

Date Missing

Life's Many Sides

The business of comparing businesses

By TON THAT THIEN

My heart leaped for joy last week when the man next to me said: Oh, jolly good! Air Vietnam makes 56 million profits in 1965'. My heart leaped for you because, I thought, with such a huge profit, Air Vietnam would surely lower its fare and make it possible for me and my family to fly to Hue (I do not say GO, because there is no other way to get there but FLY) to pay a long delayed (financially) visit to my parents. But my heart sunk as quickly when my colleague added that Air Vietnam was raising internal fares by 50 per cent. So there went the dream of a poor man! And so went the dreams of thousands of men poorer than me.

The reason for the raising of the fares, it was explained to us, was that Air Vietnam considered the fares too low compared with foreign fares. My God! I wish the staff of the Ministry of Economics did not hear that, and if they had, I wish they would not follow the example set by Air Vietnam. But I wish that all the other Government departments would not reason the same way too.

First of all, we haven't got a Parliament yet, but most of the foreign countries have. So let us have elections, and a Parliament, freedom of opposition, of the press and all the rest, too. That would be nice. Perhaps Colonel Suu should not have been made director general of Air Vietnam, but special assistant to the Prime Minister in charge of democracy building. In Air VN, he is lost to the cause of democracy in this country.

Next, recalling that many capital cities in the world are clean, have bus services, and thousands of other facilities for its citizens, let us have all that too, for obviously if we compare Saigon to them, we are a long way behind.

And then, thinking about foreign countries, many have nice schools for their kids, who are not obliged to go to class between noon and 2 pm (when most of the grown-ups have their siesta), instead of putting them in the parks and the zoo (classes had been built there, we were told last week), while a lot of land is being used for commercial building. So, let us have nice and clean, and bright schools with playgrounds, well stocked libraries, and above all good and respectable teachers who do not run their schools like grocery stores in times of shortage of everything.

Etc... etc...

Coming back to business, I am afraid the taxi owners would now start saying that a five mile drive would cost four or five dollars in New York, that is 500-600 piastres instead of 30 piastres, as it is in Saigon. So let us have that too, for are not the taxi fares in Saigon too low compared to the one of foreign countries?

After the taxi owners would come the owners of other things. Our prices are really too low compared with the prices abroad. Love here costs only 5 bucks (luxury class) compared with 20 or more in the big capital cities. So let us hike love fares too (Please hostesses, note). And food here is cheap (in the luxury restaurants) compared with the big restaurants in the foreign cities. And regarding the small restaurants, or eating places, a meal costs only 20-30 piastres. So let us hike that too.

As for business, well, Vietnam businessmen are going to make huge profits if they apply the principle that every department of a firm must pay its way, instead of balancing losses here with profits there. Please western businessmen come to Vietnam to learn the secret of making more profits.

Further, I wonder what the Ministry of Economics has to say to this 50 per cent rise in fares (which are prices) and internal fare (which are internal prices and have nothing to do with imports). I still remember that internal prices would not be allowed to rise by more than ten percent, as promised. And this is not a case of black market. The market is all white, because Air Vietnam is under Government control. Don't tell me that the Government tolerates black market or sets the example and that a more than ten per cent rise in price is not black because it is official.

As a last thought, I can say that I have given up my personal subscription to Vietnam Press, because the price of such a subscription has been raised by 40 per cent. (From 700 to 1000 piastres; and I am a law abiding citizen who refuses to pay any rise in price of more than ten per cent prescribed by the government...