Virginia Governor Robert McDonnell, speaking to India Abroad last week from New Delhi — the last leg of his three-city India tour that also took him to Mumbai and Bengaluru — expressed disappointment that his meeting with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, November 21, didn’t work out. But his first visit to India, he said, was productive.

McDonnell, who led the trade delegation, said, “Prime Minister Singh was out of the country for quite a bit… and we were notified that he was not going to be able to meet with us. That was disappointing… But obviously he’s got a huge country to run and he had come back and had some other pressing issues I guess that took precedence.”

But, he said, “This has been a tremendous opportunity to put Virginia on the map in India. We have an awful lot going for us and besides the typical things Virginia is known for — which is the great business climate, high number of technology workers, our tax and regulatory climate and so forth. Also, we have over 100,000 Indian Americans who live and work in Virginia.”

He added, “Our companies got unbridled opportunities because of the fact that they (India) are a democracy; they are English speaking and have a pretty long-standing history of good relationships with the United States and so many of their companies — international conglomerates, manufacturing companies and technology companies — are all looking to expand opportunities in the US.”

Speaking of his experience of interacting with “some 800, 900 students at Christ University (Bengaluru), one of the top 10 universities in India,” he said, “We were able to speak, via teleconference, to students at Virginia Commonwealth University. There is an ongoing partner-

ship over the last couple of years between VCU and Christ University. They had about 55 VCU students in the audience in Bengaluru and back in Richmond, there were a number of students of Christ University… India wants to dramatically expand the relationship with universities in America, particularly in Virginia. They very much value a US degree.”

The advantages of such partnerships, McDonnell said, were reinforced in Delhi where they met several business and technology leaders “who actually have degrees from Virginia — several from the George Mason University, William & Mary, and so, we see the benefits already of foreign students going to Virginia universities and coming back (to India)... now they want to do business in Virginia. We are seeing that high education can promote not only understanding between nations, but specifically for our economic development, create job opportunities for our people in Virginia.”

McDonnell also opened a trade office in Delhi to increase agricultural and forestry product exports from Virginia to India. At the ceremony with US Ambassador to India Peter Burleigh and leading Indian agricultural importers and processors he said, “One of my top economic development and job creation priorities is the development of new export opportunities, which translates into farm revenue and employment opportunities from field, to processing facilities, to trucking and transportation providers, to our world-class ports. Fifteen years ago, Virginia’s agricultural exports to China were negligible. Today, China is Virginia’s second leading export customer... We believe that

“The Indian Americans who opened the doors”

Governor Robert McDonnell said the Indian Americans who accompanied him to India on his trade mission — IMC Inc’s Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Sudhakar Shenoy; North America vice president of Sandesara Danny Patel; physician Dr. Kamlesh Dave; Virginia’s State Treasurer Manju Ganeriwala (who was born in Mumbai) — were a tremendous boost to his efforts.

“It was critically important to us. Not only do they speak Hindi, but they know a lot of people up here,” he said. “All these folks were very helpful and several of them came to meetings with us where we met with business leaders.”

Their presence, he added, “showed that Indian Americans are doing very well in Virginia. They could, as business leaders, from an Indian-American perspective talk about how great it is to do business in Virginia. I can show them the surveys and the polls... but having these leaders present at the meetings were very helpful. They opened doors for us as well.”

Drinking to Virginia

AZIZ HANIFFA

Virginia Governor Robert McDonnell’s wife Maureen, who was part of the trade delegation to India, was engaged in aggressively promoting Virginia wines. The McDonnells hosted a reception in Mumbai to promote Virginia wines and tourism, and roped in Sanjay Menon, who has featured on the Decanter power list top 100 and is one of India’s top wine importers, retailers and connoisseurs, to give a glowing review of Virginia wines.

Menon, the governor said, guided the more than 150 Indian wine importers, dealers, sommeliers, journalists and representatives from India’s tourism and travel agencies through wines from various Virginia vineyards.

Sales of Virginia wine reached an all-time high in the fiscal year 2010 with more than 402,000 cases sold. Virginia is now the nation’s fifth largest wine producer and seventh largest wine grape producer.

‘The choice of Virginia winemakers in working with Cabernet Franc and Viognier as the signature or reference varietals for the region is both very interesting and intelligent’, Menon said. The wines we tasted were true expressions of the varietal and I’m looking forward to either varietal doing for Virginia what Sauvignon Blanc did to New Zealand over 20 years ago.’

Virginia Governor Robert McDonnell raises a symbolic toast in a ‘Jefferson’ cup to strong ties and friendship between India and Virginia in Mumbai. Thomas Jefferson is widely credited with being America’s first wine connoisseur