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HEADLINE: O'MALLEY TO TALK TRADE IN ASIA TRIP;
10-DAY TRADE MISSION WILL INCLUDE VISITS TO CHINA, SOUTH KOREA AND VIETNAM

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BODY:

Gov. Martin O'Malley is planning to lead business leaders, educators and state officials on a 10-day mission to Asia aimed at bolstering trade between the state and the world's fastest-growing region.

O'Malley is scheduled to announce the trip to China, South Korea and Vietnam today, when he signs an agreement in Annapolis with the mayor of Seoul to boost trade and investment between Maryland and the South Korean capital.

State economic development officials hope to build on what they say is an already strong relationship with Asia, where Maryland has several trade offices and does hundreds of millions of dollars of export business. Several companies from the region have made Maryland the base for their U.S. headquarters in recent years.

China ranked third among Maryland's export markets last year with \$571 million in sales. South Korea ranked sixth with \$481 million.

O'Malley and nearly two dozen business leaders, educators and state officials will depart May 31.

A spokesman for O'Malley said the governor would not discuss the trade mission until the signing.

The state's top economic development official expressed hope that the trip would prepare the ground for more Asian businesses to establish operations in Maryland while opening doors for Maryland companies to do more business there.

"There is a big world out there, and most of the growth exists outside of the United States," said Christian S. Johansson, the secretary of the Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development. "This trip is about opening up new markets for Maryland products and exports. It's about fostering ties that will make us more competitive.

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It's about attracting new businesses."

Critics questioned whether the state should be spending on overseas travel following a legislative session dominated by a bitter battle over the state's budget.

Some also criticized the notion of helping foreign companies while businesses at home continue to struggle amid the slow economic recovery.

O'Malley "will certainly defend the trip by saying he's trying to bring business to Maryland," said Sen. Allan H. Kittleman, a Howard County Republican who serves on the Senate Finance Committee. "But how about instead reducing our taxes so we can help the companies that are already here?"

The Department of Business and Economic Development said it had not yet figured the cost of the trip. The agency said six state officials would participate; O'Malley spokesman Rick Abbruzzese said one staffer would accompany the governor.

Higher-ranking officials require the additional cost of dispatching state troopers for security. Maryland State Police declined to divulge the size of the security detail that would be assigned to protect the governor during the trip.

"We don't give those numbers out," state police spokesman Greg Shipley said. "For security reasons, we don't tell the number of officers we have on a security detail."

Officials said the trip will focus on promoting Maryland's expanding science and technology sectors, areas that O'Malley has identified as important to the state's future.

O'Malley is scheduled to deliver a speech at the Shanghai Bio-Forum, which attracts executives from China's largest drug and biopharmaceutical companies.

Participants are scheduled to meet with businesses and government officials in China, South Korea and Vietnam, and tour the Johns Hopkins University-Nanjing University Center for Chinese and American Studies. American and Chinese business leaders will meet at a Maryland in China banquet in Shanghai.

Marlin Steel Wire Products founder Drew Greenblatt hopes the trip will help him expand his business to South Korea. The Baltimore manufacturer already sells wire baskets to Japanese companies such as Honda and Toyota. He has had difficulty making inroads in South Korea.

"This is one of these things where face-to-face is the best way to open up opportunities that will hopefully push us over the edge," Greenblatt said. "The nice thing about it is that because the governor is there doors will be opened that wouldn't be opened to small manufacturer in Baltimore City otherwise."

Wallace Loh, president of the University of Maryland, College Park, hopes the trip will help with his vision of turning the institution into a "university without borders."

"It is the research, the education and the training of the next generation that will drive the knowledge-based economy of the future," Loh said. "The two are very well linked."

Maryland is home to more than 300 foreign-owned companies from 30 countries. About 105,000 Marylanders, or 3.5 percent of the labor force, work for foreign-owned firms.

Maryland officials have worked to deepen ties with Asia. They say the state was one of the first to open a trade and investment office in China; Maryland also has offices in South Korea, Vietnam, India and Taiwan.

The University of Maryland recently started an incubator designed to help Asian businesses make the transition to

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doing business in the United States.

The Department of Business and Economic Development's Office of International Trade and Investment made contact last year with more than 250 Asian companies. Officials say the talks resulted in six firms establishing offices in the state.

They say the office has also helped 75 Maryland companies export to Asia, helping to generate \$65 million in sales.

"Because we have had such long relationship there, we think its good idea to cultivate it," said Maryland Secretary of State John McDonough, who will go along on the trip.

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