

April 17, 2006

Vietnam Opens Congress to Choose New Leaders

By REUTERS

Filed at 10:53 p.m. ET

HANOI (Reuters) - Vietnam's ruling Communist Party opened its five-yearly Congress on Tuesday troubled by corruption and vowing to choose new leaders "with talent and morals" to speed up economic reforms.

The traditionally secretive party, one of only a handful of communist governments in the world, will for the first time give each of the 1,176 delegates the right to recommend candidates for the top post of general secretary, officials said.

Incumbent Nong Duc Manh, 65, has served five years. In his opening speech to the Congress, he said "economic development has not been on a par with capacity" and the party wanted to "further accelerate" the process.

Vietnam President Tran Duc Luong, 69, and Prime Minister Phan Van Khai, 72, have both served consecutive five-year terms and were expected to retire, political analysts said.

"The Congress will discuss the course of leading the country and elect new leadership with talent and morals," Dao Duy Quat, a senior culture and ideology official, told state-run media. He said the elite Politburo would consider candidates for general secretary recommended by delegates.

In the past, the Politburo alone chose the general secretary.

The capital, Hanoi, was awash in red flags and banners with the Southeast Asian country's yellow star or yellow hammer and sickle insignia. Red banners hung over the tree-lined boulevards with slogans in yellow such as, "The 10th Congress of the Party, a congress of intelligence, solidarity, reform and sustainable development."

Vietnam wants to become a member of the World Trade Organization this year. It will also host the summit of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in November, the largest international event in its history.

CORRUPTION SCANDAL

Corruption was on people's minds as the delegates gathered to decide economic policy and leaders for the next five years. A multi-million dollar bribery and gambling scandal in a big budget road and bridge building agency

forced the resignation of the transport minister two weeks ago. His deputy was arrested.

``We want the Communist Party to have a real doi moi (renewal), to carry out determined measures to fight graft," Dinh Xuan Tinh, 71, a war veteran and ex-accountant at a Hanoi paper mill, said in front of the Lenin statue in Hanoi.

``There have been too many words but the results minimal," he said after an early morning game of badminton. "Action should be taken to make people trust."

A Politburo member last week said corruption ``threatens the survival of our regime" and the course of economic development.

The 20-year-long process of moving from a centrally controlled to market-based economy has reduced poverty in the country of 83 million by 31 percent according to government figures. Last year, gross domestic product grew 8.4 percent, one of the fastest-growing economies in the world.

Officials said the Congress was focused on sustaining high growth with the goal of making Vietnam a middle-income country by 2020.

But per capita income is only \$640 a year and 75 percent of people live in the countryside. Like its fellow communist-run neighbor China, Vietnam grapples with a growing gap between rich and poor.

[Copyright 2006 Reuters Ltd.](#)

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [XML](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Site Map](#)

--