

## We stand shoulder to shoulder with India: Australia

Australian fatalities in the [Mumbai](#) terrorist attacks may rise, warned Foreign Minister Stephen Smith, as he reaffirmed this will not hamper but strengthen bilateral ties with India.

'We stand shoulder to shoulder with India at this very difficult time. Whilst there will be difficulties in terms of travel, in some respects this will help make us closer as neighbours and friends,' Smith told Australian Broadcasting Corporation's AM programme Saturday morning.

The number of Australian casualties is expected to rise with two confirmed deaths in the terrorist attacks that have left 155 killed and over 300 injured.

Smith said it was difficult to estimate the time it would take to confirm the Australian death toll. 'I can't discount that there may not be ... further Australians amongst the victims. We just have to wait patiently while the Indian authorities go through the painstaking process of clearing the hotel and identifying victims', Smith told ABC Radio.

'Unfortunately, I can't put a timetable on that. I think we have to say days rather than hours. It's a terrible painstaking process. I think also we are better off proceeding with caution,' Smith said.

The Australian government has sent additional consular officers to India to help provide new passports to those who needed them, counselling and medical assistance and a financial assistance package for people affected by the attacks.

'All of the things that we can do for people who have been caught up in it we think we have been doing,' Smith said.

Three Australians, Debra Bayne, a Sydney businesswoman, Drew Dickson, an architect, and Ross Jarman, a business director, who were part of the 12-member New South Wales state trade delegation and were trapped in the Oberoi Trident Hotel, were glad to arrive home Friday night after a three-day ordeal.

The Australians killed include a timber merchant from Sydney, Brett Taylor, 49, who was part of the NSW trade delegation, and a former Sydney businessman and councillor and father of two adult children, Doug Markell, 71, who was holidaying with his wife, Alison, in Mumbai.

*Neena Bhandari* ( © IANS / India eNews)