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Maryland leaders organize business trip to India

O'Malley leads travel party of 100-plus

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The Washington Times

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Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley will lead more than 100 state business leaders, educators and elected officials on an economic-development trip to India starting Nov. 28, state officials announced Tuesday.

The delegation will visit Hyderabad, Mumbai and New Delhi during the six-day trip to meet with potential investors, trade partners and government officials.

Maryland leaders hope to strengthen business ties in the country and reap benefits similar to those of the state's 68-person trip to Asia last spring, when public and private leaders secured more than \$85 million in foreign investments, according to the governor's office.

The foreign visit will be the largest ever led by a Maryland governor. Mr. O'Malley, a Democrat, said the trip will allow the state to tap into India's fast-growing economy.

"To create jobs in Maryland, a modern economy requires modern investments, and we should pursue those investments at home and abroad," he said Tuesday in a statement.

During the trip, Mr. O'Malley said, he plans to promote Maryland as a destination for Indian companies looking to establish a U.S. presence and will focus mostly on life sciences, cybersecurity, information technology, aerospace and defense industries.

Before arriving in India, he and a handful of state officials also will visit Doha, Qatar, to discuss investment opportunities there. First lady Catherine Curran O'Malley, a Maryland District Court judge, will be on the trip to work on judicial partnerships between the state and India.

Most of the private businesses sending representatives to India have existing ties there or want to establish a presence, said Karen Glenn Hood, spokeswoman for the Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development.

Maryland businesses exported \$233 million in goods and services to India last year, making it the state's 12th-largest export market. India was also the state's 13th-largest import market.

There are currently four major Indian companies with facilities in Maryland, including a pair of pharmaceutical companies, according to state officials. Officials estimate that 105,000 Maryland residents, or 3.5 percent of the state's workforce, work for the more than 300 foreign-owned companies, representing 30 countries, that operate in the state.

"The rapidly developing middle class in India is creating export opportunities that were not available even a few years ago," said delegation member Jim Seay, president of Baltimore-based Premier Rides, which builds roller coasters and other amusement rides.

State officials have stressed the need for more foreign investment in the state and have touted the success of last spring's Asia trip, which included stops in China, South Korea and Vietnam.

However, questions were raised before the trip about the presence of a lobbyist, whose firm sent an email to clients before the trip inviting them to give her any "important messages" they wanted relayed to the governor.

The lobbyist, Hannah Powers, dismissed the email, saying she made the trip solely to meet with Korean officials on behalf of the company she was representing. The governor's office also said any lobbyists making the trip were there to meet with foreign contacts and had minimal access to the governor.

At least one state-registered lobbyist is scheduled to make the India trip: Tom McDonald representing the Baker and Hostetler LLP law firm.

State officials declined Tuesday provide a cost estimate for the India trip, but said one would be available after the delegation returns home. Ms. Hood said most members will pay their own way, while state taxpayers will foot the bill for Mr. O'Malley and 11 other state officials.

For the 10-day trip to Asia, the state covered expenses for the governor and about five state officials at a total estimated cost of \$144,000.

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