

Temecula looks to trade with India

By: CHRIS BAGLEY - Staff Writer

WINE COUNTRY --- Temecula and county officials met with a senior delegation from India on Wednesday, a tentative first step they hope could blossom into increased foreign trade and investment or a sister-cities relationship.

India's national minister of food processing, Subodh Kant Sahai, and a representative of the country's chambers of commerce traveled out to Wine Country after a two-day economic seminar in Los Angeles.

Temecula City Councilman Chuck Washington and a member of Riverside County's economic development team pitched them on the possibilities of exporting wine to India, and the group discussed opportunities for investing in one another's economies.

"We won't sign any agreements today," Washington said to polite laughter at the beginning of the 30-minute sit-down session at Callaway winery Wednesday morning. "We'll just lay the foundation for a long-lasting relationship."

The meeting's significance derives largely from the sheer size and explosive growth of India's population and economy. Its gross domestic product, an estimated \$800 billion, is roughly half the size of California's, but growing at a much faster pace of 7 percent to 8 percent a year. India's population of about 1.1 billion people is nearly four times that of the United States; the country is on track to surpass China as the world's most populous nation by the year 2030, according to United Nations projections.

India also has a rapidly growing technology sector, made possible largely by the rise of the Internet and telecommunications that have improved internationally.

Washington said he intended to organize representatives from local governments and trade groups, such as the Temecula Valley Winegrowers Association, to meet with Indian representatives for further discussions on trade and investment. Thanks to a large population of relatively well-educated workers conversant in English, numerous international companies have built factories and service centers there.

Washington said he also hopes Indian technology companies might set up stateside operations in Riverside County after determining that Los Angeles and Orange County are too expensive.

The meeting came at the suggestion of Amit Okhandiar, an Indian-American who is chief executive of mLogica, a database-management firm based in Anaheim. Like Sahai's contingent, Okhandiar and several other ethnic Indians ---- who work on both sides of the Pacific ---- were arriving from the United States-India Investment Seminar and Business Expo 2006, held Monday and Tuesday at the Los Angeles Convention Center.

Discussions on sister cities were also tentative, but several participants suggested that Temecula pair with a city with a developing wine industry, of which there are several in western India. Temecula has already paired with two sister cities: Leidschendam-Voorburg, on the Dutch coast, and Daisen-Nakayama, in the southwest of Japan's main island of Honshu.

Stevie Field, an aide on economic development to 3rd District Supervisor Jeff Stone; Ashok Ummat, assistant secretary general of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry; and P.P. Sircar, a deputy consul general in India's San Francisco consulate also

attended the meeting Wednesday in Wine Country.

India's minister for food processing is not a cabinet-level position; an Indian government Web site lists Sahai as 29th among top government ministers.

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