

The Ministry of Science and Technology, along with US-based groups, are developing centres for talented Vietnamese. The Tuổi trẻ Chủ nhật (Sunday Youth) newspaper spoke with Professor Dr. Võ Văn Tới about the project.

Centres nurture homegrown talents

Through the fact-finding trip to Việt Nam last year which you led, how did the Americans rate Việt Nam's scientific talents?

We appreciate the potential and growth capacity of Việt Nam's high-tech industries. Therefore, the VEF has organised activities in many places, such as Cần Thơ and Đà Nẵng, in order to support local educational and research projects. Vietnamese people, especially the youth, have both the capability and will. We only need to equip them with opportunities, conditions and knowledge.

During the last trip, America's leading biotechnology specialists encouraged Việt Nam to promote modern technologies for the sake of the country's development. In particular, they suggested a five-year co-operation programme with Việt Nam. The first step is to organise an international conference on biotechnology at the HCM City National University from July 27-29. Next will be scientific agreements with other universities such as the Hà Nội University of Technology and Cần Thơ University, through which faculty, researchers and students will be exchanged.

Can you give us some rough ideas of VEF's plans to set up world-class, hi-tech

centres in Việt Nam?

VEF's role is to act as a medium and a catalyst between Việt Nam and SIG in the setting up of the Millennium Science Initiative (MSI) project. If successful, the project will become one of many optimised hi-technology centres. In short, these science research centres will draw some of Việt Nam's leading scientific researchers in certain fields with the long-term goal of developing a new, world-class Vietnamese science industry. MSI will also be an environment for international experts to co-operate with Việt Nam. It will be a place to receive Vietnamese talents returning from their studies abroad. MSI members will include professors, research students and students in Việt Nam. It will be the first SMI in Asia. The factors used to evaluate the success of these centres will be based on the same standards adopted by similar centres in the world.

What future will MSI bring to Việt Nam?

At present, some leading American scientists, including some Nobel laureates, are visiting and assessing the potential of Việt Nam's scientists, research institutes and educational facilities in order to help Việt Nam work

out an appropriate operation model. Like other assessments, they need time to understand all the relevant details. They have been very enthusiastic about the project. According to the Co-operation Declaration stated last November, the Ministry of Science and Technology (MoST) will co-ordinate with other ministries in building a project proposal to submit to the Prime Minister for approval, before forwarding it to the World Bank (WB) for grant consideration.

VEF and SIG will offer the MoST the necessary technical assistance in building up a model for talent centres in Việt Nam.

How does the World Bank support the project?

MSI is one of the WB's investment programmes. The intensity and scale of such investment depends on the quantity and size of programmes to be suggested by the Government of Việt Nam.

What will be the budget required for the project?

At present no figure is available. But in other countries, the MSI's annual account is about US\$20 million.

What do you think about the

Government's attitude towards this project?

The Government welcomes, recognises the importance and is very supportive of the project.

What would be the main obstacles for a project like this?

One of the difficulties is developing understanding between Vietnamese and American experts. America highly appreciates the economic achievements recorded by Việt Nam, but also wants Việt Nam to have a vision. They expect Việt Nam to think like leading world scientists.

On Việt Nam's part, I think we need to have a two-sided view of the future. We should continue to do what we have succeeded in as well as prepare for the future. For example, we should study the causes and structures of a phenomenon instead of simply following successful foreign examples.

On support for the project, the WB will only provide some initial assistance. After that Việt Nam will develop it by itself.

What areas will the project target?

These will be fields recommended by Việt Nam, such as life sciences, information technology, material science, pure mathematics and applied mathematics. — VNS