

Vietnam's President On "Charm Offensive" In New York
Bernama
Sept 29, 2015

NEW YORK, Sept 29 (Bernama) -- Vietnam's President Truong Tan Sang, wrapping up his New York visit after making an appearance at the General Assembly, went on a 'charm offensive' and obligingly answered questions at the Asia Society in New York on Monday. Quizzed by Asia Society's executive vice president Tom Nagorski, who is also the former managing editor for international coverage at ABC News, Sang combined both candour and humour to answer questions that were tricky and, at times, pointed.

Nagorski, winner of eight Emmy awards, touched on a wide range of subjects - from the situation in the Asia-Pacific region to Vietnam's economy, and the intensifying U.S-Vietnamese relations to the potential conflict in the South China Sea.

Sang cited a number of challenges facing the region, including the ASEAN grouping, in the form of the perils of an unstable situation on the Korean peninsula, terrorism, cyber security, and freedom of navigation.

He repeatedly underscored the importance of maritime security. Vietnam's relationship with China is delicately poised where on one hand, both share a growing bilateral trade and economic interaction.

On the other hand, Vietnam would not like to jettison its claims over islands in the South China Sea which China regards as its own.

Sang said Chinese president Xi Jinping's recent proposal that the issue in the South China Sea be not militarised concurred with the ASEAN view.

"I support this idea which is in line with the global understanding," he said.

When told that China argues that it has "historical claims" to the islands of Hoang Sa (Paracel) and Truong Sa (Spratly), Sang retorted that Vietnam also had full historical evidence and legal basis to support its sovereignty over the islands.

Vietnam is determined to protect its independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, and settle all disputes on the basis of international law, he maintained.

Besides Vietnam, other countries staking claims on the islands are the Philippines, Taiwan, Brunei and Malaysia.

Asked if he would like U.S. forces to return to Vietnam, Sang said his country's policy "is to diversify and intensify multilateral relations with other countries"; he cited as an example, foreign naval vessels, including from the United States that call at Vietnamese ports.

He was frank about the issues with China but also spoke warmly about Vietnam's

relationship with the U.S. and provided a strong impetus to strengthening bilateral ties with the latter.

Vietnam is trying to persuade the U.S. to rescind its ban on sales of weapons to the country and has been saying that lifting the ban would send a "signal" to the entire world that U.S.-Vietnam relations had finally normalised.

Sang said U.S. President Barack Obama's visit to Vietnam, possibly in autumn, would consolidate a comprehensive partnership formalised during his own visit to Washington DC in 2013.

The U.S. would like Vietnam to improve its human rights record to realise the full potential of its relationship. U.S. Congressmen have been saying that Hanoi needs to improve its human rights record if it wants to get privileges in the Trans-Pacific Partnership currently being negotiated. Vietnam is one of the 12 nations that would possibly be members in the TPP.

Sang also held out a carrot to potential U.S. investors whom he courted to set up operations in his country which would offer them incentives and other benefits.

"We are also keen to attract investments in infrastructure development. Japan has provided some 40 percent of its overseas development investment for Vietnam's infrastructure development," he said.

-- BERNAMA

Copyright © 2015 BERNAMA

<http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v8/newsindex.php?id=1174895>