

Consulate General of India
Ho Chi Minh City

Subject: Report on the Festival of India in Ho Chi Minh City

The “Festival of India” with the following events was held in Ho Chi City from March 6 to 15, 2014:

- (i) Buddhist Photo Exhibition ‘Dharma Darshan’ by Nav Nalanda Mahavihara from 6 to 14 March;
- (ii) “Boudh Mahotsava” by Central Institute of Himalayan Culture Studies at Pho Quang Pagoda from 6 to 10 March;
- (iii) Yoga Classes (by AYUSH) from 11 to 15 March;
- (iv) Folk Dance recital buy Kalbelia group from Rajasthan on 12-13 March;
- (v) Indian Food Festival (by ITDC) at Sheraton Saigon Hotel from 13 to 15 March;
- (vi) Mehendi Art (Ministry of Tourism) from 13 to 15 March;
- (vii) Classical Dance Recital- Nrityarupa (by Sangeet Natak Academy) on 14 and 15 March.

2. The **Official delegation** to the Festival in Ho Chi Minh City was led by Secretary (Culture) Shri Ravindra Singh who, accompanied by Joint Secretary Shri V. Srinivas, visited Ho Chi Minh City from 7-9 March 2014. In the afternoon of 7 March 2014, Secretary (Culture) met with Mr Hua Ngoc Thuan, Vice Chairman (Culture), People’s Committee of Ho Chi Minh City. Secretary (Culture) thanked the HCMC city authorities for their support in organising the Festival of India in the City. The Vietnamese side also welcomed the Indian initiative to hold such a large festival over a period of 10 days in Ho Chi Minh City. Stating that it was the first time a Festival at this scale with many activities over a sustained period was being held in the City, Vice Chairman said that it would contribute to better understanding of the Indian cultural heritage and diversity among the people of the City and promote tourism. Vice Chairman sought regular holding of such events and asked for India’s participation at the Annual “Ho Chi Minh City– Our Home” International Festival that would be organised by the People’s Committee of Ho Chi Minh City in September 2014. He even called for holding of a Film Festival of India. Secretary (Culture) assured that India would participate in the Festival in September 2014 for which it would send a dance troupe and agreed to support holding of the Film Festival of India in Vietnam. Secretary (Culture) also proposed that India would donate the Buddhist Exhibition (the photographs and panels) that the Vietnamese side could consider setting in selected pagodas across the country. This proposal was welcomed by the Vice Chairman of HCMC People’s Committee. Mementoes were exchanged between the two sides with



Secretary (Culture) during meeting with the Vice Chairman of People’s Committee – 7 March

Secretary (Culture) presenting a black stone Buddha statue to the Vice Chairman. Later in the day, Secretary (Culture) inaugurated the Buddhist Festival at the Pho Quang Pagoda.

3. Following is the brief summary of each of the events:

- (i) **Buddhist Festival:** The Buddhist Festival was hosted at the Pho Quang Pagoda in close cooperation with the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha office No. 2 in Vietnam. The Pagoda was chosen for hosting the Festival in due consultation with the Buddhist Sangha as it is well located in the city centre and is one of the largest Buddhist Pagoda in the City with adequate facilities to accommodate all the activities, including Sand Mandala, Butter sculpture, Chanting and the Sacred dance by a group of 19 Buddhist Monks from Arunachal Pradesh.



Inauguration ceremony of the Buddhist



Secretary (Culture) felicitating Most Ven Thich Thien Nhon, the Standing Vice President of Buddhist Sangha – 7 March

The Buddhist Festival/ Mahotsav was formally inaugurated by ribbon cutting at 1900 hrs on 7 March 2014 by Most Ven. Thich Thien Nhon, Standing Vice President of the National Buddhist Sangha; Shri Ravindra Singh, Secretary (Culture); and Mr Le Manh Ha, Vice Chairman of the People’s Committee of Ho Chi Minh City in the presence of over 2500 persons that included a large number of monks, dignitaries, members of the Consular Corps, senior officials from Department of Culture, External Relations, business and cultural communities from the City, members of Indian community, and local Buddhist devotees. Vice Chairman Mr Le Manh Ha, Secretary (Culture) and Most Ven Thich Thien Nhon spoke on the occasion. Secretary (Culture) felicitated the Buddhists Monks and the Vice Chairman by presenting them with black stone



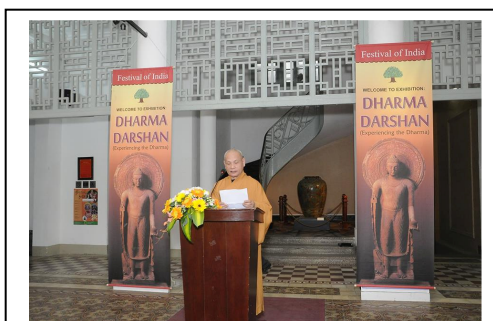
People gathered at the inauguration of Buddhist Festival – 7 March 2014

Buddhist Statues. Lama Chanting and Buddhist sacred dance were performed by the Indian Monks as part of the ceremony. Vietnamese Monks also presented their traditional chanting and dance as part of the joint celebrations. Later, the dignitaries witnessed the Sand Mandala and butter sculpture.

