

Background

Geography

The territory of Vietnam comprises a land mass of 330,000 km², a vast sea area including a large continental shelf, and a string of archipelagos stretching from the Gulf of Tonkin to the Gulf of Thailand.

On the map, Vietnam takes an elongated "S" shape. The national territory is approximately 1,750 km long, ranging from its Northernmost point to its Southernmost point, and its width varies from 50 km to 600 km. The total inland border line is 4,230 km in length, including 1,650 km of common border with the People's Republic of China in the North, 1,650 km with the Laos People's Democratic Republic in the West, and 930 km with the Kingdom of Cambodia in the West and South West.

The sea area in Vietnam is to the east, the South and the South West borders on the territorial water of Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippine and Thailand. Vietnam possesses a large continental shelf, many coastal and offshore islands and archipelagos. The main islands and archipelagos are Phu Quoc Island (70 km off the Ha Tien coast), Hoang Sa (Paracel) archipelago (300 km off the Da Nang coast), Truong Sa (Spratly) archipelago (500 km off Cam Ranh coast) and Tho Chu archipelago (200 km off the Rach Gia coast).

Vietnam has a rather diversified topography of plains, midlands, and mountains. Mountains and forests with more than 7,000 vegetable breeds make up three fourths of the area of Vietnam and can be divided into four main zones: the North-eastern mountain area, or Viet Bac; the North-western region; the North Truong Son region; and the Central Highlands. The largest and potentially most fertile plains are the Me Kong River Delta in the South and the Red River Delta in North.

The capital of Vietnam is Hanoi, which lies in the North of

the country. Principal cities include Ho Chi Minh City ("HCMC") in the South, Hai Phong on the north-east coast and Da Nang, Hue and Nha Trang, all on the east coast.

Climate

Vietnam lies in the tropical monsoon zones. The typical features of this zone include warmth, humidity and abundant seasonal rainfall.

In the North, climate changes occur in four seasons: spring (from January to April), the feature of which is drizzle and constant humidity; summer (from May to July), which is hot and rainy season, autumn (from August to October) and winter (from October to early January), the season with the lowest temperatures of the year.

In the Central and the Southern parts (from Da Nang southwards), it is hot all the year round and there are only two seasons: a rainy season (from May to October), and a dry season (from October to April).

Population and Demography

The total population of Vietnam is now accounting for about 91.7 million (not including 4 million Vietnamese living abroad); Vietnam is ranked at 13th in the world, 8th in Asia and 3rd in Southeast Asia in term of population size. The population is composed of 54 ethnic groups, of which the Viet (Kinh) accounts for 86.2% and lives in the deltas and coastal areas.

Distribution of population is uneven, with rural population accounting for about 69.4% of the total. Also, the population is not evenly distributed within the regions, Red River and Mekong River Deltas, for instance, accounting for 17% of the total land area but are home to over 41% of the total population whereas the Central highlands and Northern mountainous areas which account for over 48% of the total land area but have only about 21% of the total population. As for urban areas, Hanoi and HCMC, for instance, are the two largest

population-density cities, with about 7.1 million and 8 million, respectively.

The average population growth rate now is about 1.08% per year which is among the highest rate in the region. Population growth rates are also different and vary sharply from region to region. Normally, the mountainous and rural areas have a much higher growth rate as compared with that in the urban areas, particularly in Hanoi and other principal cities.

In addition, a matter of fact is that the rate of migration to urban areas is growing significantly in recent years and expected to continue in the future, from rural to urban areas and/or big cities. The main reason is that agricultural sector becomes more mechanized while high labor demand is arising in urban areas and in industrial zones.

Language

As earlier said, although the population of Vietnam comprises a number of ethnic groups, each with its own culture and language, Vietnamese (the language of the Viet) is used as the national standard for communications among all ethnic groups in Vietnam. Although the writing is the same throughout the country, there are in fact some differences in speaking by Vietnamese between the two parts, the North and the South.

Amongst foreign languages in Vietnam, English becomes now the most common one for communications in Vietnam after a very short of time practicing here. Although it is a generalization, it is seen that French and Chinese are still quite widely spoken in Vietnam by the older generations due largely to the historical reasons. Thanks to the close co-operations between Vietnam and other former socialist countries, including the U.S.S.R., D.D.R., etc., in the past, a number of Vietnamese can now speak and understand Russian, and German. Because of being quite common in use, English and French are used in support for Vietnamese, in some legal documents relevant to foreign trade and foreign direct

investment.