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## **Background Brief:**

# **Vietnam Dismisses Two Western-Educated Deputy Prime Ministers**

**January 1, 2023**

Deputy Prime Ministers Pham Binh Minh and Vu Duc Dam were removed from their positions as members of the Communist Party of Vietnam's Central Committee, the state-controlled Vietnam News Agency reported.

The dismissals were announced without specific reasons, but the move comes after each was involved in separate scandals related to authorities' handling of COVID-19 outbreaks.

Q1. How do you assess the dismissals of two deputy prime ministers from their positions on the party Central Committee?

ANSWER: General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong has made clear in his many revisions of party rules governing the behaviour of members of the Vietnam Communist Party that they will be disciplined for not carrying out duties and responsibilities assigned to them and they will also be held responsible for the persons they have vouched for irrespective when the transgressions took place.

Deputy Prime Ministers Pham Binh Minh and Vu Duc Dam both held positions in the party organisations within the state bureaucracy in addition to their membership on the party Central Committee. Also, Minh was a member of the Politburo.

The reasons the Central Committee requested their resignations has not yet been officially announced. But it is clearly a case of "damned if you do, damned if you don't." In other words, they are presumed guilty if they were directly involved in COVID-related scandals, or they are guilty for not discovering and taking disciplinary action against the network of corrupt officials under their care. The fact that they were allowed to offer their resignations from the Central Committee suggests the latter.

Q2. Lawyer Nguyen Van Dai, based in Germany, told Radio Free Asia that Pham Binh Minh and Vu Duc Dam are the last two educated and kind persons in the Vietnam Communist Party, and their removal is the Communist Party shooting itself in the foot. What is your response to this statement?

ANSWER: Both Minh and Dam received higher degrees abroad at universities in the United States and Belgium, respectively. However, there are other highly educated members on the party Central Committee.

Minh performed credibly as foreign minister and only a restriction on serving two-terms in office prevented him from continuing as foreign minister. Dam clearly has widespread support among the public at large because he is comparatively young, has administrative talent, and successfully handled the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020.

Both were well regarded by delegates to the 13<sup>th</sup> national party congress to be elected to the Central Committee.

However, Vietnam's system of collective leadership includes individual responsibility. Pham Binh Minh reportedly failed to provide proper supervision of repatriation flights for Vietnamese citizens stranded abroad due to COVID-19. A wide network of foreign affairs officials has been implicated in taking bribes in exchange for seats on these aircraft. If Minh personally benefitted from this, he is damned; if Minh was unaware or failed to take action, he is also damned.

Deputy Prime Minister Dam's assistant, Nguyen Van Trinh, was implicated in a bribery scandal involving the sale of Viet A JSC COVID-19 test kits at inflated prices. Dam too appears to have failed to provide proper supervision and take action against a widespread network of corrupt officials. Like Minh, if Dam personally benefitted from this, he is damned; if Dam was unaware or failed to take action, he is also damned.

The dismissal of Minh and Dam from the Central Committee is unrelated to unsubstantiated speculation that corruption-related arrests are a result of a power struggle in the Vietnam Communist Party to shape leadership selection for the 14<sup>th</sup> national party congress to be held in 2026.

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