The Indian Monks held Chanting and dance performances every evening on other days as well at the Pho Quang Pagoda that attracted a crowd of about 300-400 persons. A large number of Buddhist devotees visited the Pagoda everyday to seek blessings from the Indian monks. The Monks also visited the Vinh Nghiem Pagoda on 8 March 2014 where they interacted and exchanged views with the Vietnamese Monks. The closing ceremony was held on 10 March 2014 at the Pho Quang Pagoda at 0900 hrs where the finished Sand Mandala and the Butter sculpture were handed over to the Buddhist Monks. It was attended by around 500 persons.



- (ii) **Buddhist Exhibition:** “Dharma Darshan”- an exhibition consisting of Buddhist replicas and photographs and literature on the sacred Buddhist sites in India and teachings of Lord Buddha with Buddhist chanting being played in the background was held from 6 to 14 March 2014. It was jointly inaugurated by cutting of ribbon by the Standing Vice President of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha Most Ven Thich Nhat Tan and the Consul General of India at 1000 hrs on 6 March 2014 at the



Standing Vice President of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha at the inauguration of Buddhist Exhibition “Dharma Darshan”- 6 March



Visitors to the Buddhist Exhibition -6 March

Fine Arts Museum in the centre of the City. The impressive inauguration was attended by over 150 persons, including senior officials from the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Ho Chi Minh City; delegations from the neighbouring provinces, members of the Indian community, local cultural activists, University and Think thanks, businessmen and Buddhist believers. More than 400 persons visited the Exhibition that was open for nine days. The Post took the initiative to organize visits of the groups of students from local universities to the Exhibition as well. Overall there was a very positive feedback on the content and quality of the Exhibits. Since the Exhibition and its content were in English, the Consulate got it translated into the Vietnamese language and brought out a booklet for better outreach and understanding of the Exhibition by the visitors.

(iii) **Yoga:** Four Yoga sessions were organised everyday (two in the morning from 7am to 9 am; and two in the evening from 6.30 pm to 8.30 pm) at the hall of the Ho Chi Minh City Union of Friendship Organisations (HUFO). Pre- registration for the classes was arranged. A local Yoga school- VYOGA, was also associated for provision of translator and logistics arrangements for the classes. After initial inauguration in the evening of 11 March (when classes could not be held due to late arrival on account of delayed flights), regular classes commenced from the morning of 12 March 2014. The two yoga teachers from AYUSH taught Suksuma Vyayama, Asanas, Pranayama and meditation. On an average, about 75 persons attended Yoga everyday at HUFO. An evening session on 12 March was also arranged in the premises of VYOGA. Unfortunately, one of the two teachers, Dr Divya Saraswat returned to India on 14 March (2 days before schedule) on grounds of ill health. The other Yoga teacher continued to take all classes on the remaining two days. These classes were well appreciated by the attendees, especially the youth.

(iv) **Folk Dance recital:** An 8 member Kalbelia Folk dance troupe from Rajasthan held a standalone performance of about 40 minutes on 12 March at the auditorium of HUFO. It was formally inaugurated jointly by lighting of the lamp by the President of HUFO Mr Le Hoang Quoc, Consul General and Prof Tran Van Khe, 92 year old eminent cultural personality in HCMC. The Folk troupe presented Kalbelia, Ghumar and Banjara dances. Besides the musicians enthralled the audience with instrumental jugalbandhi and folk songs. Over 300 persons attended the performance and



Rajasthani Folk Dance Recital by Kalbelia group – 12 March

included members of the Consular Corps, senior officials from various government departments in Ho Chi Minh City; representatives from academic institutions and universities in Ho Chi Minh City and Can Tho City; cultural activists; members of the academic community among others. The performance was highly appreciated by the audience. The group also held about 25 minutes

performance at the inauguration of the Food Festival at Sheraton Hotel on 13 March 2014.

- (v) **Food Festival**: The Food Festival with two chefs from ITDC was held at Cafe Saigon, Sheraton Saigon Hotel in HCMC from 13 to 15 March 2014. The inauguration was held at 1830 hrs on 13 March where invitees, including Head of the Ministry of Public Security in the South, senior officials External Relations and People' Committee, MP and President of Vietnam India Friendship Association, Aquaculture Research Institute, other Think Tanks, and members of the local media with the spouses attended the event. The Kalbelia group also presented the Rajasthani folk music and dance at the food festival on 13 March. The Food Festival got wide publicity, including with advertisement put out by the Sheraton Hotel and it attracted over 600 people over the three days, with capacity full crowds of about 200 persons everyday at the restaurant. The menu offered wide choice in a buffet style food court during dinner time at the hotel. The Mehendi artist applied Heena to the Guests on all the three days.
- (vi) **Mehendi**: Mehendi was quite popular and a large number of girls and women got their hands painted. Mehendi sessions were organised to the guests at the Food Festival every evening. Separate sessions were also arranged for the students of the Indian Studies Department at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities (on 14 March) and for select spouses of the VIP, senior officials and Indian community members at the residence of the Consul General (on 15 March).

