

Far Eastern Economic REVIEW

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INTELLIGENCE

China Travel Advisory

Authorities in China's Henan province have been forced to call on the military to control peasant bandit gangs that have made travel out of the provincial capital of Zhengzhou a perilous experience. In late July troops made a sweep of the highway connecting the city with Luoyang, where bandits had been setting up flying road-blocks to rob travellers. The troops captured two gangs and executed an unknown number of people following summary trials. Travellers from Henan said road conditions remained dangerous, despite the military's campaign. As in many other parts of the country, Henan peasants' anger over the widening gap between urban and rural living conditions has contributed to a breakdown in law and order.

Wrong Impression

Deputy Prime Minister and Unification Minister Han Wan Sang is convinced that Chosun Ilbo, the country's powerful conservative daily, is set to oust him from government on ideological grounds. The newspaper and its sister publications have attacked his liberal view of North Korea, pillorying him as an appeaser of communism. But Han thinks the real reason behind the attack lies in his wrongly perceived image as a radical championing reform of the elite institutions that include the newspaper in question.

Bank on Apec

Along with US President Bill Clinton, the World Bank is jumping on the bandwagon of Apec, or Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum. In a report to be released before the November Apec summit in Seattle proposed by Clinton, the World Bank will call for a decisive round of trade and investment liberalisation in the Asia-Pacific region centred on Apec. This "Apec Round" could result in, among other things, an across-the-board reduction of tariffs by as much as 50% which will then be applied to imports from outside the region on a non-discriminatory "most-favoured nation" basis. The bank is opposed to free trade arrangements, including the North American Free Trade Agreement concluded among the US, Canada and Mexico, which are by definition discriminatory.

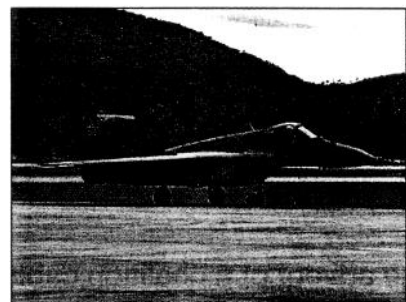
Adieu Dr Dieu

Vietnamese mathematician Phan Dinh Dieu, long the most outspoken critic of the ruling Communist Party to remain out of

prison, has been ousted from his post as vice-chairman of the National Centre for Scientific Research. In recent months, Dieu had called for the party to abandon its Marxist-Leninist ideology and challenged it to allow other parties to compete in the country's political life. Officially, he was removed from his post in a dispute with the centre's director, physicist Nguyen Van Hieu, but observers see Dieu's firing as an attempt by the party to isolate him from potential supporters. Dieu has asked to be allowed to teach mathematics and computer science at Hanoi University.

Best MiGs Money Can Buy

Russia has made the modifications to its MiG29 fighter aircraft that Malaysia specified as a condition before proceeding with the purchase of 18 aircraft. A senior Malaysian defence official said that the Russians have offered a much improved engine, and stronger airframe for the aircraft, which the official said is a modified "S" variant. Russia has also agreed to set



The MiG29 on show in Malaysia.

up a service centre for the MiG aircraft in Malaysia. The official explained that Malaysia's decision to buy a mixture of 18 MiG29 from Russia and eight FA18 fighter aircraft from the US was to optimise the number of aircraft the air force could acquire. The whole deal will cost an estimated US\$1.5 billion.

Spooky Politics

The latest no-confidence vote against Indian Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao's government brought the Intelligence Bureau, India's domestic security agency, into full play. The agency is known to have mounted intensive surveillance of MPs and helped Congress wheeler-dealers in cracking the 20-member opposition group led by Ajit Singh to deliver crucial votes. Sources said the agency prides itself that it was able to give Rao an accurate forecast of the voting outcome a few hours before parliament met on 28 July.

VIETNAM

Dissenting Voices

Criticisms ahead of party conference anger government

By Murray Hiebert in Hanoi

Vietnamese leaders may be regretting their decision to hold a special communist party mid-term conference next January. Several leading intellectuals have capitalised on the event to launch attacks on the party for sticking to old-time Marxist-Leninist politics despite its free-market economic reforms.

The state-controlled press has refused to publish the critiques, so the intellectuals have taken to circulating photocopies underground. This has so angered the party that it warned its members in late October that they will be punished if they are caught distributing or in possession of materials "opposing socialism." One of the most stinging critiques was written by Lu Phuong, a southern intellectual who challenges the party's sacred tenet that simply because it was introduced by Ho Chi Minh, the founding father of independent Vietnam, the party must adhere to Marxist-Leninist ideology.

