

Welcome Remarks

by



Ambassador Rajiv Bhatia

Director General, ICWA

at

Sixth Sapru House Lecture

by

H.E Mr. Pham Binh Minh,

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam

on

“India-Vietnam Relations and Regional Issues”

at

Sapru House, New Delhi

12 July, 2013

Your Excellency Mr. Pham Binh Minh, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam,

Ambassador Aftab Seth, Chairperson for today's important event,

H.E. Nguyen Thanh Tan, Ambassador of Socialist Republic of Vietnam to India,

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all, particularly the distinguished Foreign Minister. We are grateful to him for having accepted our invitation to deliver the Sixth Sapru House Lecture. His theme, as you know, will be 'India-Vietnam Relations and Regional Issues.' I am also deeply thankful to Ambassador Aftab Seth, for having agreed to serve as Chairman today. He is one of the few respected experts on Vietnam in our country. Our warm thanks go also to the Vietnam Ambassador and his team who collaborated with us to put this event together.

2. This lecture series is dedicated to the founding fathers of Indian Council of World Affairs, the country's leading foreign policy think tank. This series was started last year. We are happy to note that we have been getting exceptional speakers to come and address us. Foreign Minister Mr. Pham Binh Minh's presence today adds immensely to the value and prestige of our lecture series.

3. As we are an institution of scholars, I would like to share the outcome of our modest research into history. Vietnam's greatest leader, President Ho Chi-minh, visited India in February 1958. Both President Rajendra Prasad and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru were at the airport to receive the extraordinary hero. Welcoming him, Nehru called him 'a great revolutionary' and a 'legendary figure.' The visiting President paid a rich tribute to the 'valuable contribution made by India to the cause of peace in Asia and the world.' More importantly for our purpose, President Ho Chi-minh visited ICWA and delivered an important address on 7 February 1958.

4. Now, our further research indicates that the ace diplomat who served as the Consul General of Democratic Republic of Vietnam in India during 1956-60, was none other than Mr.

Nguyen Co Thach. He later rose to become the Foreign Minister of Vietnam and served in that capacity from 1980-1991.

5. When Mr. Co Thach was serving in New Delhi, his son was born, and who too, in the fullness of time, rose to occupy the position of his country's Foreign Minister. Indeed a worthy son to a worthy father! He is amidst us today. Let us give another round of warm applause to our distinguished guest, Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh.

6. This is his first visit to India as the Foreign Minister. He is a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and a deputy in the National Assembly of the 13th Legislature. Earlier, as a successful career diplomat, he handled numerous diplomatic assignments, including as Ambassador to the UN and as first Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs. He comes at a time when strategic partnership between India and Vietnam is clearly on an upward trajectory. Relations have been blossoming well, but the two nations are determined to strengthen them further in many fields, in order to promote our mutual interests.

7. I am happy that ICWA has been making its humble contribution to this process. In the past one year alone, we received three delegations from Vietnam. We hosted a research scholar from Vietnam. I had the privilege to lead a Track II delegation of scholars to Hanoi where we had very fruitful and productive deliberations. Earlier in 2011, ICWA had published a book entitled 'India-Vietnam Strategic Partnership.' We are releasing another important publication today, the result of joint dialogue and research among Indian and Vietnamese experts, which is the tangible outcome of our visit to Vietnam.

8. May I now invite our Chair, Ambassador Aftab Seth, to share his observations about our honoured guest and today's theme with a view to setting the stage for His Excellency the Foreign Minister who shall deliver his lecture shortly.
