

UPDATE

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Asian Development Bank Proposes Big Coordinated Plan For Six Nations Of Mekong Basin

Proposed road, bridge and port projects in Vietnam are included in a big regional package of proposals agreed on by planners in Asean and at the Asian Development Bank.

The extensive wish-list is part of ADB's long term master plan for infrastructure development for effective links among all the countries of Southeast Asia. As described by the Economist Intelligence Unit, the plan would support ADB's Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Co-operation Program.

The Bank is providing the overall plan, supplying the seed capital and helping coordinate among the participating countries. They include Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. The total bill for the transport projects is forecast to exceed US \$10 billion.

One group of projects scheduled for the next two to five years is designed to stimulate trade among Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam. Among them is the My Thuan Bridge over a branch of the Mekong 50 km south of Ho Chi Minh City. Australia has pledged US \$43 million for the job. The Vietnamese government will fund the remaining US \$32. In addition, the 240 km road between Phnom Penh and Ho Chi Minh City road is designated for upgrading, along with ferry and landing facilities. ADB has allocated US \$50m.

Another project planned among the first group calls for widening Route 9 to four lanes from Dong Ha on Vietnam's central coast to Mukdahan in Thailand.

Second tier projects anticipated by ADB include:

- Two ports at the eastern end of Route 9 near Dong Ha.
- Upgrading eight small-to mid-sized ports in Central Vietnam.
- A port on the Thi Vai River 70km south of Ho Chi Minh City.

A project to the north will be funded unilaterally by China but is considered an important part of the Mekong development strategy. That is the upgrading of the Chuxiong-to-Dali road in Yunnan. This is part of China's link to Myanmar. People committed to the the development of the Mekong basin also talk about the possibility that all the capital cities of Southeast Asia will be linked with a rail network. But, as the Economist Intelligence Unit observes, this is unlikely soon.

Vietnam Gives Foreign Advertisers a Break

Vietnam has relaxed its restrictions on the size of foreign lettering on advertising billboards. An order from the office of the Prime Minister stipulates that joint venture companies may now display names and trade names in foreign languages, and these foreign names can now be bigger than the Vietnamese lettering, but not as large as twice the size of the Vietnamese. Last February police removed and painted over foreign product names such as Carlsberg, Coca-Cola, Tiger beer and Kodak. That action was described as "cultural cleansing."

Speakers Invited For GSVA Meeting

Greater Seattle Vietnam Association invites all members and friends to its annual meeting Thursday, September 12, 5:30 p.m. at the Social Hall of the University Friends Meeting (Quakers). The address is 4001 NE 9th Ave, Seattle. That is the low, dark building on the corner of 40th and NE 9th.

The program: a buffet dinner, speakers and GSVA business, including election by the membership of new members of the Board of Directors. The new Board will elect officers.

Two speakers are planned, including Jim Street, former President of the Seattle City Council and early supporter for a Sister City relationship with Haiphong. He met Haiphong Mayor Dao An in June 1995 during the visit of a Haiphong delegation to Seattle. Later that year Street visited Haiphong with GSVA President Norma Mohr and University of Washington Professor Hy Resnick. All three were in Vietnam then with the trade mission led by Governor Mike Lowry.

The other guest speaker will be Jerilyn Brusseau, Director of Peace Trees Vietnam. She will discuss a project to plant trees to replace landmines in the old demilitarized zone in Quang Tri Province in Vietnam.

(see directions on page 3)

ADB Has A Web Site

The Asian Development Bank can be found on the World Wide Web at the following address:

<http://www.asiandevbank.org>

Scholars Look At Quality Of Life

A professor from Seattle has been in Vietnam for a new phase of the research that continues to offer details to define traditional village life with its emerging changes and to calculate the human cost of war and peace.

Professor Charles Hirschman is Chair of the Department of Sociology at the University of Washington. His interest in Southeast Asia and his concern for the people began when he worked for the Peace Corps in a Malaysian village.

In 1988, he began his collaborations with scholars in Vietnam. The current installment of their work is the second year of a five-year project in collaboration with Professor Tuong Lai, Director of the Institute of Sociology of the Vietnam National Center for Social and Human Sciences in Hanoi. The two men have been assisted over the years by several Vietnamese and American social scientists. Their new research is based on a survey of 1,800 households in rural and urban communities in a province of northern Vietnam.

Population numbers assessed

The work in progress follows and builds on a study in 1991 called the Vietnam Life History Survey. Researchers for that study questioned people in 400 households in rural and urban communities in the north and the south. Inhabitants were asked in detail about their current status and about conditions and events from their past, sometimes going back several generations.

The data collected were analyzed with information from many other sources, revealing patterns in education, employment, migration, marriage, childbearing, population and mortality rates.

One analysis based on the findings was "Vietnamese Casualties During the American War: A New Estimate," written by Hirschman with Samuel Preston and Vu Manh Loi. (Population and Development Review 21. No. 4. December 1995.)

