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Vietnamese PM to reshuffle Cabinet

More young technocrats likely to feature in smaller Cabinet

By Roger Mitton

HANOI - VIETNAM'S Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung is expected to embark on a major Cabinet reshuffle within the next few weeks.

The Premier, who will celebrate one year in office this month, is well positioned to overhaul his Cabinet by inducting more dynamic young technocrats like himself. He has just received the highest single vote count in the recently concluded National Assembly elections, netting 99.1 per cent.

The polls did not yield surprising results - the ruling Communist Party won more than 90 per cent of the seats.

Since the start of the year, Mr Dung has made it clear that he would revamp his team once the elections are out of the way.

Dr Ha Huy Thanh, director of the Institute for Environment and Sustainable Development, said: 'The reshuffle will bring in new faces who, I've heard, will be more open, disciplined and innovative, and whose views will be more in keeping with modern-day Vietnam.'

There are indications that Mr Dung may reduce the size of the Cabinet from 29 members to as few as 22 by eliminating some ministries and merging others.

The health and population ministries, for example, are likely to be combined into a single portfolio, as are culture, information and sport.

Mr Nguyen Tran Bat, chairman of Investconsult, a major business advisory firm, said: 'It is a good idea to reduce the number of ministries because it will help administrative reform and reduce overlap and red tape.'

Among those highly likely to be axed are 10 ministers who were not elected to the Communist Party's central executive committee at its congress in April last year.

They include the influential head of the government office, **Mr Doan Manh Giao**, who is expected to be replaced by his younger deputy **Nguyen Xuan Phuc**, 53, a more dynamic southerner whose style resembles that of the Prime Minister.

Also departing will be ministers in several heavyweight portfolios such as interior, trade, labour, health and natural resources.

Expected to helm the newly combined Trade and Industry Ministry is Mr **Hoang Trung Hai**, 48, a Hanoi native who speaks English with an Irish accent, acquired during his years in Dublin, where he obtained a master's degree.

Another high-flier moving up will be Agriculture Minister **Cao Duc Phat**, 51, an energetic Harvard-educated technocrat whose portfolio is expected to absorb the fisheries and, possibly, natural resources ministries.

But perhaps the biggest boost will go to Dr **Nguyen Thien Nhan**, 54, the Germany-trained Education Minister who will become a deputy prime minister, while retaining his education portfolio.

Once the Prime Minister announces his reshuffle later this month, he is expected to embark on a long-delayed visit to Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia and the Philippines.

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