

## INFORMATION

**Serminar: Buddhism, Vietnamese culture and society in the time of industrialization and modernization**

On March 26, 2008 the Institute of Religious Studies (Việt Nam Academy of Social Sciences) organized a seminar titled *“Buddhism, Vietnamese culture and society in the time of industrialization and modernization”* in Hà Nội. Taking part in the workshop were representatives from Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Party Central Organizing Committee, the Party Central Department on Propagation, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, the Việt Nam Fatherland Front, the Hồ Chí Minh Academy of Politics and Administration, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Party Central Department on Mobilization of the People, the Việt Nam Association of History Science, UNESCO, some foreign embassies in Hà Nội, and the most venerable, the most virtuous, scientists and religion researchers of the Institute of Religious Studies and many relevant organizations. Associate Professor, Dr. Nguyễn Xuân Thắng, vice president of Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences, opened the workshop.

About 20 reports were sent to the workshop, mentioning many angles of Vietnamese Buddhist culture as well as

its varieties caused by cultural, social and political factors taking place during the industrialization and modernization of the country. These reports mention the value of Buddhist cultures to the development of the country and the view of Vietnamese Party and State towards religion issues and emphasizes that Vietnamese Buddhism, during its history of 200 years, has always fallen paralleled the vitality of the country throughout its ups and downs. Especially after 20 years of innovation, integration and development, beliefs – religions in general and Buddhism in particular – become increasingly strengthened and solidified.

The reports “Vietnamese Buddhism in the country’s new opportunities: Chances and challenges” (by Most Venerable Thích Gia Quang, Vice General Secretary of the Executive Board of Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha); “Research and Application of Buddhist values in modern Vietnamese society” (Associate Professor, Dr. Nguyễn Hồng Dương, the Chairman of Institute of Religious Studies at the Việt Nam Academy of Social Sciences); “The role of Buddhism in the firm development of the country” (Dr Nguyễn Quốc Tuấn); “Vietnamese

Buddhist Community abroad and the widening of Buddhism with Vietnamese color” (Dr. Nguyễn Mạnh Cường, Institute of Religious Studies); “Khmer southern sect Zen in the time of unification and integration of Vietnamese Buddhism” (by Venerable Dương Nhơn, vice chairman of the Executive Board of Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha).

At the end of the workshop, some delegates said that the workshop was a practical action welcoming the 2008 Vesak, an international religious festival first recognized by United Nations in 1999. Vesak took place in Việt Nam in mid-May 2008.

#### *MAI HOA*

##### **Scientific Workshop: “The situation of teaching and learning history in schools: causes and solutions”**

On March 27, 2008, the Việt Nam Association of History Science, the Việt Nam Revolution Museum, the Hồ Chí Minh City College of Social Sciences and Humanities, the Hồ Chí Minh City Hồng Bàng University and the Party Central Department on Propagation, and the Ministry of Education and Training organized a scientific workshop with the theme: “The situation of teaching and learning history in schools: causes and solutions” in Hà Nội. At the workshop, there were managers and researchers

from the universities, individuals from the history department, science offices, and museums, central and local educational officers, history school teachers, history book writers, exam writers and exam markers of history. General Võ Nguyên Giáp, the honorable chairman of Việt Nam Association of History Science, wrote to welcome the workshop.

In the opening speech of the workshop, Professor Phan Huy Lê, the chairman of Việt Nam Association of History Science quoted warning numbers about the quality of teaching history in schools. For instance, in the entrance exam to university and college 2007, 150,234 examinees – 95.74% of the total number of examinees – got scores from 0 to 4.5 mark, among whom 5,908 (3.76%) got a score of 0 and only 17 examinees got a score of 9. The average score was 2.09, which is lower than the average of 4.29 for all subjects.

Professor Đinh Xuân Lâm said, “Many people feel dissatisfied with the low marks in history for the entrance exams to university and college.”

The reports sent to and presented in the workshop focus on reflecting and analyzing the situation in schools and in the locality. The results serve as a warning for the level of teaching and learning of history occurring in schools, where the subject of history and history teachers themselves are not respected. History is considered a secondary subject, with poorly

qualified teachers, an unscientific method of teaching, a syllabus that lacks continuation, and textbooks bad both in content and form. Both students and their parents therefore are not interested in the subject, and exam regulations cause exam questions to have a negative effect on the actual learning of the subject, achievement in classes, etc.

