

Coffee festival opens in Central Highlands

Update: March, 11/2017 - 04:00



A traditional music and dance performance by ethnic minority artists at the sixth Buôn Ma Thuật Coffee Festival on Friday night. — VNA/VNS Photo Thống Nhất

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Bồ Xuân Hiệp

ĐẮK LẮK — Prime Minister Nguyễn Xuân Phúc has urged the Central Highlands region to develop into a prosperous area by promoting its biodiversity, cultural values and organic agriculture.

The PM spoke at the opening ceremony of the sixth Buôn Ma Thuật Coffee Festival on Friday night in the Central Highlands province of Đắk Lắk.

Phúc said the Central Highlands region had great advantages and potential for coffee plantations and exports, and that it should also improve its agro-forestry processing industry.

He said the region, which could become an attractive tourist destination, should promote ecological tours associated with coffee and gong-culture values.

The PM urged the region to develop a sustainable strategy to preserve the identity of local ethnic groups, especially the gong space culture, which in 2008 was named to the Representative List of UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Cultivation of coffee trees is the main livelihood of farmers in the Central Highlands region.

"The Buôn Ma Thuột coffee festival plays an essential role in promoting the trademark Buôn Ma Thuột coffee and Việt Nam's coffee to the international market," Phúc said.

During the festival, which will run through the weekend, there will be cultural activities around Buôn Ma Thuột, including a culinary street, street festival, elephant race, boat race, and wooden statue-carving contest with 60 artisans from the central province of Khánh Hòa and the Central Highlands region.

The fourth conference on investment promotion for the Central Highlands will be held today (March 11) in Buôn Ma Thuột. It is expected to draw 500 representatives from local and international agencies.

In addition, a photo contest featuring local coffee culture and gong space culture as well as a coffee harvesting competition will take place.

The country has exported an average of 1.2-1.5 million tonnes of coffee each year in the past 10 years.

Việt Nam is the second-largest coffee exporter in the world, following Brazil.

The festival has also attracted investors interested in trade and tourism projects in the area, he said.



Prime Minister Nguyễn Xuân Phúc speaks at the opening ceremony of the sixth Buôn Ma Thuột Coffee Festival on Friday night in the Central Highlands province of Đắk Lắk.— VNA/VNS Photo Thống Nhất

Gong festival

During the coffee festival, local and foreign visitors will have an opportunity to enjoy a gong festival in Đắk Lắk Province.

The gong festival promotes the cultural value and music of the Central Highlands gongs to the country and world, as well as the country's socio-economic development, particularly tourism.

Gong performances and traditional ethnic group ceremonies will be organised in Buôn Ma Thuột and Buôn Đôn District.

Many ethnic groups will take part in the gong festival, together with performers from other countries such as Cambodia, Laos and Romania.

"Gong music is a deeply rooted part of culture in most East and Southeast Asian countries," Phúc said.

The gong festival reflects the Central Highlands gong culture's status as a masterpiece of the world's oral and intangible heritage. The title was awarded by UNESCO in December 2005 after the Government submitted an action programme on the unique culture.

The opening ceremony of the festival involved about 1,000 local and foreign performers at Buôn Ma Thuột's March 10 Square. The performance is based on a story about the history of the province and its ancient gong culture.

During the festival, many activities will be held, including religious ceremonies accompanied by gong orchestras as well as contests, seminars and exhibitions.

Việt Nam gongs consist of two main types, the *cồng* and *chiêng*. *Cồng* has a knob in the middle, while *chiêng* is flat. *Cồng* makes deep bass sounds, while melodies have to be coaxed out of a *chiêng*.

“Gongs have been widely used during daily life including grand ceremonies of the Central Highlands ethnic groups,” Phúc said.

“Villages in the region often reflect their strength through gongs. They show the people’s sentiments, love, and relationship to nature,” he added.

The ceremonies were broadcast live on VTV1, VTV5 and VTV8 of the Việt Nam Television Network as well as TV and radio channels in Đắk Lắk Province and other Central Highlands provinces. —

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