Phuong, a former party activist and Culture Ministry official, argues that Ho simply "borrowed Leninism as a tool" to fight the French colonialists and the US. He never imagined that he had adopted an ideology which would "turn intelligent people into foolish ones, turn people with ideals into degenerate ones and bog down the nation in stagnation," Phuong writes.

"The incompetence in economic development and brutal suppression of politics and culture brought by the socialist model on behalf of Marx and proletarian revolution resulted in Vietnam for many years having independence, but not liberty and happiness," Phuong, who now works as a photographer in Ho Chi Minh City, writes in his 16-page tract.

"... economic development can only accompany political liberalisation," he warns the party. "We have to give up the idealism that Uncle Ho chose in a very simple manner... But the question is by what means — will it come through collapse or will it come through peaceful means?"

Another critique circulating in the capital was authored by biology Prof. Nguyen Xuan Tu, writing under the pseudonym "Ha Si Phu," or "hero professor of Hanoi." Marxism-Leninism has been "unable to achieve national reconciliation [and] the construction of a democratic society and a market economy," Tu argues in his 76-page paper.

"It is necessary for us to give up a foreign theory which is not suitable for our



Ho Chi Minh: no deviation from his choice?

country... so that we can abolish [internal] resentment, call for contributions to develop the country and create conditions to harmonise our nation into the larger world," he writes.

"Some people are afraid that 'if we give up idealism we will suffer immediate chaos,'" Tu says, alluding to the party's argument that political reform will cause instability, threatening the country's modest economic achievements since the communists launched their drive towards a free market in 1986. "If this is true, our nation is only worthy of being a slave [and] we cannot be independent."

A third underground tract written by a southern intellectual, Nguyen Phong Ho Hieu, explores the ramifications of a possible US lifting of its trade embargo against Vietnam. Hieu, who quit the party in 1990, claims Hanoi's leaders are ambivalent about a US return to Vietnam because of the political impact of the anticipated surge in economic growth.

"The question of political liberty will arise when the people have economic freedom," Hieu argues. "People will demand that the government and party give back the liberties they have lost," he says, listing examples such as free elections, freedom of speech, press and religion, and equality before the law.

Overseas Vietnamese have also smuggled into the country documents criticising the party. One circulating in Hanoi is

called, *It's Time to Put Marxism into the Grave*.

So far the party has made no direct public comment about the critiques. But in early October, a Hanoi newspaper published an article slamming the party's "internal enemies," puzzling readers who had not seen the tracts and could only guess what had caused such an outburst. Later that month and in early November, the party dailies in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City published a two-part series attacking an unnamed mathematician for his "ideological errors."

This was a clear swipe at Phan Dinh Dieu, a frequent party critic who was ousted a few months ago from his job as vice-chairman of the National Centre for Scientific Research after an interview he gave a Danish journalist was published in Europe.

Interestingly, party chief Do Muoi invited Dieu to an unpublicised meeting to discuss reform in Vietnam around the time of the press attack, suggesting that party leaders are divided on how to respond to their critics. At the same time, officials say the party has asked half-a-dozen intellectuals sympathetic to the government to prepare articles criticising the other underground tracts currently being circulated.

But the attacks on the party are not the only problem troubling its leaders as they prepare for the conference. Originally scheduled for November, the meeting has already been postponed twice, first to December then to January, reportedly because of differences within the leadership. Rumours are now circulating in Hanoi that the meeting may be postponed again.

Although the party is united on the need for continuing reform, officials say the country's leaders are divided on the pace at which change should be introduced.

Party sources say senior leaders are also divided over the appointment of roughly 15 new central committee members, who are to replace members expected to retire or lose their positions during the conference. These differences are due to be debated when the central committee begins its sixth plenum around 23 November.

The plenum will also seek to revise the draft political report prepared for the conference. The current draft, which reviews economic and political developments in the country since its seventh congress in 1991, prompted widespread criticism from provincial officials and government ministries when it was circulated a month ago. Some critics charged that the document was overly optimistic about the country's economic development since the launching of the reforms. Others complained that the draft failed to spell out the party's vision for Vietnam's future, including a definition of what exactly it means to have "a free-market economy with a socialist-orientation under the leadership of the state." ■