

Developing a strategic partnership

Over the years, India and Vietnam have been steadily adding new dimensions to their strategic partnership, comments *Nguyen Van Lich*

Over the past 35 years, the Vietnam-India relationship has been improving consistently. Improved bilateral ties and a new strategic partnership were highlighted last July when Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung arrived in India at the invitation of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

The Joint Declaration of Strategic Partnership between India and Vietnam, signed during the visit, seeks to diversify and deepen the relationship between the two countries. It will encompass bilateral relations of the political, economic, security, defence, cultural, science and technological dimensions and steer cooperation in regional and multilateral areas for years to come. Salient features of the Joint Declaration include the establishment of a Strategic Dialogue, a Joint Working Group on Countering Terrorism, closer defence cooperation, India's commitment to assisting Vietnam through grants and concessional lines of credit, a joint commitment to working together to establish an Asian community and expansion of bilateral trade, enhancement of science and technology and cultural cooperation and close cooperation in multilateral fora.

The two sides also signed eight agreements for cooperation in the areas of energy, fishery and aquatic products, agriculture, culture and education and specific measures to promote cooperation between ministries, sectors and localities.

MoU on Cooperation in Fisheries and Aquaculture: The MoU (memorandum of understanding) envisages exchange of



Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and their spouses at a welcoming ceremony at the Presidential Palace in New Delhi

information and data, exchange of delegations, cooperation in research and human resource development and encouragement of direct cooperation between the businesses of both countries through investment, establishment of joint ventures, and technology transfer in the area of fisheries and aquaculture.

Work Plan in the Field of Agriculture 2007-09: The Work Plan was signed under the MoU on Agricultural Research and Education, concluded between two countries in 1992. The Work Plan envisages exchange of scientists and experts, germplasm and literature, technical cooperation, joint research, and the protection of intellectual property rights of scientists of either country.

MoU on Cooperation between Vietnam Steel and Tata Steel: After signing an MoU with Vietnam Steel Corporation for building a steel complex in Vietnam of 4.5 million tons capacity, with investment from Tata Steel, the two parties signed an MoU on sharing of know-how and expertise.

Cooperation on Atomic Energy: The MoU between India's Department of Atomic Energy and the Ministry of Science and Technology of Vietnam envisages Indian assistance in training Vietnamese scientists in nuclear and related fields, Indian assistance for developing India-Vietnam Nuclear Science in Dalat and the study and evaluation of ore processing technology for Vietnamese uranium ores.

The two countries signed a Cultural Agreement in 1976. The specific activities and exchanges are agreed upon within the frame of a three-year Cultural Exchange Programme. A new *Cultural Exchange Programme* (CEP) for 2007–10 has been signed and provides for exchange of exhibitions, publications, writers, seminars, delegations of youth and sports teams, non-commercial exchange of films and documentaries, organisation of film weeks, and exchange of TV and radio programmes. The Archaeological Survey of India will depute a team for conservation of the Cham monuments in Vietnam.

MoU for Establishing a Centre of English Language Training in Danang City: This is a part of India's contribution to the Initiative for ASEAN Integration, which seeks to narrow the gap between the older and the newer members of ASEAN. The Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages in Hyderabad will be the technical consultant to the Danang centre. The centre will seek to raise the level of proficiency in English, train teachers from schools, colleges and universities and prepare students for competitive examinations, including TOEFL, International English Language Testing System (IELTS), Graduate Record Examination (GRE), and General Management Aptitude Test (GMAT). The Indian side will provide the technical equipment, faculty and staff members for a period of two years.

Educational Exchange Programme: This programme envisages the exchange of research material, educational materials and literature, organising joint conferences and seminars, training programme, exchange of faculty, recognition of educational qualifications, setting up chairs of contemporary studies, provision of scholarships and mutual assistance in IT, computer science, mathematics and science.

On 24 March 2008 India and Vietnam signed an MoU for Cooperation in Security Matters, including terrorism and transnational crime, particularly drug trafficking. Talks between India's Home Minister Shivraj Patil and Vietnamese Minister for Public Security, General Le Hong Anh, preceded the event. The MoU comes close on the heels of the Treaty of Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters signed during Patil's visit to Vietnam in October

last year. The treaty ensures close mutual assistance in prevention, investigation and prosecution of crime in the two countries. It also covers service of summons and other judicial papers and execution of warrants. Tracing proceeds and instruments of crime, their forfeiture and confiscation are also part of the treaty.

India has also agreed to impart training to Vietnamese officers in investigation of bank fraud, organised crime, money laundering, economic offences, drug trafficking, cyber crime and scientific investigation. Two courses for Vietnamese police officers have since been conducted. India is also working on establishing a US\$550,000 cyber forensic laboratory in Vietnam. In the near future, India will become one of Vietnam's leading partners in politics, economy, trade, investment, security, defence, science and technology and education.

Recently, a delegation of 20 business houses from Kolkata visited Vietnam. They operate in the fields of IT, electronics components, machines, equipment, steel, iron, cement and pharmaceutical products. Leading Indian corporations such as Reliance, Essar, ONGC, Infosys, NIIT, Wipro, Ranbaxy, Satyam, GAIL and Aditya Birla are expected to continue investing in Vietnam. Essar has agreed to invest \$527 million in southern Vietnam. During the Vietnamese Prime Minister's visit the two countries' enterprises signed agreements and trading contracts worth over \$4 billion.

Trade turnover between Vietnam and India has been increasing by 2030 per cent annually. In 2003 trade turnover was \$490 million; it rose to over \$1 billion in 2006, meeting the Vietnam-Indian Action Plan for 2004-6. In 2007 Vietnam's exports to India were \$180 million, an increase of 31 per cent, and imports were \$1344 million, an increase of 54 per cent. Vietnam's key exports to India are farm produce, handicrafts, footwear, garments and textiles, wood products, and electronics spare parts. Its key import items from India are pharmaceutical products, medical equipment, and IT.

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