

VIETNAM NEWSLETTER



Published by

THE VIETNAM COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

P. O. BOX 932, SAIGON, VIET NAM

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Vol. III

28 Oct. - 4 Nov. 1971

Nos. 42-43

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Letter from Saigon

THIEU'S THREE POINTS

Last Sunday, in taking the oath to "defend the Fatherland, respect the Constitution, serve the interests of the Nation, and do the utmost to fulfill the duties of a President," the re-elected South Vietnamese leader, Mr. Nguyen Van Thieu, also presented the general principles that are to guide his Administration in his second term.

Of course, the President will certainly elaborate on these points--peace approach, improvement of the nation's democratic institutions, and preparations for prosperity--but as things are now, his inauguration statements can be given a degree of elaboration in the projected context of Vietnamese developments.

Rather explicit on the matter of peace restoration, Mr. Thieu was much less so on the other two points. But this, in a way, is quite understandable, for the democratic process is still something of a novelty in Vietnam and economic affluence for the common citizen depends on a great many factors not totally under Thieu's control.

Peace Restoration

The South Vietnamese leader was particularly eloquent on the necessity of peace. "Death and destruction," he told the nation, "have covered our Fatherland for so many years that I share with you your deep aspirations for peace."

"All of us probably cherish nothing more than the hope to see the fighting come to an end so that we may devote ourselves to reconstructing the country and healing the wounds of war and so that our children may grow up in an atmosphere free of hatred."

According to Thieu, however, all the peace proposals he had previously made, including one for an immediate ceasefire, had been spurned by the enemy. "We have been left with no other alternatives than to continue the struggle," the President continued, "for the kind of peace we aspire to cannot be a fake peace that would lead to the enslavement of this free nation."

Nevertheless, the President emphatically maintained he would keep the door of peace open. "We shall leave the door of peace open... We shall continue the search for peace. We shall be ready for peace negotiations anywhere and at any time. We shall welcome peace initiatives and constructive proposals from any quarter. We shall continue to be guided by the notion of national reconciliation..."

Then came an eloquent appeal for an end to the long conflict. Once more, Thieu pleaded, "for the sake of peace, for the sake of human brotherhood, for the sake of blood ties between Vietnamese living in the two parts of the truncated nation, I solemnly call on the North Vietnamese to cease warring, refrain from the use of force, and enter a peaceful debate conducive to the restoration of normalcy."

MAY BE REPRODUCED

The South Vietnamese leader, then, touched upon a more remote possibility, that of reunification. To prepare conditions favoring the reunification of the land, he said, "let us start with some forms of postal, commercial, and economic exchanges." But Thieu did not say whether he expected a favorable response from the foe. "I sincerely hope the North Vietnamese authorities would respond to this constructive proposal," he only stated.

Consolidation of Democracy

For the Chief Executive, however, the consolidation of the nation's democratic institutions must be a more important task as "the very meaning of the long and hard struggle of the People and Army of Vietnam can only be found in our effort to protect freedom."

After maintaining that "democracy should be the very foundation of our society and that of our political regime," Thieu expressed the view that the development of a democratic process is a most difficult undertaking "for at the base of a democracy there must be found a recognition of political divergences, which, however, should not be allowed to explode the current constitutional framework."

President Thieu also seemed to think that democracy can only work if "the prerogatives of each of its citizens should be respected within the framework of the law." But privileges and obligations are notions made inseparable by our sense of responsibility and respect for legality.

Probably in a reference to the pre-inauguration street disturbances, the South Vietnamese leader also declared:

"Without a sense of responsibility, we will be drawn into petty rows... (and) without due respect for the law, the interests of the masses will be endangered by a minority of provocateurs."

With these conditions being satisfied, President Thieu appeared to be ready for an "honest dialogue," the format of which he described in the following terms: "The time has come for an endeavor to unite the nation against Communism... and what I mean by that is an effort to strengthen mass organizations, especially political parties, as I have more than once suggested during my first presidential term and will do my best to promote in the coming years."

This need for mass organizations, Thieu explained it by averring that "the time will soon come when the shooting war will be replaced by a political struggle. It will come when the Communists decide that armed aggression does not pay and change their strategy to one of political subversion. That is why we must be doctrinally and politically strong so as to be able to win this type of conflict."

