

**EMPOWERING
ASIA – AN
INCREASED
ROLE AND A
COMMON
VOICE AS A
RESPONSIBLE
PLAYER**
GUEST OF HONOR AND
FIRST KEYNOTE SPEAKER
MONDAY, JANUARY 22, 2007

by

His Excellency Vu Khoan

*Former Deputy Prime Minister,
Special Envoy to the Prime Minister
on External Affairs (Guest of honor
and keynote speaker from Vietnam)*



Mr. Tadahiko Ishigaki,
Senior Vice President of Hitachi, Ltd.,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, I wish to thank the Hitachi Young Leaders Initiative for choosing Vietnam to host the 8th HYLI. In my opinion, this is a very wise choice: Vietnam is now considered a dynamic economy, a peaceful country which is receiving increased attention from the international community, especially after Vietnam's accession to the World Trade Organization and our recent success in hosting the APEC Summit 2006. Furthermore, Vietnam is a young country, with over 60% of the population under the age of 30 – the same demographic as the Asian young leaders at this forum.

To be honest, I was skeptical when I received the invitation to be the guest speaker of the forum, to be here as the invited speaker on behalf of an older generation that hardly keeps up with the innovative ideologies of the young, who represent the future. However, I am also excited about being here, to enjoy the atmosphere of the young and to share their optimism about Asia's future.

The forum's theme, "Empowering Asia – An Increased Role and a Common Voice as a Responsible Player", is a hot topic indeed. Indeed, Asia is at the centre of the international community's attention, thanks to its emerging strengths and the important roles that it plays.

This gives rise to a question that sounds simple, but requires some clarification: where is Asia? Asia does include not only East Asia, which encompasses both the South East and North East area, but also South, Middle and West Asia – all of which have very different characteristics.

At this forum, perhaps we should address East Asia only. After WWII, development waves emerged one after another. The first was the "Japan miracle", and the next was the arising of the new industrial economies which are considered Asia's dragons. Now, the hot topic is the emergence of China, India and Vietnam. In my opinion, the economic sub-theme on the roles of China and India in Asian economic development is a very relevant topic for discussion at this present time.

An in-depth discussion on the causes of the above-mentioned waves would be very interesting indeed: the similarities and differences of these development paths, and their implications for Asia. I understand that these are very complicated issues, and that it is difficult to find a simple and consistent answer. However, there is a Vietnamese saying that goes, "One tree does not make the entire forest." As such, I hope that the young Asian talents, with their joint intellectual prowess, will help us to find solutions for Asia's future.

Although natural resources play an important role, I personally feel that they are not a decisive factor for the dramatic growth of most East Asian economies. Furthermore, it is the economies with the least natural resources that have

achieved the highest and most stable growth. I am far more convinced that human resources are the very key that drives the development of most dynamic East Asian countries.

Asia's human resources are plentiful and low in cost. But, more importantly, Asians are skillful, diligent, well-educated, adaptable and thrifty. These advantages will continue to lead them to greater successes.

On the other hand, we must admit that the current context of rapid scientific & technological developments and innovations reveals the weaknesses of the human resource development systems in our region. So far, a number of revolutionary inventions were not created in Asia and there were rarely any Nobel award winners from the Asian region. Moreover, many manufacturing industries are based on outsourcing projects.

For the sustainable development of Asia in general and of East Asia in particular, especially to ensure the quality of growth, and to better position this region as a global player, our top priority should be human resource development and strong educational innovation. The implementation of these objectives depends on you, Asia's future leaders.

Another factor that would help to ensure Asia's development is the maintenance of regional peace and stability. A strong partnership between countries, through the formation and development of groups such as the ASEAN, the ASEAN + 1 with North East Asia and India, the East Asia Forum, as well as the establishment of free trade zones, will also play a very important role. Fortunately, during the three past decades, peace has prevailed in our region, while the various cooperative efforts have brought about outstanding achievements. Sad to say, social and political stability is not equal in all member countries, and sometimes the cooperation efforts are not as effective as we expect. This is why we are counting on you, the owners of Asia's future, to play an active role in ensuring the region's peace, stability and cooperation.

At present, we face a number of challenges: the continuous and damaging epidemics on both humans and animals, including HIV/AIDS and the bird flu; the growing divide between the rich and the poor in different areas and countries; social evils; and cross-national crimes. These hinder the sustainable development of our continent. Asia's young generation has a critical role in addressing and fighting these issues. In this spirit, I applaud the choice of the environmental sub-theme, "Challenges for Asia in Water Management and Sustainability" as water resource management is a big challenge for all our countries.

As an integral part of Asia, Vietnam shares opportunities and challenges with other countries in the region. Vietnam is one of the first nations to have achieved national independence; unfortunately, in the next 40 years after its independence, Vietnam went through devastating wars, fierce blockades and regional isolation that hindered the development of our country.

Fortunately, economic innovation was ignited in Vietnam two decades ago, setting the foundation for our current rapid economic development, social stability and heightened position on the international arena.

You may ask: what is the essence of innovation? In my opinion, it is in keeping a harmonious balance in the following areas:

- Harmony between growing economic development and solving social problems such as: hunger elimination and poverty reduction, culture, education and health care development, and environmental protection.
- Harmony between establishing market-oriented mechanisms, and completing the State's macro regulations.
- Harmony between developing all economic sectors, including the private sector and foreign-owned enterprises, and improving the State's economy management.
- Harmony between facilitating internal strengths, and broadening international cooperation and global economic integration.
- Harmony between building a jurisdiction-based state, and maintaining social democracy.

This philosophy of harmony has its roots in Eastern culture, and has ensured a rapid and stable development for our country.

While we are proud of what we have accomplished to date, we realise that Vietnam remains poor in comparison with other countries in the region. Thus, we are working towards the short-term goal of making Vietnam no longer an under-developed country by 2010. Our mid-term goal is to turn Vietnam into an industrialised country by 2020, and our long-term goal is to build up Vietnam as a just, democratic, powerful and civilized nation.

This great cause depends mainly on the young generation, and on their friendly partnerships with the other young people in the region and around the world. I strongly believe this forum is the perfect chance for such a great wish to be put into action.

I wish the forum every great success. And to all present, I wish you good health and an enjoyable stay in Vietnam.



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