

Daily News (Bowling Green, KY)

March 18, 2011

Area leaders hoping to lure India business

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With a population of nearly 1 billion people and 7 percent annual growth in gross domestic product, **India** is a nation ripe for expansion outside its boundaries.

Southcentral Kentucky leaders are hoping to capitalize on that by reaching across the globe with the formation of the Indo-Kentucky Chamber of Commerce. About 125 people from around the region, state and **India** attended the organization's kickoff meeting Thursday.

Dr. Subodh K. Das, founder and chief executive officer of Phinix, a resource management company in Lexington, called the move timely.

"Growth in the United States is incremental now, but growth in **India** and China is exponential," Das said.

As an example, he cited U.S. consumption of aluminum.

"That is 80 kilograms a person annually here," he said. "In **India** it is (3 kilograms). With their population, if that were to double, just think of the potential."

Mukul Gupta is president of Chandra Porteco and Kentucky Copper and was one of the driving forces behind the formation of the new chamber.

Gupta, who visits the U.S. about every three months to check on the company's plants, including a new one in Morgantown, said that while the reception to the state was welcoming, navigating such things as financing was difficult.

"That was the major intention of forming this organization – so what difficulties we faced we can let others know about," Gupta said.

Gupta, whose Morgantown facility has just begun construction of specialized copper rods, said that while the Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce was helpful, being able to communicate with other Indian-based businesses and industries could have been even more beneficial.

Karan Gupta agrees. His family owns a hardware manufacturing company in **India** and a year ago decided to locate a hardware distribution facility in Tennessee.

Karan Gupta said such an organization could encourage entrepreneurial Indians to locate businesses in the area.

Larry Hayes, secretary of the state's Economic Development Cabinet, said he came to Thursday's reception "to validate what you are doing."

Hayes said the state has seven manufacturing companies that have all or some Indian investment, and two of them are in this area – Kentucky Copper and Logan Aluminum.

"I really see the potential for the relationship with **India** to grow like it has with Japan," he said.

When the state landed Toyota, it was the first Japanese-owned manufacturer to locate here. Now there are hundreds.

"I think we will look back five years from now and compare the situation with **India** to what happened with Toyota," he said.

Mukul Gupta is already working to help Kentucky make connections with other Indian manufacturing companies. When Hayes and Gov. Steve Beshear visited **India** in October, Mukul Gupta organized a dinner and invited his suppliers to the meeting.

Mukul Gupta also said he will provide a desk and space in Mumbai for information or for a

representative of the Indo-Kentucky chamber to help spread the word to others.

Santosh Xavier, general manager of the Holiday Inn Express in Franklin, said the thousands of Indian businessmen and women in Kentucky could participate in organizations such as the Indo-Kentucky chamber and encourage others to form businesses.

“This country needs foreign investment,” Xavier said.

Raja Bhattacharya, chairman of the organization, expects that since the word is out about the organization, membership will begin growing. Bhattacharya, along with Rodney Kirtley, executive director of the Barren River Area Development District, have been working for months to form the organization, which now has been incorporated.

— For more information about the organization, e-mail raja.bhattacharya@kkgv.com. or contact Debbie McCarty at the BRADD, 781-2381.

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