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## Deep friendship binds Vietnam, Malaysia together

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WHILE the Malaysians joyfully celebrated Merdeka Day yesterday, the Vietnamese look forward to celebrating theirs with the same kind of feelings tomorrow.

The Vietnamese, after about 100 years of writhing under the suppression of foreign domination, on August 19 1945, under the leadership of the Communist Party of Vietnam headed by President Ho Chi Minh, finally overthrew the double yoke of colonialism and fascism. The August revolution, strongly supported by the entire Vietnamese people, ended in triumph and on September 2 1945, President Ho Chi Minh proclaimed independence, thereby founding the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

Even then, the young republic had to fight nine years of resistance war which ended with the Dien Bien Phu victory on May 7 1954 and after that it needed another 20 years of fierce struggle to achieve reunification and regain full independence for the country on the April 30 1975. In July 1976, after the general elections where the entire people of reunified Vietnam for the first time and fulfilled their right of franchise, the country was renamed the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

Vietnam's history is full of challenges and victories. Over the past 55 years, the Vietnamese, under the banner of the Communist Party of Vietnam, have recorded great achievements in safeguarding and building the country.

The Doi Moi (comprehensive renovation) line implemented over the last 14 years since 1986 has brought about very important changes in the economic, political and social lives of the Vietnamese.

From a country that had no place on the world map and was devastated by colonial exploitation and an imperialist war, Vietnam has emerged as a sovereign and free country. Doi Moi in the economy has helped Vietnam achieve a high GDP growth rate of 7.4 per cent a year from 1991 to 2000.

A country that had to import nearly one million tonnes of foodgrains to feed its people every year prior to 1989 has since begun to export rice. It has now become the world's second largest rice exporter, third largest coffee exporter and second largest exporter of cashew nut. With this, the quality of life in Vietnam has improved considerably in material, cultural and spiritual aspects.

Vietnam's pro-active policy of diversification, friendship with all countries and quest for peace, independence and development has resulted in it having economic and trade relations with 154 countries and territories and diplomatic ties with 167 countries, including all major powers.

The month of July in 1995 marks a milestone in Vietnam's international relations as it joined Asean, signed a cooperation agreement with the EU and normalised diplomatic relations with the US. Vietnam actively takes part in various important regional and world organisations such as Apec, UNO and its system, and is now preparing for accession to the WTO. For the first time in its history, Vietnam is enjoying the most favourable environment for peaceful construction and development.

The remarkable success of the Doi Moi cause in all fields has now created a premise for Vietnam to embark on the rapid industrialisation of the country.

Efforts will be made to improve the living standards of the population, enhance human resources and scientific, technological and economic infrastructure, thus creating the necessary conditions for turning Vietnam

into an industrialised nation by the year 2020.

For this to be successfully achieved, Vietnam needs socio-political stability, a peaceful and stable environment in the region and the world at large as Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said recently: "Stability is vital for development and growth and for the business sector to manage their businesses successfully."

Vietnam and Malaysia have very close relations deeply rooted in their peoples' warm sentiments to each other and the common aspiration for peace and stability, development and prosperity. The two countries established diplomatic relations as early as 1973 and there has been an active exchange of visits from both sides since. With Vietnam becoming a full member of Asean in 1995, the friendship and cooperation between Vietnam and Malaysia has reached a higher level.

Visits to Vietnam by Their Majesties, Yang Di Pertuan Agong and Raja Permaisuri Agong (1995), and Dr Mahathir as well as visits by the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam Do Muoi, President of State Tran Duc Luong, Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet, Chairman of National Assembly Nong Duc Manh to Malaysia have accelerated the development of friendly and cooperative relations between the two countries.

Vietnam and Malaysia also enjoy good trade, investment and tourism links. Trade volume has been increasing at a pace of over 20 per cent to reach US\$638 million (US\$1 = RM3.80) in 1999 compared to merely US\$17.4 million in 1987. Malaysian companies have invested significantly in Vietnam with over 70 projects in operation and around US\$1 billion of capital investment.

With the fast recovery of the Malaysian economy, Malaysian investment in Vietnam will surely rise. Malaysian businessmen are committed and serious in doing business with Vietnam and their investments highly effective. Vietnam is grateful to Malaysia for its valuable support and fruitful cooperation.

The Vietnamese greatly admire the success achieved by Malaysia in economic development in the 43 years since independence. From a poor agricultural country with a legacy of long colonial domination and exploitation, the people of Malaysia have build their country into one of the most advanced nations in the region and the world. Vietnam has a lot to learn from Malaysia's experiences, especially in economic and human resource development as well as environmental protection.

We have witnessed how the people of Malaysia have strived to achieve the goals embodied in the seventh Five-Year Plan and in the long run Wawasan 2020. We are confident that under the leadership of Dr Mahathir, the Malaysians will record further success on the way to achieving Wawasan 2020. Malaysia boleh!

May I express our heartfelt congratulations to Malaysians on Merdeka Day and best wishes for the friendship and cooperation between our two countries.

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