- (vii) **"Nrityarupa Classical" Dance**: The Sangeet Natak Academy artists performed two recitals of classical dance recital "Nrityarupa" on 14 March at the prestigious Opera House (attended by about capacity full crowd of 450 persons, including dignitaries, diplomats, Indian community, academic institutions, etc) and on 15 March at the Youth Cultural House (attended by over 400 persons, especially students from various universities). The Chairman of the People's Committee of Ho Chi Minh City, Mr Le Hoang Quan, made an exceptional gesture by attending the performance at the Opera House on 14 March 2014 as the Chief Guest (the Chairman normally does not attend such events where Director of the Culture Department are nominated on behalf of the provincial authorities). He was accompanied by the Party Secretary and Chairman of the People's Committee of Phu Tho Province from Northern Vietnam. Each of these recitals was preceded by traditional lamp lighting ceremony. Classical dance recitals which brought together the six classical dance forms (Kathak, Kathakali, Bharatnatyam, Chau, Manipuri and Oddissi) enthralled the audience. The performances were well choreographed and



perfectly delivered. The introduction of the various forms at the beginning of the performance in English and Vietnamese languages helped the audience to appreciate the dances even better. A formal reception for over 400 persons (to mark the Festival of India) was organised at 1830 hrs on 14 March at the Opera House before the classical dance recital.

4. **Publicity and Media Coverage:** As part of the publicity plan, announcement about the Festival was made through a Press Conference at Sheraton Hotel on 27 February 2014 (a week before the inauguration). The Press Conference, attended by about 50 persons from both print and electronic media (including from the Buddhists television and newspapers), was addressed by Ambassador Mrs Preeti Saran along with the representatives of participating institutions like- Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, People's Committee of Ho Chi Minh City; HUFO; Department of Sports, Culture and tourism; Fine Arts Museum; Youth Cultural Centre, Opera House; Sheraton Hotel. The Consulate brought out bilingual posters, leaflets, brochures and invitations/ passes for the Festival that were disseminated widely to the senior leadership of all the Provinces in Southern Vietnam; senior dignitaries and officials in HCMC; leading business contacts; universities and academic institutions in South Vietnam; Indian community members; media, etc. As mentioned to above, a bilingual booklet was also brought out on the Buddhist Exhibition in order to ensure its understanding and outreach to wider public in Vietnam. Print and electronic media was present in each of the events and the Festival of India received a very wide media coverage in Vietnamese, English and French languages. Electronic media, including HTV, VTV and Voice of Ho Chi Minh City Radio also carried interviews with the artists recorded after the performances. Some of the clippings from print media are attached herewith. The Consulate hired a photographer for main events and disseminated the photos of the events to media and also publicised them on the Website (www.mea.gov.in/cgihcm) and Facebook page (www.facebook.com/cgihcm) of the Consulate. The videos from various television sources have also been uploaded on the You Tube channel (cgihcmc) of the Consulate.

5. **Support of the local Institutions:** The People's Committee of the Ho Chi Minh City extended support for successful organisation of the Festival. The Chairman of the People's Committee attended the last event (dance recital at the Opera house on 14 March) and the Vice Chairman of the People's Committee attended the Inaugural event (Buddhist Festival on 7 March 2014). This was significantly a high level participation from the provincial authorities, who normally are represented at the level of Director of the Culture departments for such events for other countries. The People's Committee also provided prestigious venues like the Opera House (for the Classical dance recital on 14 March) and the Fine Arts Museum (for hosting the Buddhist Exhibition from 6 to 14 March) free of charge. The Ho Chi Minh City Union of Friendship Organisations (HUFO) also provided their venues for Folk dance (on 12 March) and Yoga (from 11 to 15 March) free of charge. The Vietnam Buddhist Sangha in HCMC closely cooperated with the Consulate and they provided the auditorium at the Pho Quang Pagoda free of charge. We had to incur expenditure on the technical (including light and sound), stage, decorations, banners, hiring of MCs, and publicity associated with these venues. Private organisation- VYOGA World- also cooperated with the Consulate to provide translator, pre-register and Yoga mats for the participants. The HUFLIT University provided

student volunteers to act as liaison officers with the larger groups like Kalbelia and SNA dance troupes. A nominal honorarium was given to them for their services.
