

**T**he Mekong Delta consists of 11 provinces (Long An, Tiền Giang, Đồng Tháp, Vĩnh Long, Trà Vinh, Cần Thơ, Sóc Trăng, Bến Tre, Minh Hải, An Giang and Kiên Giang) with an area of 39,600 sq.km and a population of 15.9 million people (1994), representing 12% of the country's area and 22% of the country's population. Its area is larger than Singapore (600 sq.km.) and Brunei (5,800 sq.km.) and it is the most populous one in eight economic zones of the country.

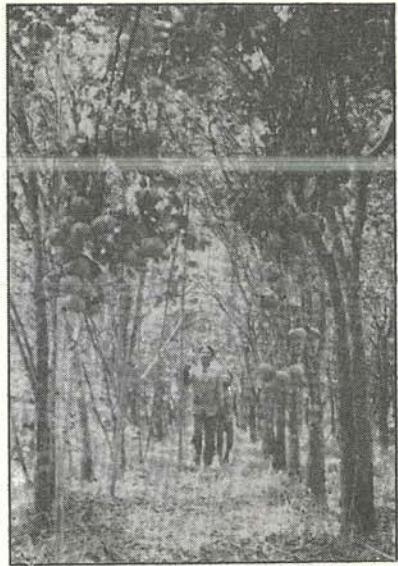
The most outstanding advantage of the Delta is its natural conditions favorable for the development of tropical agriculture. It produces the biggest amount of agricultural products (rice particularly) in the country. Its network of rivers and canals are rich in alluvial and convenient for waterway transport and communication with other zones and foreign countries. Its territorial waters are rich in maricultural products. The

equivalent to 91.1% of the national average and 45% of per capita income of the Eastern South Vietnam.

Its structure of industry is backward: the primary sector (land and sea farming) represents 48% of the gross product of the Delta. This percentage is higher than the national average and other zonal averages (except for Western Highlands). The manufacturing and construction industry contribute nearly 20% of the zonal gross product.

As the country's biggest agricultural zone, the Delta has helped to stabilize and develop the economy. Its rice production has contributed to the national food reserves, represented a half of national rice output and a better part of rice for export. In 1995, the Delta produced 14.1 million tonnes of rice, 3 million tonnes of sugarcane, 2 million tonnes of fruit, 230,000 tonnes of pig and 70,000 tonnes of poultry.

Mariculture and fishing are also strong points of the Delta. In 1995,



# THE MEKONG DELTA BY THE YEAR 2010

by Dr. PHƯƠNG NGỌC THẠCH

Delta is adjacent to Eastern South Vietnam which is considered as an industrial and trading center and a market for agricultural products and near many Southeast Asian countries who are important trading partners.

Most residents in the Mekong Delta are Kinh (Việt) people (92%), the others are Khmer (6.1%) and Chinese (1.7%). Nearly 3 million people live in town (equivalent to 19% of its population). This proportion is lower than the average of South Vietnam (48%) and the national average (21%). Rural residents are 12.8 million (or 81% of its population) with a population density of 400 per sq.km. (the national average is 219). It is predicted that its population will reach 21 million by 2010 and two-thirds of them keep on living in rural areas.

In the Delta, the production isn't well developed so its gross product represents only 20% of GDP, smaller than what contributed by the Red Delta and Eastern South Vietnam. As a purely agricultural zone, the Mekong Delta could gain only low income: its per capita income is US\$195,

its maricultural output reached 600,000 tonnes and 14% of national fishery output were caught in the Delta.

The manufacturing industry contributed only 16% of the zonal gross product. Around 65% of the zonal industrial output came from the agro-industry, but most of products of this industry were semi-finished and of low quality.

Exportation has become an important factor in the Delta. The zonal export earnings represented around 17% of the national export turnover and reached some US\$586 million in 1994. Its staple exports were rice and maricultural products representing around 50% of rice and 60% of shrimp amounts exported by Vietnam.

However, the infrastructure, especially communications, water and power supply, is poor and degraded. The waterway network (4,952 km, long) and the road network including 8 national routes (5,200 km. long) are wearing out. Telecommunications with other zones and foreign countries, in spite of recent development, couldn't meet requirements posed by



the economy. Public utility services are very poor: only 50% of towns in the Delta were supplied with water (around 50-70% of townspeople were supplied with some 50 liters of water per day); 20% of rural families used water from supply services and from wells; 24.4% of rural families were supplied with electricity (the national average was 54.8%). As for housing, 73% of them in the Delta were huts (much greater than the national average).

