

Since its inception 72 years ago (1946-2018), the Vietnamese sport sector has done more than provide games for the nation to play by enhancing the country's international integration efforts.



*Vietnam U23 team were welcomed by fans nationwide following their outstanding performance at the AFC U23 Championship in China last January.*

President Ho Chi Minh signed Decree No. 33 dated March 27, 1946 on the establishment of the youth and sport sector.

His call for people to exercise the same year has been seen as a guideline for the national sport sector to move forward over the years.

The beloved President said "Either protecting democracy or building the nation and new lifestyles need good health to gain successes...Each strong citizen can help make the nation strong."

In 1951, the Vietnam Table Tennis Federation joined the International Table Tennis Federation,

the first world sport organisation Vietnam joined.

Between 1954 and 1975, sport cooperation formed part of the country's foreign affairs, aiming to enhance solidarity between Vietnam and other socialist countries, and gather international support for national reunification.

During the period, the domestic sport sector received assistance from the Soviet Union, China and other socialist countries in training officials, coaches and athletes.

With the support of the Soviet Union, Vietnam participated in the 22nd Olympics in 1980, the first Olympics the country had participated in after reunification. Since then, Vietnam has been represented at every Olympics, bar 1984.

In 1982, the Vietnamese sport delegation participated in the Asian Games (ASIAD) in India for the first time. Since then, the country has taken part in every edition of the tournament, which is held every four years.

At the sixth National Party Congress in 1986, Vietnam began an open-door policy in different spheres, including sport. As a result, three years later, the country participated in the Southeast Asian Games (SEA Games) for the first time in Malaysia.

On January 29, 1991, the Council of Ministers issued a decision to designate March 27 as Vietnamese Sports Day, aiming to encourage people from all walks of life to participate in sport and physical activities.

After holding the 22nd SEA Games in 2003, the country will host the 31st edition of the games in 2021.

Speaking at a meeting in Hanoi last June to assign Hanoi as the venue for the event, Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc said hosting the event is an honour for Vietnam as a constructive

member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

### **Sound orientations bear fruits**

In 2010, the Prime Minister approved the national sport development strategy to 2020, laying out the directions for the domestic sport sector in the years to come.

According to Vuong Bich Thang, General Director of the Vietnam Sports Administration, since 2011, the sport sector has focused on major sport events included in Olympics and ASIAD such as track and field, swimming, weightlifting, taekwondo, chess, karate, table tennis and football.

In that spirit, athletes have received intensive training both at home and abroad, he said, adding that the sector has also teamed up with relevant state agencies and social organisations to promote sport development.

Besides, it has renewed the athlete selection and training system with the aim of improving the quality of athletes, while scaling up international integration efforts, he said.

Such efforts paid off as over the past years, the domestic sport sector has recorded marked achievements at continental and international tournaments.

One of the achievements is the third position Vietnam had claimed at the 28th SEA Games in Singapore in 2015, with 73 gold medals, of which some 85 percent came in Olympic sports like athletics, swimming, gymnastics, rowing, fencing, taekwondo and shooting.

In 2016, 23 Vietnamese athletes qualified for the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where Hoang Xuan Vinh secured Vietnam's first Olympic gold medal in any sport, winning the men's 10-metre air pistol event.

During the 29th SEA Games in 2017, Vietnam, for the first time, broke Thailand's long-held dominance in the track and field event with 17 gold medals.

Of note, Vietnam U23 shocked the continent's football community after blowing past regional heavyweights like Iraq and Qatar to become the first Southeast Asian squad to reach the final of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) U23 Championship held in China in January 2018.

Despite the loss to Uzbekistan in the final, Vietnam U23 has written a new page in the history of Vietnamese football.

"It is the first time in history that we defeated a number of Asian powerhouses in an official tournament and became a new force on the continent," said Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism Nguyen Ngoc Thien.

Following the squad's heroics in China, Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc invited the 31-strong contingent to the Government office.

"The whole team united together to overcome difficulties of physique and small stature, as well as the hard conditions of the weather. They also practiced hard, worked in a team and showed their composure and confidence during the tournament for the pride of the country. And they made miracles," he said.

On behalf of the Government, PM Phuc presented the first-class Labour Order to the team. He also gave three third-class Labour Orders to head coach Park Hang-seo, goalkeeper Bui Tien Dung and midfielder Nguyen Quang Hai.

Other members of the team received the Prime Minister's certificates of merit presented by Deputy Prime Minister Vu Duc Dam.

The victory is hoped to push Vietnamese football teams to reach greater heights in tournaments

in the years to come.

It signals Vietnam's ability in different areas, while motivating young Vietnamese to work to bring home greater achievements, said National Assembly Chairwoman Nguyen Thi Kim Ngan.

Tran Duc Phan, Deputy General Director of the National Sports Administration, said the domestic sport sector has received due attention, citing the Government's recent decisions to improve the material life of athletes, especially young ones.

Over the past more than 70 years, the Vietnamese sport sector has deeply integrated into the world, creating an important premium for athletes to gain high results, he said.

The official noted gold medals earned by Vietnamese athletes during the recent Olympics and ASIAD and stressed that they were attributable to efforts of the entire nation.

### **Sport fills nation with pride**

Last January, Hanoi and many big cities turned into seas of red as throngs of fans took to the streets waving national flags before, after and during each match of the AFC U23 Championship to cheer the Vietnamese squad.

Tens of thousands endured cold weather to greet the team as they returned home with a silver medal from the tournament. Many waited for more than five hours to see their idols, who displayed their great performances throughout the event.

Twenty-six year-old Bui Thi Lan from G&B Company Limited said sporting success had awakened patriotism among Vietnamese and brought people closer, explaining that employees in her company hugged each other after each of the U23 team's victories.

PhanThi Thu Huong, a junior of Hanoi University, said Vietnamese have shown their strong love for sport and football in particular, and national pride during the AFC U23 Championship as well as the 29th SEAGames.

“The U23 team and other athletes have fueled the love for sports of Vietnamese,” she said.

Nguyen Thi Luyen, a student of Hanoi National University of Education, said there are no gaps of gender, age and occupation when people celebrate the country’s sporting successes.

“I like to join the crowds to shout out ‘Vietnam wins,’ hug my friends and even strangers, and hold their hands to cheer Vietnamese athletes at tournaments. I feel proud to be a Vietnamese,” said Do Thi Linh, a student from the Academy of Journalism and Communication. -

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