

## China, Vietnam celebrate completion of land border demarcation (South East Asia)

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**YOUYIGUAN, Guangxi, Feb. 23 (Xinhua) -- A ceremony was jointly held by China and Vietnam here Monday marking the completion of land border demarcation and the erection of boundary markers, a significant event in bilateral relations.**

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The ceremony started at 3:30 p.m. at the Youyiguan border gate in Pingxiang City in south China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, opposite to Lang Son City of Vietnam. The border gate is known as Huu Nghi Quan in Vietnam.

More than 400 government officials and about 400 representatives from both countries, including those who attended the land border demarcation, were present at the ceremony. Chinese State Councilor Dai Bingguo, Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Wu Dawei, Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister Pham Gia Khiem and Vietnamese Deputy Foreign Minister Vu Dung were all there.

"The completion of land border demarcation is a major event in bilateral relations with far-reaching historic significance," Dai said.

"It not only creates a new condition for the two countries to develop a comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership, but also contributes to regional peace, stability and development," he said.

"The Communist Party of China and the Chinese government attach great importance to the relationship with Vietnam. We are willing to make joint efforts with the Communist Party of Vietnam and the Vietnamese government to develop land borders into a link of friendly exchanges and close cooperation, thus bringing benefits to the two peoples," Dai added.

Dai's praises for the milestone event were echoed by Pham.

"It (the completion of land border demarcation) is a significant historic event in bilateral relations and satisfies the long-term and ardent aspirations of the two peoples," Pham said at the ceremony.

"It sends an important signal to the whole world that relations are developing soundly. The two sides should continue to cooperate closely to implement the border pact," he added.

During the 45-minute ceremony, Pham and Dai jointly unveiled the No. 1116 and No. 1117 boundary markers. The two monuments are about 1.6 meters tall with a national emblem on the front.

Folk songs and dances by artists from both countries followed the ceremony.

Youyiguan, or the Friendship Gate, is one of China's key border passes. It is more than 2,000 years old and has witnessed a number of historic wars, including the fight against French invaders in 1885 after they stormed Vietnam.

China and Vietnam signed a border treaty in 1999. In 2001, experts and specialists from both sides started marking 1,347 kilometers of border land. China and Vietnam finished demarcation at the end of last year.

In total, 1,971 monuments were set with the help of advanced demarcation equipment and GPS technology.

"We need to make some minor adjustments to the original map because of geological conditions," said Huang Liuran, who worked for three years with the No.10 demarcation team for the Pingxiang border section.

"Sometimes we ate together and celebrated each other's festivals. We sent them gifts or bought them Chinese medicines when they got sick," said Huang, 31, who learned the Vietnamese language at a university in Guangxi.

He regarded the mission as a rare opportunity and great honor, despite the harsh working conditions in the humid mountains. "Sometimes we had to drink unsanitary water and we always suffered from allergic reactions and mosquito bites in the forests."

Demarcation teams also encountered landmines left over from wars, but the mine-sweeping staff were able to unearth them and no one was injured in his team.

Huang, also a captain of Pingxiang's border brigade, noted that there had been frequent reports of disputes over land use between residents on both sides due to the undefined boundary. As more border stones were established in recent years, the number of such incidents dropped drastically.

"An explicit border is a premise of stable life for border residents and will help us to better regulate the area," Huang said.

To Yan Tingwan, a native of Pingxiang who lives just 200 meters away from the No. 1055 boundary stone, the demarcation project could lead to a better life.

Yan, 51, a father of three in the Yingyang Village, said his family income was about 10,000 yuan (1,470 U.S. dollars) a year. Yan and his wife opened a 50-square-meter grocery shop nine years ago, but profits were unsatisfying. The couple also offered passenger and cargo transportation across the border.

"A border trade zone is expected to be opened in the village next month. Maybe it could bring more people here and boost my business," said Yan.

In Puzhai, a bustling border trade market in Pingxiang, throngs of Vietnamese peddlers selling fruits, rosewood and various specialties flood in every day.

Cai Guodui and his wife, who have run a small grocery store for almost a decade, witnessed the rapidly growing border trade.

"It was very easy to earn more than a million yuan a year at the beginning. As more and more businessmen flocked here, competition became extremely intense. In recent years, my shop just earned about 10,000 yuan a month," said Cai, 45, a native of southeast China's Fujian Province.

Vietnamese woodwork, coffee, snacks, and spices sell well here. Chinese fruits, garments, home appliances and industrial products are popular in the Vietnamese market.

China has been Vietnam's largest trade partner for more than two years, with trade hitting 19.46 billion U.S. dollars in 2008, a growth of 28.8 percent year on year. Leaders of the two countries have set a target of 25 billion U.S. dollars by 2010.

The two countries established diplomatic relations in 1950. Bilateral ties deteriorated in late 1970s and normalized in 1991.

"Vietnamese people hailed the completion of the land border demarcation, believing it will promote exchanges of all aspects across the border, especially trade and tourism," said Bui Hong Phuc, vice chairman of the Vietnam-China Friendship Association (VCFA).

Vietnamese Friendship Association and VCFA are planning to organize a cultural exchange event in border areas this summer along with their Chinese counterparts, in an effort to consolidate the traditional friendship between the people, said the chairman.

"I hope more people will be able to travel across the border to experience the beautiful scenery on both sides," said Nguyen Thu Ha, 35, a Vietnamese tourist guide.

"The border areas will be more secure and stable. Demarcation is important and deserves celebrating," she said.

China and Vietnam have agreed to work out a new agreement on land border management to build it into a region of long-term peace, friendliness and stability.

(Wang Mian, Han Qiao and Li Jianmin contributed to this report)

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[<<< zurück zu: News](#)

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