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## Mumbai attacks not expected to hinder Maryland-India links

Trade missions, other projects will resume, officials say

by Lindsey Robbins | Staff Writer

In the wake of the terrorist attacks that rocked the financial capital of India last month, business between the country and the U.S. seems to be, for the most part, unaffected.

Speaking at the Maryland-India Business Roundtable last month, before the Mumbai attacks, Gov. Martin O'Malley lauded India's work in the life sciences and information technology fields and discussed partnerships.

A week after the violence, which killed 171 people, a Sykesville training and simulation company postponed its trade mission to India. GSE Systems had been invited to participate in the first commercial nuclear trade mission to India since that nation opened to civilian nuclear trade with the U.S. The mission was scheduled for Dec. 2-9.

Despite the postponement, executives at the roundtable remain confident business dealings will pick up quicker than ever in the coming weeks.

"Mumbai is like New York City. Things are always moving. It's difficult to stop that kind of activity for long," said Elisha B. Pulivarti, executive director of the roundtable, which is in Largo. "We're taking a biotech delegation to India next month."

Pulivarti said tourism is the industry that has been hit the hardest since the attacks.

Rajiv Dewan, managing partner for Indigo Arc in Rockville, said he's heard from various people that people are canceling immediate trips to India, but Indigo Arc and its partner businesses are continuing projects with the country.

"Nobody's really said 'Oh, we've got to pull out,'" he said.

Indigo Arc is a 10-employee consulting company that also works with New Delhi information technology company Icreon. The two companies began collaborating just after the attacks but have been speaking with each other for about a year.

"We're trying to clear this cloud. ... We want everybody to be safe, and security officials in India are taking necessary precautions and doing their best to protect visitors," Pulivarti said.

Justus Devadas, president of Spicer Memorial College in Pune, India, said the commercial sector has always recovered quickly after attacks, such as the train bombings in Mumbai in 2006. Devadas was part of a delegation visiting the roundtable last week.

He praised the cooperation with the FBI and India in addressing the incidents and said he hopes missions to India will be able to resume soon.

"We haven't seen a change," said Heinan Landa, CEO and president of Optimal Networks in Gaithersburg, which works with Zenith Infotech, a Mumbai firm. Landa was part of the Montgomery County business delegation that visited India last year, along with Dewan and others.

Montgomery County, which has strived to strengthen its relationship with India, also sent the prime minister letters expressing its condolences after the attack, said a county economic development spokesman.

Landa said Optimal Networks, which provides IT outsourcing services to small and medium-sized businesses, offered to fill in for its Indian partner company if it needed help completing work in the attacks' aftermath. Zenith Infotech, which also has offices in the U.S., said it appreciated the offer, but it could handle its usual workload.

"Everything is business as usual," Landa said. "We're in tune with these events since you have to be when working with global partners."

Optimal Networks and Zenith Infotech have worked together since 2005.

Ronald K. Wills, senior vice president of retail banking at HarVest Bank of Maryland in Rockville, said he thinks India and its relationships with the U.S. will become stronger than before the attacks. Wills is also involved with the India

business roundtable and founded the National Association of Business Owners and Entrepreneurs to help small businesses get involved in international opportunities.

"We understand what they're going through," Wills said, referring to the terrorist attacks against the U.S. on Sept. 11, 2001. "There's been no decrease in efforts to work with them, and we continue to see fantastic possibilities."

Wills added that India also had the advantage of not being as entangled as some other nations in the global financial woes.

He said the governor's and the state's strong interest in working with India on scientific projects isn't going to wane and that there has been no change for the trade missions coming up in 2009.