Prosperity

The South Vietnamese leader did not say much which was new on the matters of peace restoration and democracy consolidation. But he mentioned the economic situation with a degree of frankness that borders on candor. Indeed, Thieu's inauguration address was void of claims of economic strides. He instead said:

"Year after year since national independence was recovered, we have had to beg for economic assistance from friendly powers. With each passing year, however, instead of decreasing, the need for foreign aid has increased greatly with the effect of making the country's economic life totally dependent on it and the citizens' standard of living function to the degree of generosity of allied nations."

Thieu then sketched a four-point development policy, which includes the modernization of agriculture, the expansion of fishery and cattle raising, an effort at setting up new industries, and the replacement of foreign aid by a major export drive.

Of course, the President did not nurture any illusion. "Even under normal circumstances," he stated, "the problem of development involves considerable difficulties. In the present conditions of the land, this task is all the more difficult... Whether we are going to fulfill it depends on each and every one of us. The Government alone cannot do much, for economic development is an enormous undertaking that should have the total backing of a nation having its eyes on the future."

As always, the general principles enunciated by the President are undeniably sound. South Vietnam's dependence on foreign aid, which could be defended during the dangerous mid-sixties, must be done away with if this nation should stand the chance of ever standing on its own feet--politically and militarily.

On this point, President Thieu could only give his compatriots some encouragement. "This beautiful land which our forefathers have bequeathed upon us," he said, "contains immense wealth. We have rice-fields of great fertility, immense jungle areas, and an extended coastline. Our nation is full of intelligent, hardworking, and patient people. We have the ability to exploit our natural riches and we have the manpower to give ourselves a life of plenty and to bring our country into the community of affluent nations."

Not For Soon

This rosy prospect, of course, is not for soon. A couple of days before the President spoke, an internal U.S. development occurred which could perfectly alter the basic data of the Vietnamese situation.

Indeed, during the China debate at the United Nations, the U.S. Senate unexpectedly voted to discontinue the entire American economic aid program. South Vietnam, which had been promised one-sixth of an estimated three billion dollars, found itself confronted with the very real possibility of a collapse.

Indeed, if the massive American assistance should be ended, the Saigon administration would not have the financial capabilities for any of its vital programs. In the pre-electoral days, President Thieu had given the voters an idea of the importance of U.S. aid when he declared he would resign if this scheme should be discontinued.

But even if the assistance program should be restored as Mr. Melvin Laird, the U.S. Defense Secretary, declared upon arriving here last Wednesday night, indications are many that it will not be as important as before. South Vietnam probably will have to content itself with half or two-thirds of an original package of 549 million dollars.

As compared to what North Vietnam is receiving this year from its Communist allies--300 million dollars in economic aid from the Soviet Union and an undisclosed number of million from Communist China--whatever Saigon may get from Washington should be viewed as a big leap backward.

Thieuism--peace in freedom, disciplined dissension, and economic sufficiency--will be given its first real test sooner than expected. The President's most trying hour, which may also be his finest, will probably come in a few months' time.

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LAIRD'S VISIT

U.S. Defense Secretary Melvin Laird last week visited South Vietnam for an assessment of the Vietnamization program before President Richard Nixon announces a new phase of U.S. redeployment from the war zone. Mr. Laird visited this war-torn land in the company of top Pentagon officials, including Admiral Thomas Moorer, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Although nothing has been officially said of the contents of the discussions Mr. Laird and Admiral Moorer had with Vietnamese officials, a government source in Saigon disclosed last Friday that the U.S. and South Vietnamese governments had agreed to the reduction by half of the American contingent at present still in Vietnam. This would mean another withdrawal order involving this time the repatriation of some 100,000 American troops.

According to the same government source, President Nguyen Van Thieu had apparently been prepared "for whatever number Washington may wish to withdraw" and he only drew Mr. Laird's attention to the necessity of continued massive U.S. material assistance so that the Vietnamese may completely shoulder the task of defending their own land in the coming months.