The delegates discussed and proposed many solutions to improve the quality of teaching and learning history in schools, like correcting the view of history and the learning of history, training and retraining teachers, improving the ability of self learning, teaching, and doing research, renewing examination and evaluation, investing to equip the teaching and learning of the history, and improving the role of management and research offices in museums, organizations, and the of whole society.

Moreover, the delegates also have chance to listen to information about the teaching and learning of history in other countries.

At the end of the workshop, organization board concluded and summarized the main issues, bringing forward some petitions to report to the Ministry of Education and Training and leaders at all levels.

*NGÔ THẾ LONG*

**Serminar: Building up intellectual forces in the speed-up of industrialization, modernization, and international economical integration**

On April 1, 2008, in Hà Nội, the Party Central Department on Propagation organized a workshop on “Building up intellectual forces in the speed-up of industrialization, modernization, and international integration.” Scientists, leaders and managers of the ministries and departments took part in the workshop. Dr. Bùi Sĩ Tiếu, vice chairman of the Party Central Department on Propagation, presided at the workshop.

In the workshop, the delegates focused on discussing 6 main issues: the main criteria needed to aid and identify intellectuals, the role of Vietnamese intellectuals during the time of industrialization, modernization, and international economical integration, the situation of intellectuals and the evaluation of their contribution during innovation, the main good and bad points of Vietnamese intellectuals, the main issues in the objectives and views of the Party towards building up intellectual forces, and the main solutions to building up intellectual forces in the speed-up of industrialization, modernization and international economical integration.

Many ideas were directly expressed in the workshop and many others are sent in writing to the organization board, some of which paid special attention to the answering of the questions: Who is

intellectual? What are the qualities of intellectual forces in modern situation? Most of the ideas expressed attention to the criteria to decreasing limits on intellectuals that are based on assigning their roles, positions and responsibility in the new time, promoting their potential and strength in the innovation of the country, and understanding international integration in this time.

According to the delegates, in order to build up and fully promote the potential of intellectuals to meet the demand, the Party and the State need to focus on the gathering of intellectuals. Intellectuals need to work in the most convenient working environment and be treated nicely in terms of both material and spiritual life.

*MINH XUÂN*

**Workshop: “Journalism Training to meet social demand”**

On April 22, 2008 in Hà Nội, the Department of Journalism in the Academy of Journalism and Communication organized a scientific workshop on “Journalism Training to meet social demand.” The workshop was organized to evaluate the quality of journalism training and find solutions to improve the quality of journalism training to meet social demand in a time of globalization and economic integration.

The delegates agreed that journalism training is a difficult task, a process of

training people who must have both professional skill and loyalty towards the party, the regime, and the country. Individuals therefore must combine political and professional qualities together, and this process requires that both teacher and worker are well-qualified and aware of how to design and execute their work. With new demand for a developing media-journalism system during the WTO integration time, a common awareness and effective solutions to renew journalism training are essential in this period.

The organization board received more than 30 reports focusing on two main ideas:

- Common issues of journalism which analyze and clarify the basic demand and skills of journalists in particular and journalism in general in this period.
- Journalism training as evaluated by teachers, researchers in schools, research institutes, and journalists and managers from the press.

The delegates paid special attention to and agreed with the ideas expressed in the report “The Orientation of journalism training in the innovation and international integration time” by Professor, Dr. Dương Xuân Ngọc, deputy director of the Academy of Journalism and Communication. In the report, he mentioned some starting points for renovation of journalism

training in the new time. First, it called for a thorough grasp of the resolution of the 5<sup>th</sup> plenum of the Party Central Committee (10<sup>th</sup> tenure) about the ideology and argument of journalism training. Secondly, it addressed renovating the syllabus, textbooks, teaching and learning methods. Thirdly, it argued that journalism training must be based on the unity between schools (training bases), institutes of journalism research, and journalism production bases (radios and newspapers stations). Fourthly, it supported socializing journalism training. Fifthly, it said to combine journalism training with retraining and the improvement of journalists.

The delegates claimed that it is necessary to be aware that the training of journalists must be practical, modern, and suitable with the new demands of integration. Besides clarifying the beginning stages of training, more attention must be paid to syllabi, textbooks, the enrollment of teachers, the teaching and evaluation of students, the material and technological facilities, and management.

VÂN HÀ

**Workshop: Vietnam's economic changes after accession to WTO**

Vietnamese economic experts joined their foreign colleagues to discuss the impact of Vietnam's accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) on

its economy and society at a workshop in Ha Noi on April 2.

Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade Nguyễn Thành Biên told the workshop that Vietnam's economy recorded a growth rate of 8.5 percent in the first year the country joined the WTO.

Đặng Đức Anh, an economic expert of the Vietnamese Ministry of Planning and Investment, said the high growth rate, a record for the past decade, is due to domestic investment and consumption.

Business and production in major economic sectors have also showed positive signs.

Last year, Vietnam attracted more than 20 billion USD in foreign direct investment (FDI), equal to the total capital attracted in the previous five years. The nation's export revenues also reached 48.4 billion USD, a year-on-year rise of more than 20 percent.

The securities market also developed with its capital accounting for more than 40 percent of the nation's gross domestic product (GDP).

Deputy Minister Biên said that apart from such advantages, Vietnam has faced many difficulties and challenges such as high consumer price index and import surplus.

Experts said the volume of consumer goods imported from other Southeast Asian nations and China into Vietnam has increased. Additionally, Vietnam's accession to the world's biggest

trade body has impacted on the nation's inflation and its monetary and exchange rate policy.

However, they said the prices of Vietnamese goods remains competitive due to the depreciation of the greenback against currencies of Vietnam's major trade partners.

If the inflation rate is still high, Vietnam will lose its price competitiveness compared to regional major rivals, especially when the US dollar regains its value, experts warned.

To maintain a high economic growth rate, the experts suggested Vietnam speed up its reform and improve the growth quality and competitiveness of all sectors, businesses and the entire economy.

They said Vietnam needed to maintain its competitive advantage in major staples like footwear, textiles and apparels and farm produce.

Experts also warned Vietnamese businesses to explore the WTO's regulations to devise more effective and suitable business strategies.

The workshop was jointly held by the Ministry of Industry and Trade and the European Commission Multilateral Trade Assistance Project Vietnam (phase II).

*(Vietnam Agency)*

**Vietnam's long term prospects remain strong, despite domestic and inter-national macroeconomic turbulence**

*Sa Pa, June 6, 2008* - The one-day mid-year informal Consultative Group (CG) Meeting for Vietnam was held today, with donors expressing their continued support to Vietnam amidst global and domestic macroeconomic turbulence.

At the meeting, the Government and donors jointly reviewed Vietnam's macroeconomic management, as well as the country's revised priorities and the impact on poor and disadvantaged people. They heard reports from the Vietnam Business Forum and the Anti-corruption Dialogue held prior to the mid-year CG. The delegates spent the afternoon discussing future challenges to Vietnam with regard to climate change, ensuring decent living standards for the poor and ethnic minorities, the importance of local participation in development programs, as well as aid effectiveness.

*H.E. Deputy Prime Minister Trương Vĩnh Trọng* opened the meeting by taking stock of the recent challenges in the domestic and international environment, such as the food and oil price hike, high inflation, and trade deficit. *"This has affected the country's macro-economic stability and the pace of economic growth as well as delivered a direct impact on the livelihoods of different groups of the population, especially the poor,"* Mr. Trọng said. The Deputy Prime Minister briefed the donors on the comprehensive measures Vietnam is taking to tackle the challenges, and

called on the donors to provide further support so that Vietnam will “*rise above difficulties*”.

*Minister of Planning and Investment, Mr. Võ Hồng Phúc, updated delegates on the socio-economic developments so far this year, as well as the outlook for the rest of the year. “Despite difficulties,” he said, “the Vietnamese economy has continued to register high growth, but challenges remain that may affect implementation of development targets in the coming period”.*

#### MACROECONOMIC MANAGEMENT

Delegates noted that while Vietnam faces various challenges, such as a larger trade deficit and higher inflation, there is reason to remain upbeat about the long term prospects of the country. The key challenge ahead was to ensure steadfast implementation of the measures announced by the Government to stabilize the economy.

*Mr. Ben Bingham, the IMF Senior Resident Representative reminded delegates of the need for the Government to respond to signs of weakening economic indicators, which are beginning to weigh in on investors’ sentiments. He also urged the government to ensure transparency and timely data provision on key economic and financial variables, a sentiment echoed by several other donors at the meeting. “We have been encouraged by the recent speeches by the Prime Minister and other senior officials*

*which have clearly laid out the economic challenges the country faces, and the broad policy strategy for addressing them. The priority now is to translate that strategy into a concrete and convincing policy package that will bolster investor confidence and restore macroeconomic stability,”* remarked Ben Bingham.

