

*US, Vietnam Sign Nuclear Technology Deal*

*And, as middle class grows in Asia, so does demand for air service*

Hello, and welcome to *As It Is* from VOA Learning English.

I'm Christopher Cruise in Washington.

Today we have news from a part of the world where the number of people is expanding fast. The growth is putting demands on electric power stations and airline companies.

Asia's growing middle class is creating a need for ever more electricity. It is also creating a demand for air travel. As we will hear today on *As It Is*, the power companies and the airlines are struggling to meet that demand.

"This massive increase in intra-Asian tourism and air travel is simply driven by the fact that so many more people are going into the so-called 'middle-class' status."

But first, we take you to Vietnam, a country where, over 40 years ago, American troops were fighting and dying. Now, the United States has signed an agreement with Vietnam to sell the fast-growing Southeast Asian nation nuclear technology.

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## **Former Enemies Sign Nuclear Technology Agreement**

An agreement between the United States and Vietnam would let American companies sell nuclear technology to America’s former enemy.

The United States Congress has yet to approve the agreement.

Caty Weaver tells us about the deal and criticism that Vietnam is moving too quickly to build nuclear power stations.

American Secretary of State John Kerry and Vietnamese Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh signed the agreement on October 10th at a meeting in Brunei.

If Congress approves, American businesses will be able to sell nuclear power equipment to Vietnam.

The companies want to be able to do that because Vietnam's nuclear power market is expected to grow from \$10 billion to \$50 billion by the end of 2030.

Vietnam has its own supplies of coal, oil and hydropower. But experts say the nation may have to import energy as soon as 2015 because its economy is growing so quickly.

To deal with the expected growth, Vietnam plans to build as many as 13 nuclear power stations over the next 20 years. It has already made nuclear technology agreements with Russia and Japan.

Murray Hiebert is with the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, DC. He says nuclear projects require long-term investments and relationships. And he says the October agreement between the United States and Vietnam will help American companies -- but, he says, that is not the only reason the American government signed it.

"I think there are two things that are at work here, one is potentially the economics and the jobs. The other is the U.S. has moved quite quickly to improve relations with Vietnam."

Not everyone agrees that Vietnam should have nuclear power plants.

The country is on a seismic fault line -- a place where the Earth's tectonic plates meet and sometimes move, causing earthquakes. And it has a long coastline. So there are many places that could be hit by tsunamis, which are created by earthquakes.

In 2011, an Italian group completed a study of the site planned for the country's first nuclear power center -- in Ninh Thuan province. It found that the area could be especially at risk to tsunamis.

The proposed American deal bars Vietnam from enriching or reprocessing plutonium or uranium while it develops nuclear energy. This requirement is aimed at preventing Vietnam from developing nuclear weapons.

I'm Caty Weaver.

## **Growing Asian Middle Class Demands Air Travel**

Rising incomes across Southeast Asia have been good for the aviation industry. New low-cost passenger airline companies are experiencing record growth. The industry is racing to build airports and train tens of thousands of new pilots, while flying safely.

Trade groups say Asia and Pacific airlines carried more than 138 million passengers in the first eight months of 2013. That is an increase of five percent compared to the same time period last year.

The Center for Asia Pacific Aviation says this growth is coming from low-cost air carriers. These airlines were responsible for more than half of all passengers who flew last year. Ten years ago there were no low-cost carriers.

Martin Craig is the head of the Pacific Asia Travel Association. He says Asia's growing middle class is causing the growth.

"This massive increase in intra-Asian tourism and air travel is simply driven by the fact that so many more people are going into the so-called 'middle-class' status with discretionary income and one of the first things they want to spend their hard earned spare cash is on going overseas."

Southeast Asia's middle class is now estimated at around 500 million people. It is expected to reach as many as 1.7 billion by 2030. But Mr. Craig says that estimate may be too low.

To fly all of those passengers, industry experts say the airlines will need to train almost 200,000 pilots.

Experts say the main domestic air travel markets are Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand. Those countries have a combined 25 low-cost passenger airlines. And more are expected to start flying.

Brendan Sobie works at the Center for Asia Pacific Aviation. He says passenger air travel in Laos, Burma and especially Vietnam is growing fast.

"Being a, a frontier emerging market and having a lot of economic activity in Vietnam -- so it has some catch up to do in order to approach some of the other markets in Southeast Asia -- from a growth and low cost carrier penetration standpoint we're starting to see that catching up now taking place, and IATA sees

Vietnam as one of the three largest growing markets in the world in the next few years.”

Industry experts say there are uneven infrastructure and training levels from one country to the next. In some cases, development may be taking place too quickly for officials to ensure safety rules are being met and enough public services provided.

Brendan Sobie says countries must have enough roads and other infrastructure to meet growing demand and passenger arrivals.

“The countries and airports that don’t invest basically lose out on the traffic to other airports and countries. And that of course creates an incentive to invest because these airports and countries don’t necessarily want to lose out on that growth, on that traffic. Unfortunately, there’s a huge lag; you know, it takes a long time to build an airport and build a runway and build a terminal and what happens is that sometimes the growth is just very rapid, they just get behind the curve and we’re seeing some of the governments now racing to catch up to that.”

And that's our program for today. We hope you enjoyed it.

I'm Christopher Cruise.

I'll see you next time on As It Is.

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