Other sources also said President Thieu called Mr. Laird's attention to the massive Soviet and Chinese assistance North Vietnam is presently receiving. This, the sources said, can be estimated at least US\$3 billion. Indeed, according to the newest aid agreement signed by Soviet and North Vietnamese leaders, Russian assistance to Hanoi amounts this year to US\$300 million in economic aid and US\$1.6 billion in military hardware. Peking's aid for Hanoi has not been publicly announced but is considered equally as important.

Top economists in Saigon predicted last week that if the U.S. aid program should not be revived after it was killed by the U.S. Senate late last month, South Vietnam may enter a period of intense economic troubles marked by rapid inflation, serious shortage of consumer goods, and possibly panic hoarding.

HUMANITARIAN GESTURE

In an unprecedented "humanitarian" gesture, the South Vietnamese government released on the occasion of President Nguyen Van Thieu's inauguration 2,938 Communist prisoners of war. All those freed on this occasion are natives of South Vietnam since the North Vietnamese regime had constantly refused to accept any of its men captured on southern battlefields.

According to a government communique, 681 of the released prisoners were to be made full-fledged citizens while the remaining 2,320 were considered as "returnees" or former enemy personnel under the supervision of the "Open Arms" Ministry until their total reintegration into society. A breakdown of the number of released POW's showed 2,726 to be able-bodied and 212 disabled persons.

It was the largest batch of Communist prisoners of war ever set free by the South Vietnamese government. They represented about seven per cent of the POW population, which is held in some ten major prison camps throughout the Republic. The largest of these camps is located on the Island of Phu Quoc, where about half an estimated 38,000 war prisoners are being detained.

HESTER HITS NORTHERN PROVINCES

About 100 persons, mainly children, were killed and hundreds of others wounded when Typhoon Hester swept across the seven northern provinces of the Republic. In addition, hundreds of thousands of persons were made homeless as the tornado stormed its way inland from the South China Sea, destroying or damaging anything that appeared to be trying to slow down its 140 miles an hour speed.

Not only were civilian houses destroyed but military installations were also badly damaged. The big American base at Chu Lai reportedly suffered to 85 per cent damage and innumerable U.S. and South Vietnamese helicopters were grounded. According to a source on the scene, troops operating on the higher ground had to tie themselves to trees to escape death.

Immediately after reports of devastation reached Saigon, the Government ordered a large-scale relief program. The Cabinet Council has approved the allocation of VN\$200 million from the National Budget and a VN\$300 million interest-free loan for relief assistance to the victims in the Northern provinces. Civic organizations also tried to contribute their share to alleviate the suffering of Hester's innumerable victims. Most significant of these was a fund raising dinner organized by the Lions Club in the course of which a painting given by President Thieu was auctioned and sold at VN\$10,000,000.

One of the most immediate effects of Hester was the importation of 50,000 tons of American rice. It had been hoped that with a good harvest this year, South Vietnam would be in a position to stop importing this basic staple.

DIEM REHABILITATION SOUGHT

The late Ngo Dinh Diem, South Vietnam's first President, came last week quite close to being rehabilitated when thousands of his supporters organized a memorial service in his honor at the Basilica of Saigon. The wife of President Nguyen Van Thieu took part in this development, which, thus, was given a degree of official sanction.

On this occasion, an estimated 10,000 persons paraded from the Basilica to Diem's tomb at the Mac Dinh Chi cemetery, where Mr. Truong Cong Cuu, an ally of the late President, declared Diem "died because he tried to reject foreign domination and sought to oppose the expansion of the war."

A movement for Diem's rehabilitation has been in evidence in Saigon during the past year or so. The publication of the Pentagon's secret papers, which presented Diem as resisting American pressure with all his force in 1963, appeared to have given new strength to the campaign for the rehabilitation of a man many a Vietnamese still consider as a national hero and a great patriot.

UNDER 200,000

The American contingent in Vietnam dropped in late October to under 200,000 men, only a few thousand above the ceiling of 184,000 ordered by President Richard Nixon for 1st December. According to informed sources, President Nixon once again beat his own schedule for troop redeployment. "When he is to speak to the American nation next Nov. 15, President Nixon will be in a position to claim completion of the current redeployment phase," the source also said.