*ADB Country Director to Vietnam, Mr. Ayumi Konishi fully supported the Prime Minister’s eight point policy action to manage the current economic difficulties. “We strongly believe that it is time for the government to move quickly, clearly and decisively in implementing the stated policy actions, and present a clear direction to the investors and the general public of Vietnam as a whole.”*

*The United Nations Resident Coordinator, Mr. John Hendra stressed the importance of not leaving the poor behind in times of difficulties. “We strongly endorse the government’s decision to prioritize fighting inflation, so that those Vietnamese who have left poverty do not fall back into it.” he said. “Rising food prices are a huge burden for poor households. Hence, providing additional support to the poor is especially important in this period of high inflation.”*

*Mr. Daisuke Matsunaga, Deputy Chief of Mission from the Embassy of Japan echoed other speakers in congratulating the government for*

sending the right signal to the market on giving priority to stability. *“We agree with the government’s point of reining in public spending. However, it is necessary to be prudent and ensure continued social investments so as to maintain safety nets for the poor.”*

Reporting on the results of the Vietnam Business Forum (VBF), Mr. Nguyễn Văn Lâm, representing the International Finance Corporation conveyed the conclusions from the VBF, including a determination that government and businesses continue to strengthen their partnership to advance reforms and sustain economic development. *“Business representatives shared the government’s concern for the current economic trends and agreed that measures to stabilize macro economic economy should receive top priority”,* Mr. Lan told the meeting, adding that businesses would like the government to *“review and revise policies that would enable a more efficient and innovative business-enabling environment”*

#### ANTI-CORRUPTION

The Government Inspectorate informed the meeting of the main contents of the anti-corruption dialogue on June 3rd in Hanoi. Donors welcomed the fruitful and frank exchanges during the dialogue. In concurring with the report of the dialogue given to the meeting by the Government’s Inspectorate, the

Swedish Ambassador, Mr. Rolf Bergman, added that the Government of Vietnam should be commended for placing its anti-corruption efforts high on the political agenda and urged early implementation. Yet he also called for greater clarity on the further development process of the legal framework, in particular the Civil Service Law. *“The role of the mass media, including journalists, must be given a most important role to play. Unless the media is given this strong role in the struggle against corruption, the struggle will never end successfully,”* he also emphasized.

Donor participants also noted that the empowerment of elected bodies and an expanded role for civil society are crucial factors in the fight against corruption.

#### CLIMATE CHANGE

The government and development partners agreed that climate change will pose new threats to Vietnam’s socio-economic welfare, especially for people in the low lying and coastal areas. Delegates were encouraged by the government’s quick action in preparing the National Target Program (NTP) on response to climate change. *“Tackling climate change threats requires multi-sector approach, and we are encouraged by the Prime Minister’s chairing of the Steering Committee for the NTP. The next step would be to ensure strong institutional arrangement at all levels for effective*



implementation, especially at the community level, where the poor suffer most from disaster. It is also essential that a comprehensive national climate change strategy is developed,” said Mr. Peter Lysholt Hansen, Ambassador of Denmark. Other donors noted that in light of the risk of increased frequency of disasters, further strengthening of the Government’s disaster management systems remains critical.

#### NORTHERN MOUNTAINS AND AID EFFECTIVENESS

During discussion on the effectiveness of development aid to the northern mountain area, Ms. Lynne Racine, Development Counselor of the Embassy of Canada noted that “Perhaps the most important factor in making aid to the northern mountains more effective, is to include ethnic minorities in decisions affecting the development of their communities.”

In his closing remarks, the Vice-President of East Asia and the Pacific of the World Bank, Mr. James Adams, co-chairing the mid-year CG meeting, expressed appreciation for the productive discussion between the government and the donor community. “The discussion reflects the overall

positive attitude toward the long term prospects of Vietnam, despite the need for firm actions to tackle short term challenges.” On behalf of the participants, he thanked the host for organizing the mid year CG meeting successfully in the beautiful town of Sa Pa.

In the concluding remarks, Minister of Planning and Investment, Mr. Võ Hồng Phúc reviewed the points raised during discussions at the mid year CG meeting, highly appreciating the comments provided by the donor community. He stressed that although Vietnam is facing some immediate challenges, with the determination of the government and the support from the donor community, the country will be able to maintain a high and sustainable growth rate, serving as an attractive investment destination for foreign investors in the future. On behalf of the Ministry of Planning and Investment, Minister Phúc thanked the Lào Cai People’s Committee for successfully hosting the mid-year CG 2008.

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