30,000 a year each) for it to fulfil its role in renewing Australian capacity.