But even more significant of the role played by U.S. troops in South Vietnam was the number of fatalities reported for the week ending last Saturday, when only two Americans were killed in actions attributed to the long conflict. It was the lowest such figure since March 1965, when America had a mere 29,000 advisers serving in this war-torn land. Still, there were 69 American soldiers wounded in this week of relative little fighting.

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Economic News**EUROPEAN FIRMS TO INVEST IN THE REPUBLIC
OF VIETNAM**

At a meeting sponsored by ECAFE and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) held in Singapore from November 3 to November 11, 1971, six industrial projects for which foreign participation is needed were presented by the South Vietnamese delegation. The projects include among other things ceramic tiles, prefabricated housing, automobile assembly and spare parts manufacture, farming tools and glass tubes.

The South Vietnamese delegation of private businessmen and industrialists left Saigon Saturday, October 30, 1971 for Singapore, led by Vice Minister of Economy Pham Minh Duong. The Vietnamese projects have been widely promoted by the Secretariat of UNIDO since early this year. At the Singapore meeting representatives of 16 foreign firms and finance institutions, mainly European, discussed with Vietnamese businessmen specific joint venture arrangements.

COMMERCIAL AGENTS' BUSINESS LICENSE DEPOSIT

In a ministerial decree dated October 19, 1971, the Ministry of Economy specified as follows the conditions to be fulfilled by all persons, real or juridical, in order to qualify as licensed commercial representatives of foreign firms or foreign shipping companies operating in Vietnam:

1. Being fully qualified to conduct business activities in accordance with the existing Vietnamese commercial code;
2. Being of Vietnamese nationality;
3. Having paid a business license deposit at the National Treasury at the following rates:
 - a. VN\$3 million (about US\$11,000) for general commercial representation;
 - b. VN\$5 million (about US\$20,000) for representatives of international shipping companies operating in the southern part of the Republic of Vietnam;
 - c. VN\$3 million for representatives of international shipping companies operating in the northern part of the Republic;
 - d. Representatives of international shipping companies now operating in the southern part of the Republic must pay an additional deposit of VN\$3 million if they wish to establish agents or offices at the ports in the northern part of the Republic.

Within three months, starting from October 19, 1971, all commercial agents now in operation must pay the new deposits at the National Treasury.

Although only individuals or firms of Vietnamese nationality may engage in the business of commercial representation, foreign firms or individuals who have been granted license in the past and who were still in operation at the time the above-mentioned decree was signed may continue to do business provided they pay the newly required deposits and have their licenses revalidated.

TAX COLLECTORS CORPS CREATED

A decree recently signed by the Prime Minister has dissolved the Technical Cadres Branch and created the new Tax Collectors Corps. The Technical Cadres Branch was established in July 1969. The newly created body will be administered by the Ministry of Interior but the salary of its members will be paid by employing agencies to which they are assigned.

According to the decree in question, tax collectors shall be assigned to all cities and provinces throughout the country to collect taxes for the local administration. They will also assist local administrators in working out and implementing fiscal procedures.

To be recruited as tax collector, a candidate must be from 21 to 50 years of age, holding the Baccalaureat (Senior High School Diploma) 2nd Part, or an equivalent academic diploma.

Tax collectors are remunerated on a lump sum basis, from VN\$6,000 to VN\$8,500 per month (US\$25 to US\$32) depending on qualifications plus a fixed professional allowance of VN\$4,000 (about US\$15) per month.

Members of the Technical Cadres Branch to be deactivated may join the newly created Tax Collectors Corps at their request.

RVN AT ECAFE SEMINAR ON PETROLEUM

A South Vietnamese delegation of petroleum experts and officials led by Lawyer Vuong Van Bac attended the ECAFE Seminar on Petroleum Legislation in Bangkok from October 18 to October 25, 1971. The meeting--the first of its kind--was attended by representatives from 18 countries including : Australia, Taiwan, Fiji, France, Indonesia, Japan, the Khmer Republic, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the Philippines, the Republic of Vietnam, Singapore, Thailand, the USSR, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The Federal Republic of Germany attended as an observer.

