

## Vietnam News Summary V

Subject: Vietnam News Summary V  
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Date: 13 SEP 1996 17:03:31 GMT  
Newsgroups: soc.culture.vietnamese

## Vietnam News Summary

Following is a summary of news reports collected over the last two weeks.

- Steve Denney  
Sept. 13, 1996

### DOMESTIC AFFAIRS

\* Almost 400 people have died from the tropical storms which have ravaged northern Vietnam since July, reports the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (Sept. 3). A spokesperson said the storms killed 394 people, seriously affected 262,787 households and caused \$362 million in damage. One of the worst hit areas was the mountainous province of Lai Chau, where 76 people died in one village alone. (Reuters Sept. 3).

\* Seven top managers of what was considered a model state company in Vietnam have been arrested on bribery charges. It is one of the biggest corruption scandals since market reforms began in Vietnam ten years ago. The Nam Dinh Textile company (about 48 miles southeast of Hanoi) managers are accused of paying roughly \$80,000 in bribes to provincial and state bank officials in order to obtain a \$50 million loan to buy equipment. More arrests are expected. "This case demonstrates the weakness and inefficiency of having provincial authorities manage state-owned enterprises," said a Ministry of Interior investigator. (UPI Aug. 30).

## FOREIGN AFFAIRS

\* The nomination of Congressman Douglas "Pete" Peterson (D-FL) as U.S. ambassador to Vietnam has been postponed to next year on a technicality. Sen. Craig Thomas (R-WY), chairman of the East Asia and Pacific Affairs Subcommittee, said the nomination has been held up because of legislation that prohibits a sitting member of Congress from serving in a civil position created during his term. Since the U.S. established diplomatic relations with Vietnam during Peterson's term this would make him ineligible to serve as ambassador until Jan. 1997 (Peterson is not running for re-election). Observers believe in any case it was unlikely that Peterson's nomination would be approved during this election year. Peterson, 61, is a former POW in Vietnam, having been detained for seven years. (Knight-Ridder newspaper, Sept. 12).

\* Six countries sharing the Mekong River met in Kunming, China from Aug. 28-30 to discuss various initiatives on the development of the so-called Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) over the next 25 years. The GMS encompasses Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam and the Yunnan province of southern China -- a land area of 2.3 million square kilometers and has a population of almost 230 million. The conference was the sixth held under Asian Development Bank auspices. Some 100 priority projects have been identified, including 34 in the transportation sector costing an estimated \$8.7 billion altogether. One of the top priority projects is a road connecting Bangkok to Phnom Penh, Vung Tau and Ho Chi Minh City (est. cost \$490 m.); another is an "East-West Transportation Corridor" connecting Thailand with Vietnam through Laos (est. cost \$130 m.). Laos has proposed a railway project to connect Vientiane with Vietnam's railway system. (Kyodo Aug. 28, 30).

\* Australian aid to Vietnam for 1996-97 will total around A\$63.6 million, according to AusAid. Major projects will include health care, student exchange and construction of the My Thuan bridge. Vietnam is Australia's second largest aid recipient for 1996-97, ranking behind Papua New Guinea (\$319.5 m.) and Indonesia (\$108 m.). Cambodia will receive \$30.8 m., Laos \$17.3 m. (AusAid budget summary, posted by Vern Weitzel in AVSL-L, Aug. 31).

\* Vietnam wants to strengthen trade ties with Malaysia, said SRV amb. to Malaysia Hoang Nhu Ly Tuesday (Aug. 28). Ly said Malaysia