



India-Vietnam Relations

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Why in the News?

- Recently India's Vice-President M. Venkaiah Naidu was on a four-day visit to Vietnam.
- India and Vietnam both agreed to further strengthen cooperation in defence and security, peaceful uses of atomic energy and outer space, oil and gas and renewable energy.

Evolving Strategic Realities Between India and Vietnam

- Cultural and economic links between India and Vietnam date back to the 2nd century.



- In modern times India supported Vietnam's independence from France, opposed American involvement in the Vietnam War, and supported unification of Vietnam.
- India and North Vietnam established official diplomatic relations in 1972 and have since maintained friendly relations,
- Both Vietnam and India were also close allies of the Soviet Union during the Cold War but both stressed on maintaining strategic autonomy.
- In 1992, India and Vietnam established extensive economic ties, including oil exploration, agriculture and manufacturing.
- The two states promulgated a Joint Declaration on Comprehensive Cooperation in 2003 in which they envisaged creating an "**Arc of Advantage and Prosperity**" in Southeast Asia
- In 2007 both countries agreed on the establishment of the Strategic Partnership
- Vietnam has been emerging as a pivotal state in India's **Act East policy**, which can be reflected in multiple dimension of cooperation:

- **Defence cooperation**

- The two countries developed strong defence ties extensively in fields like:
 - **Sale of military equipment:** negotiations for four large patrol vessels and BrahMos short-range cruise missile are going on.
 - **Training** Vietnam's armed forces in military equipment: Kilo-class submarines.& Sukhoi aircraft.
 - India also announced a new line of credit US\$500 million for procurement of defence equipment.
 - **Joint naval exercises** Vietnam is also a part of **MILAN**, India's multinational naval exercise.
- Also, Vietnam and India use the same Russian and erstwhile Soviet platforms, there is a significant convergence between the two in the defence sector
- Vietnam has even asked India to develop this naval facility. this is significant in light of the that not even the US, a close ally of Vietnam in the region, was given this privilege.

- **Geostrategic convergence of two nations.**

- India and Vietnam have their shared apprehension of an aggressive China
 - China's virtually claiming the whole **South China Sea** as its territory and its assertiveness in the Indian Ocean.
 - China complained about Indian cooperation for the **exploration for oil** in Vietnamese waters, especially in light of the disputed political status of the Spratly Islands, which India currently recognizes as part of Vietnam.
- Also, there is no secret in contemporary India's Foreign Policy of its desire to play a more assertive role in the Indo-Pacific region. In this context:
 - Both sides stress the importance of:
 - A peaceful and prosperous **Indo-Pacific region** on the basis of respect for national sovereignty and international law
 - Freedom of navigation: 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea
 - Rule-based international order

- **Regional cooperation**

- India and Vietnam closely cooperate in various regional forums such as ASEAN, East Asia Summit, Mekong Ganga Cooperation, besides UN and WTO.
- Vietnam has supported India's bid to become a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council and join the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)

- **Economic and Commercial Relations**
 - India is now among the top ten trading partners of Vietnam
 - In 2015 five key sectors were identified as thrust areas including garment and textile, pharmaceuticals, agro-commodities, leather & footwear and engineering.
 - Major export commodities from India: machinery and equipment, pharmaceuticals, automobiles, textiles and leather accessories, Jewellery & precious stones.
 - Main items of imports from Vietnam: mobile phones & accessories, computers and electronics hardware, chemicals, rubber, ordinary metals, wood and wooden products etc
- **Science and Technology cooperation**
 - India and Vietnam have signed the Framework Agreement on cooperation in:
 - Exploration and Uses of Outer Space for Peaceful Purposes, IT Cooperation, Cyber Security
 - Uses of Atomic Energy for Peaceful Purposes
 - Vietnam has been a large recipient of training programs under Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (**ITEC**) programs
 - A proposal to set up a **Centre for Satellite Tracking and Data Reception** and an Imaging facility in Vietnam under **ASEAN-India Cooperation** mechanism is under consideration.
- **Cultural Relations and People to People Exchanges**
 - The **Indian Cultural Centre** opened in Vietnam in September 2016, with the objective of strengthening India's cultural presence in Vietnam.
 - India was one of the partner countries in the November 2016 **Hanoi International Film Festival**
 - The third successive International Day of Yoga was held at the iconic Hoan Kiem Lake area of Vietnam

Challenges in India-Vietnam Relations

- Vietnam's closeness with India sparks alarm in China, thus Vietnam is finding the balancing difficult vis-a-vis China.
Vietnam doesn't want to be seen as part of QUAD.
- India's trade with Vietnam is \$5 billion and that too is stagnating whereas with that of China is \$65 billion in 2015.
- India's relations with Vietnam follows the same trajectory with that of ASEAN i.e below potential.

Potential of India-Vietnam Relations

- In 2016, the first time in 15 years, an Indian Prime Minister visited Vietnam signalling India is no longer hesitant to expand its presence in China's periphery.

- India's foreign policy envisages India to play an anchor for peace, prosperity and stability in Asia and Africa, deepening of ties with Vietnam will only strengthen this narrative.
- Vietnam now engages India at the level of a '**comprehensive strategic partner**'
 - In this pursuit, Vietnam has even asked India to develop a naval facility in Vietnam which was denied to US, a close ally of Vietnam.
 - This signal the criticality of India's significance for Vietnam
- Strengthening ties with Vietnam will eventually lead a step towards the realization of SAGAR (Security and Growth all in the region) initiative as hailed by Indian PM.
- India and Vietnam both can mutually benefit each other in the arena of Blue Economy and ocean security.

Conclusion

Vietnam and India's relations should not be looked from only from the prism of Vietnam is for India, what Pakistan is for China. There is a huge scope of cooperation in the multidimensional sector so that both mutually grow and contribute to regional peace and prosperity.

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