The principal theme of discussion was petroleum legislation, with particular reference to offshore operations. In his opening statement the ECAFE Executive Secretary U Nyun called on developing countries in the region to reach urgent agreement on common boundaries to facilitate development of offshore petroleum resources. He said the major aim of the Seminar was to help developing nations of the area with newly established offshore prospecting operations in order to frame petroleum legislation based on the best existing models, define offshore boundaries and combat pollution hazards. Following were some of the main topics on the agenda:

1. Government revenues from oil and gas;
2. Government authority in the administration of exploration, evaluation and development of offshore oil and gas;
3. Status of oil and natural gas legislation currently in force in countries of the ECAFE region.

RVN PAVILION AT THAT LUANG INTERNATIONAL TRADE FAIR

Mr. Leuam Insisiongmay, Deputy Prime Minister of Laos, inaugurated the Vietnamese pavilion at the That Luang International Trade Fair in Vientiane on October 22, 1971. Among the countries participating in the fair were Great Britain, France, Australia, Japan, Thailand, India, Israel, Russia, Laos and the Republic of Vietnam.

Unlike those of other participating countries that only showed photographic illustrations, Vietnam displayed a variety of native products such as lacquer ware, Ha Tien cement, dolls, sugar, textile fabrics and handicraft.

ANTI-CORRUPTION MOVE

Colonel Cao Van Khanh, Director-General of Customs, recently disclosed that he had dismissed a number of customs officers involved in corruption cases and lacking dedication to duty. He said 17 customs branch chiefs had been transferred to the head office of the Directorate General and demoted. They have been replaced by young and dynamic customs officers. Colonel Khanh also said each team of customs inspectors would now have six men instead of two. These inspectors will make regular spot checks of customs stations.

SAIGON TO HAVE NEW BUS SERVICE

In a televised interview last October 16, 1971 Mr. Buu Hiep, Technical Assistant to the Saigon Mayor, said two new bus services would start operation in the capital city early next year if government approval could be granted in time to two recently submitted projects.

The first project, sponsored by the Free Confederation of Labor, calls for the establishment of a public transport company to operate a fleet of 350 Japanese-made buses (Isuzu diesel type), each having 36 seats and standing room for 15 to 20 passengers. Mr. Buu Hiep said if government approval was granted now, the Free Confederation of Labor could put into service almost immediately 100 such buses in the first phase. Another 150 buses would become operational in the second phase prior to January 1972, with the remaining 100 buses scheduled for service within the subsequent four months. Mr. Hiep did not elaborate on financing and managerial arrangements.

The second project, submitted by the Union of Three-wheel Vehicle Drivers, proposes the use of Ford minibuses, each having 26 seats and costing VN\$1.6 million (about US\$5,800). MEKONG FORD, the newly-established sole agent of Ford in Saigon, has however agreed to a discount of VN\$200,000 per bus (approximately US\$750). The Union of Three-wheel Vehicle Drivers is asking the Government for deferred payment of some taxes on the imported buses. If this privilege can be obtained, cash payment for the bus can be slashed by 30 per cent. If everything goes according to schedule the Union will have 400 minibuses operating in the capital city within the first three months of 1972.

With the government-owned bus service suspending operation six years ago, Saigon now has some 3,500 taxis, 60 school buses, 2,100 three-wheel lambrettas, 2,500 motorized cyclos, 5,500 pedicabs, and about 250,000 motorcycles.

ASIAN PACIFIC MARKETS ATTRACTIVE TO U.S. BUSINESS

Asian Pacific markets are among the fastest growing in the world. The U.S. increasingly depends on access to these markets as a factor contributing to its own economic strength and well-being. Direct investment in the region by U.S.-based multinational enterprises is an effective vehicle to promote domestic and international economic interests while fostering the economic development of the nations in the region. Multinational enterprises abroad contribute positively to the balance of payments of the U.S. annual returns on foreign direct investment, which now substantially exceed annual outflow.