After a long period without capital accumulation, until recently, sources of capital have started to be formed: around 10% of the zonal gross product were retained; other 10% were sent to the Treasury (representing 9.2-12.2% of the national budget); some 20% of local budget were for public expenditure.

Material and spiritual lives of local residents have been improved step by step. The per capita income in 1994 was US\$195. According to a survey carried out all over the country, 24% of families in the Delta were of the upper class, 37% of the lower class, and the rest of the middle class. However, around 73% of working population did the farming, so the zonal per capita income is lower than the national average (US\$213 per capita). The intellectual standard was improved, but the illiteracy rate in the working population of the Delta was still high (19.2% in comparison with the national average of 16.5%). In many provinces, the ratio of skilled workers to the working population was low (3% in comparison with the national average of 10%). As for health care service, although no epidemic took place and many diseases were well under control, but the ratio of undernourished under-fives was high (33%) while the ratio of doctors to 10,000 residents was low (2.36: 10,000).

However, generally, the Mekong Delta could reach a new development stage in which the industrialization and modernization will take place.

Targets planned for this stage are high, so the Delta must gain a high growth rate, ensure a stable development, change the structure of industry, assure the supply of food to domestic market, and protect the environment and national security. The following is an outline of the Delta economy by the year 2010.

The average growth rate in the period 1995-2000 will be 9% and then, 11% in the period 2001-2010. By 2010 the per capital income will reach US\$690. If circumstances permit, the growth rate will be 11% during both two said period.

The structure of industry will be changed completely: manufacturing, construction and service industries will represent nearly 80% of the zonal gross product, while the agriculture will employ some 50% of the working population, and represent some 20% of the gross product.

The agriculture in the Delta will ensure the country's food reserves and will be developed overall with eco-friendly technology. The animal husbandry will represent some 37% of the agricultural output. By 2010, the rice output will reach over 18 million tonnes, sugarcane 4-5 million tonnes, fruit 4 million tonnes and maricultural products over 1 million tonne.

To develop the Delta, in spite of a lot of difficulties, we have no alter-



native but develop the manufacturing industry: the agro-industry will represent around 60% of the industrial output; industry using imported materials such as building materials, steel, machinery and electronics will represent 40%. Industries with high growth rate will be textile, leather, garment, agro-industry, building materials, machinery and electronics, steel. In the Delta, there will be 30 industrial estates occupying a total area of 5,000 hectares.

The service industry will represent 44% or 45% of the zonal gross product. In the period 1996-2000, export business will make a growth rate of 18%-20% and bring in US\$8.6 billion by 2010. Eco-tourism will develop remarkably and attract from 6 to 6.2 million tourists every year, nearly 1 million of them will be foreigners.

The infrastructure will develop,

networks of roads, waterways, airways will be perfected and connect the Delta with other zones and foreign countries. The waterway network includes around 200 rivers and canals with an average length of 0.68km per sq.km, two or three deep-water ports for large ships. The road network consists of some 10 national routes and a lot of provincial routes with an average length of 0.5km per sp.km. along with a system of bridges (the biggest will be the bridges over Tiền and Hậu rivers). Many airports will be built or enlarged (Cần Thơ, Phú Quốc, Rạch Giá, Cà Mau, etc.) to transport goods and passengers. The supply of electricity will be improved, the zonal grid will be built to supply power to both towns and rural areas. All rural residents will be supplied with clean water. The communication network will reach to every village and hamlet.

All residential areas in the Delta will be linked together by socio-economic activity. The network of towns including some 100 towns distributed evenly over the Delta. Of this network, Cần Thơ will be an economic, scientific and cultural center of the Delta. The urbanization rate will be 35% and the population of townspeople will reach 7.4 million by 2010.

The capital will be accumulated at high speeds: some 12% of the zonal gross product in the period 1995-2000, and 15.5% in the period 2001-2010, will be turned into investment. Some 15% of the zonal gross product in the period 1995-2000, and 22% in the period 2001-2010, will be contributed to the national treasury, and 20% of the zonal budget will be spent on public investment.

The living standard will be improved: the per capita income will reach US\$690 (in 1994 price); the unemployment rate is reduced; the manufacturing and service industries employed some 50% of the working population; the primary education will be compulsory by 2000 and the first part of the secondary education will be compulsory in towns by 2010; the ratio of skilled workers to the working population will be 30%; the average life expectancy will reach 70 years; the average height of the youth will be 1.70m.; the ratio of undernourished under-fives will be below 5%.

We hope that after the next 15-year period, the Mekong Delta will be a modernized and industrialized zone which could ensure national food reserves, has good infrastructure and a high ratio of skilled laborers to the working population. These are what we aim at and should try our best to achieve.