Some of the results may surprise readers. It was already known that Vietnam's population grew from 20 million in 1945 to almost 75 million in 1995. Hirschman and his associates went further, tabulating growth for specific periods, including the years of the war with the United States, 1965 to 1975. Tabulations also were made by age and gender.

The authors reported: "Even between 1965 and 1975, the mortality rates for young men in the most vulnerable age group, those 15 to 29, were only slightly above one percent per year. With a rate of natural increase that was at least two percent per year in the 1960's and 1970's, there were actually more potential military recruits every year (in both the North and the South) than in each previous year."

Mortality drop continues

In that same report, the scholars noted a finding from an earlier study that they said requires more analysis. It also deals with death rates. Mortality was very high during the colonial era, dropping to moderate levels during the 1960's and 1970's, particularly in the North. Then the downward trend leveled off during the 1980's.

The authors commented, "a satisfactory analysis of how moderate levels of mortality were reached in a very poor country during wartime conditions is yet to be carried out."

The current five-year study, called the Vietnam Longitudinal Study, is based on annual interviews of the same subjects. Researchers believe they will be able to record changes in the quality of life among villagers during the transition from socialism to a free market economy. What the researchers have seen already causes concern, as described by sociologists Tuong Lai and Vu Manh Loi in conversations at the University of Washington.

Rural problems cited

They were deeply saddened by the quality of life in the rural communities they visited. Vu Manh Loi was particularly concerned about what he called the "miserable" status of rural children today. He said childhood malnutrition is an estimated 59 percent. Many teachers have abandoned the village schools, which are now closed. He said literacy is decreasing.

Combining Statistics With Compassion

He also was surprised to see women in a state of exhaustion performing extremely strenuous labor. Prof. Tuong Lai also said his biggest concern is for the rural children. He said the only way to get help for them would be to help the mothers, and they, he said, were particularly burdened because of the shortage of able-bodied men in rural communities.

Tuong Lai appealed to the Greater Seattle Vietnam Association (GSVA) to send a small delegation to one or more communities in his survey area. He proposed that the Vietnamese women and the American women may talk about the problems and look for ways they may be solved.

Nguyen Thang returns home

Still one more member of the community of Vietnamese scholars at the university here has returned home to Hanoi. He is Ngyuen Minh Thang, who spent three years in Seattle conducting post-doctoral studies and projects under a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. Thang is a demographer who specializes in population studies. He and his wife Huong Vu and their two young children leave many friends here who will miss them greatly.

Thang was a big help to GSVA during its initial contacts with Haiphong, responding to Haiphong's first inquiries about the Sister Cities program. Thang was an effective "middle man". He made phone calls, translated faxes and advised GSVA about the history and current conditions in Haiphong.

History Shelf When Did The War Start ?

In Washington, D.C. the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee has voted to change the day the Vietnam War began - at least for the purposes of calculating compensation to a group of disabled U.S. veterans. In the eyes of the U.S. Congress, the war began on August 5, 1964, when President Johnson said two Navy destroyers were under attack by North Vietnam in the Gulf of Tonkin. The Veterans Affairs Committee wants the date changed to February 28, 1961, the date that U.S. military advisers first accompanied South Vietnamese troops on patrols. Changing the date would make a difference of several thousand dollars in disability payments, according to the New York Times.

Follow These Directions

Directions to University Friends Meeting for the annual meeting of GSVA September 12.

The Meeting House is a low, sprawling brown building partially hidden by trees and bushes at 4001 NE 9th Avenue. That is the corner of 40th and NE 9th ave, between I-5 and the University bridges. It may be reached in three ways: But follow carefully because some of the approaches are complicated by streets that are one-way part of the time and two-way part of the time.

1. Start on 40th anywhere ^{west} east of the I-5 bridge; proceed ^{west} west; at 9th Ave, turn left.
2. Start at University Bridge, going north; three options for right turns appear at the end of the bridge; take the first, marked "NE 40th westbound"; this turnoff circles under the bridge and leads to a 4-way stop intersection with 40th and 7th; make a very sharp right turn (almost a hairpin) putting you on 40th going back ^{east} east; the second street is 9th; turn left.
3. Start on Roosevelt Way going south toward University Bridge (*the most easy but least logical route*); as you get close to water, resist temptations to turn right on 43rd or 42nd; watch for an unmarked alley at the end of the last block of low buildings on the right; turn right immediately; after 50 yards or so you will see 9th, with the University Friends Meeting on the other side of the street.

- Parking:
1. The public lot on 9th across the street from the Meeting House.
 2. The lot on 9th adjacent to the Meeting House.
 3. The south shoulder of 40th between 7th and 9th.
 4. Random spaces on neighborhood streets.

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Greater Seattle Vietnam Association

A grassroots, non-profit, duly incorporated and registered organization dedicated to helping the people of Seattle create and maintain links with the people of Vietnam.

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