These empirical judgments were voiced by leading representatives of U.S. business enterprises operating in Southeast Asia at the semi-annual meeting of the Asian Pacific Council of American Chambers of Commerce (APCAC). The meeting held in Seoul, Korea, on October 3-5 was attended by more than 40 Council representatives of the American Chambers of Commerce in Australia, Hong Kong, Japan, Vietnam, Korea, Okinawa, the Philippines, Taiwan and Thailand. Following are some of the proposals and recommendations made by APCAC on this occasion:

China Trade: APCAC supports the U.S. policy as set forth in President Nixon's statements encouraging the establishment of commercial relations with the People's Republic of China. In pursuit of this policy objective, APCAC opposes all forms of political or economic discrimination that would limit the fulfillment of the goal of free trade.

U.S. Defense Contractors in Vietnam: APCAC endorses the need to form a Business Advisory Council, which will serve to advise both the U.S. Government and the Government of the Republic of Vietnam in evolving an effective policy designed to utilize the capital investment and the technological, business and professional expertise developed during several years of support of joint U.S. and Vietnamese Government efforts. The purpose of such a policy, in the case of transition, should be to provide an equitable basis for transition of capital investment and expertise to the Vietnamese economy in order to maximize the contribution of existing American trade to the postwar economy.

Trade Policy: Specifically APCAC recommends:

1. Further improvement in U.S. export financing conditions and in U.S. Export Import Bank programs;
2. Repeal of the American Selling Price (ASP) duty base system.

U.S. Military Aid: APCAC accepts the need for continued support of U.S. treaty commitments, but also recognizes that a major cause of the U.S. international balance of payments deficit is military spending at home and abroad. Hence the Council recommends that all countries in the region should assume a greater share of the defense burden. APCAC believes strongly that as U.S. military spending declines, U.S. private direct investment should be encouraged in the interest of economic and political stability.

To encourage the flow across national borders of technological and managerial skills, APCAC calls on the U.S. Government to negotiate on a reciprocal basis consular agreements with Asian nations to ease restrictions on overseas travel, particularly with reference to travel by American businessmen based in Asia. The Council believes the ultimate objective should be to enable American businessmen living overseas to obtain four-year multiple entry visas (as opposed to tourist visas) for all countries of Asia.

Employment of Foreign Nationals: APCAC invites the attention of the governments of developing countries in the Asian Pacific region to note the contributions made by American investors to the well-being of Asian countries. Of particular value to national development are the many jobs created by American investment and the effective introduction of modern business methods by American firms, including efforts to train increasing numbers of local citizens for key positions in management, production and sales fields.

NEW BANKING OFFICES

A branch of the Dong Phuong Bank was opened in Tuy Hoa on October 20, 1971. With this new branch the Dong Phuong Bank now has 4 provincial banking offices: My Tho, Tuy Hoa, Chau Doc and Bien Hoa.

The Dong Phuong Bank, established in May 1969, is one of the smaller Vietnamese banks. Its net worth as of December 31, 1970 stood at VN\$151 million (about US\$550,000), compared to VN\$3.3 billion (about US\$12 million) of the government-owned Vietnam Commercial Credit Bank.

Another new banking office was also opened by the Ky Thuong Ngan Hang (Industry and Commerce Bank), commonly known as the Military Bank, in Saigon at No.2 Pham Ngu Lao Street, on October 26, 1971.

TRADE OPPORTUNITIES

Radio and Television

The Saigon Ky Nghe Dien Cong Ty (Saigon Electronic Industry Company), 35 Le Loi Street, Saigon, is seeking bids for the supply of machinery and equipment for their radio and television assembly line. Commercial representatives of foreign firms intending to bid are invited to contact the Industrial Development Bank at 40 Nguyen Hue Street, Saigon. Bid deadline is 9 a.m., December 18, 1971.

Textile Equipment

The Vietnam Textile Company (VINATEXCO), 12 Cong Ly Street, Saigon, is inviting bids for the supply of machinery and equipment for a textile mill. Bid deadline is 10:30 a.m., November 27, 1971. For further details contact the Industrial Development Bank at 40 Nguyen Hue, Saigon.

Power Generating Equipment

The Vietnam Electric Power Company, 72 Hai Ba Trung Street, Saigon, is seeking bids for the supply of power generating equipment for their Can Tho Power Plant. Bid deadline is 12 a.m. December 6, 1971. Full details may be obtained at the Industrial Development Bank, 40 Nguyen Hue, Saigon.

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