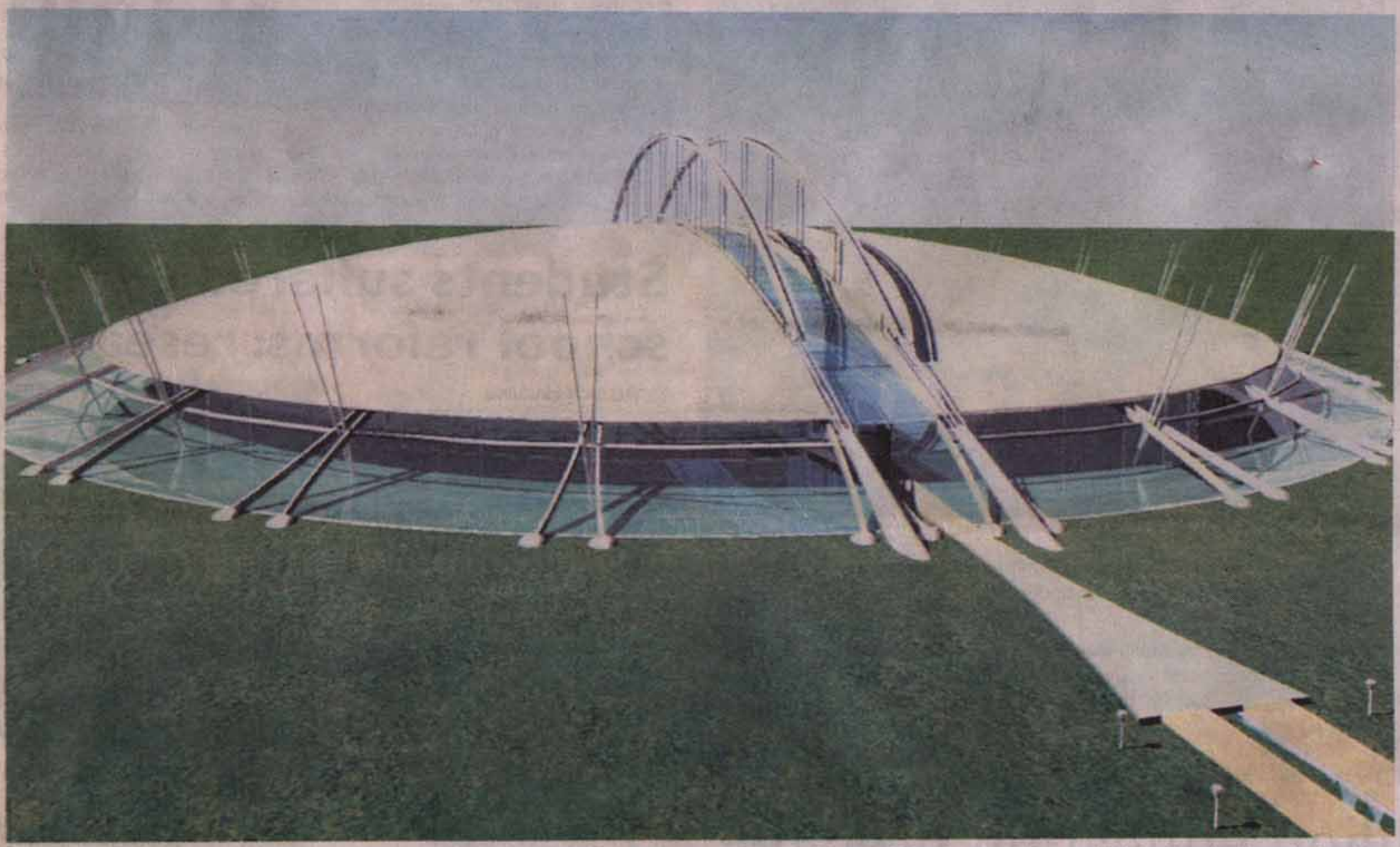
Monash wins $157 million national synchrotron facility



Above: Australia's first synchrotron will be built at Monash University. Below: Victorian State and Regional Development Minister Mr John Brumby, Monash vice-chancellor Professor David Robinson and Victorian Premier Mr Steve Bracks examine a synchrotron model at the project launch last month. Picture: GREG FORD

BY JUNE YU

Monash University will host Australia's first synchrotron, a powerful $157 million microscope that will revolutionise scientific research in this country.

Victorian Premier Mr Steve Bracks recently announced that the State Government would provide $100 million for the project, with the remaining funds to come from universities, other research institutions and private sector investors.

With a diameter of 60 metres, a synchrotron is a large, circular particle accelerator tens of billions times more powerful than the best conventional microscope. It allows scientists to examine molecular structures at an atomic level.

Construction of the synchrotron, to be built on the corner of Wellington and Blackburn roads, Clayton, is scheduled to start in the next year.

Mr Bracks said the development of the synchrotron was the most significant scientific infrastructure investment in Australia for decades.

"It will provide a massive boost to Victoria as a leader of biotechnology and scientific research, create 700 jobs and add $65 million a year to the Victorian economy," he said.

"It will help our scientists make major scientific breakthroughs in areas such as the fight against cancer, the development of new computer chips and advances in drug design."

Victorian State and Regional Development Minister Mr John Brumby said the synchrotron would cement Victoria's position as the scientific and technology capital of Australia and the Asia Pacific region.

"Nobel Prize winner Professor Peter Doherty has said that in five to 10 years' time 80 per cent of research for pharmaceutical products will be undertaken in a synchrotron," he said.

Monash deputy vice-chancellor (Research and Development) Professor Peter Darvall said many Australian scientists who now had to travel overseas to use synchrotrons in other countries for their research would welcome the project.

He said medical achievements such as the development of the anti-flu drug Relenza would never have been possible if Monash and CSIRO researchers had not gained access to a synchrotron facility overseas.

"A synchrotron is an essential tool for researchers at the leading edge in fields including pharmaceutics, information technology, biotechnology and mineral processing," he said.

Vice-chancellor Professor David Robinson said Monash was an ideal site for the national synchrotron facility, given its proximity to several major CSIRO centres and a cluster of other research and development organisations.

The announcement complemented the university's plans to construct a $300 million Science Technology Research and Innovation Precinct, he said.