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McGuinty's trip a partisan junket

By RON BANERJEE

Premier Dalton McGuinty has just returned from a "trade mission" to South Asia, and Conservative MPP Tim Hudak has correctly questioned the size of his entourage. McGuinty took several MPPs and a support staff of almost 40 people, who collectively spent almost \$2 million of taxpayer money. This expense would be justified if it delivered tangible benefits, but this is not likely to happen for many reasons.

McGuinty spent less than a week in booming Indian centres, such as the industrial dynamo Mumbai and the technological nerve centre of Bangalore.

During his time there, the Canadian entourage received a few scant mentions buried in the inner pages of local papers. The economically dynamic hotspots of India have received thousands of eager investors and leaders from America and Europe (including George Bush last year); according to Indian journalists, Canada is not on the radar. Predictably, no contracts were signed in India during this junket.

The next part of his trip took him to Punjab, the agricultural Indian province from where Canada's Sikh population originate. Canadian business leaders who had accompanied the premier at their own expense skipped this portion, since Punjab is not a prime investment destination. But the Liberals draw much support from Ontario Sikhs, so Ontario taxpayers paid for McGuinty's photo-ops in places like the Golden Temple. These images, beamed home, are expected to bolster Liberal fortunes in the upcoming provincial elections.

Pakistan was the next stop. Eager to curry votes with the huge Pakistani-Canadian community, McGuinty and his Liberal colleagues are pursuing "trade ties" in a nation which is so unstable the State Department has classified it as a failed state.

LOTS OF ATTENTION

There is little scope for trade and investment there; terrorism, ethnic conflict, and fundamentalism are so pervasive that business ties with the outside world are virtually nonexistent. The Toronto Star's Ian Urquhart reported that few investors or trade missions visit Pakistan, so McGuinty received a lot of attention as a curiosity item. When foreign leaders do visit, the major topic of discussion revolves around alleged Pakistani support for al-Qaida terrorists operating in neighbouring Afghanistan. Our premier chose to avoid discussing this.

It is not right for McGuinty to camouflage taxpayer funding for Liberal election prospects by labelling foreign junkets as trade missions. This delegation received attention in

regions which have little to contribute to our economic interests, while being virtually ignored in the truly vibrant and promising areas of the subcontinent.

Furthermore, visiting a nation which is complicit in the deaths of our brave troops and refusing to even mention the subject for fear of jeopardizing Pakistani vote-banks smacks of unpatriotic heartlessness.

Our premier suggests that the huge number of South Asian immigrants in Ontario helps us to establish business success in that region. Canada is far down the list of nations which are engaging successfully there.

Business success is not simply a function of blindly importing masses of people from an entire subcontinent. Identifying which specific areas produce well qualified human resources who can meet our employment needs, targeting these areas in our immigration policy, and then leveraging their contacts to pursue trade relations is the basis of a rational policy of engagement.

It is high time to demand more from our leaders than the shameless pursuit of partisan goals which damage Canada.

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