

Mass. gov returns from China trade trip

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BOSTON (AP) - A Massachusetts delegation led by Gov. Deval Patrick returned from a trade mission to China with agreements to cooperate on life sciences and clean energy (NASDAQ:CLNE) projects, as well as renewed hopes for nonstop air service between Boston and Beijing.

Patrick says there were also less tangible benefits from last week's six-day trip: personal relationships established with Chinese business and government leaders that could lead to more cooperative ventures, and a chance to discuss China's human rights record with a Chinese foreign ministry official.

'It was a very full, valuable visit on a lot of levels,' Patrick told a news conference on Monday, flanked by eight other Massachusetts business and government leaders who accompanied the governor to China.

For Patrick, a high point came when he was shown something his home state lacks: super-fast public transportation. Patrick rode on a maglev train that can carry travelers 18 miles from Shanghai's main airport to its financial district in just seven minutes.

'That was a gas,' Patrick said of the technology, which uses powerful magnets to suspend a train above a track and propel it at high speeds.

Meetings with China's fourth-largest airline yielded progress in years of efforts by the Massachusetts Port Authority to bring service to China from Boston's Logan International Airport.

Grand China Airlines has applied to Chinese regulatory authorities to begin nonstop Beijing-Boston flights as early as mid-2009, said Tom Kinton, Massport's executive director.

If Chinese authorities approve the plans, the new service's timing could depend on how quickly Grand China receives its first delivery of the highly anticipated 787 Dreamliner airplane, Kinton said. In October, Boeing Co. (NYSE:BA) said it will delay the plane's commercial launch by six months to November or December 2008 because of assembly problems.

The trip also yielded technology development and commercial agreements with Chinese officials involving Massachusetts medical device makers and Canton, Mass.-based Organogenesis Inc. The company, which harnesses the body's regenerative powers to aid in wound healing and recovery from surgery, reached a pact with China's National Tissue Engineering Center, a government-funded private company.

The Massachusetts Technology Collaborative signed a pact with the Chinese Wind Energy Association to promote wind energy research, and representatives of the University of Massachusetts, Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology strengthened ties with Chinese academic institutions.

Some activists had pressed Patrick to raise China's human rights record as an issue during meetings with government officials. Patrick said he had an opportunity to politely raise the issue during a luncheon with a senior Chinese foreign ministry official who's expected to fill a post in China's U.S. Embassy in Washington.

Patrick said the official's responses about China's political freedoms 'were consistent' with statements other Chinese officials have made on the topic.

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