

## **Party congress - Government appointments - Economy - Foreign relations**

Summary and key dates

Sixth CPV congress in Hanoi (Dec. 15–18, 1986). Delivery of political report by Truong Chinh (Dec. 15). Decision of three senior party leaders not to seek re-election (Dec. 17). Political bureau meeting on appointment of advisers (Jan. 6, 1987). Appointment of new general secretary (Dec. 18, 1986). Appointment of new Cabinet ministers and formation of new ministries (Feb. 16, 1987). Death of Army General Chief of Staff (Dec. 5, 1986). Critical report on economy in party newspaper (March 1, 1986). Political bureau directive on autonomy for economic units (April 8, 1986). Devaluation of currency (Nov. 7, 1986). Results of 1986 economic plan and introduction of 1987 plan (Dec. 24, 1986). Border fighting with China (Jan. 5–7, 1987). Reported release of Chinese prisoners (Feb. 10). Visit by Soviet Foreign Minister (March 11–13). Visit by US senators (Jan. 1–2). Alleged Vietnamese attack on Lao tribesmen (Dec. 26, 1986).

The sixth congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) was held in Hanoi (the capital of Vietnam) on Dec. 15–18, 1986, and was attended by 1,129 delegates representing over 1,800,000 party members [for previous party congress, in March 1982, see 31589 A].

The congress was attended also by delegations from the communist parties of Laos and Kampuchea (led by their respective general secretaries, Mr Kaysone Phomvihane and Mr Heng Samrin), by a delegation from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) led by the politburo and secretariat member Mr Yegor Ligachev, and by representatives of the ruling communist and workers' parties of Afghanistan, Albania, Angola, Bulgaria, Congo, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, Ethiopia, East Germany, Hungary, North Korea, Mongolia, Mozambique, Poland, Romania and South Yemen. Also in attendance were representatives of India's ruling Congress, Nicaragua's ruling Sandinista National Liberation Front, the African National Congress, the South West Africa People's Organization, the anti-government El Salvador guerrilla Farabundo Marti Liberation Front, and communist parties from Chile, France, West Germany, India, Japan, Portugal and the USA.

Mr Truong Chinh, then general secretary of the CPV see below for his resignation from this post on Dec. 17 and the current Chairman of the Council of State, delivered a summary of the political report of the central committee at the opening session of the congress on Dec. 15. The report, which covered all aspects of the party's policy, addressed a number of past errors in economic planning and was highly critical of the leadership qualities of the higher organs of the CPV. Its main points were as follows.

General situation and tasks. National reunification was complete and the party's main tasks were socialist construction and the defence of the homeland. In pursuing these tasks the party had, since 1976, made a number of errors and it was the role of the sixth congress to analyse these errors and recommend corrective measures. Mistakes in economic planning, particularly in investment allocation and capital construction between 1976 and 1980, had left heavy consequences. However, some progress had been made in collectivization and in industrial and agricultural production. Major steps had been taken in the building of defences on the northern border (with China) and the Army had continued to fulfil its international duty towards Laos and Kampuchea.

Overwhelmingly critical assessment of the socio-economic situation. The party had not achieved the objective set by the fifth party congress, namely the stabilization of the socio-economic situation, and consequently the people had lost confidence in the party leadership and the functioning of the state organs. Although some growth in production had been recorded during the period of the third five-year plan (1981–85), this had not been in keeping with the capabilities available and the labour spent. Targets had not been met in the production of food grain, coal, cement, wood, textiles and items for export. Natural resources, especially farmlands and forests, had been wasted and parts of the environment needlessly destroyed. Imbalances had increased between supply and demand and between export and import in foodstuffs, consumer goods and raw materials. Millions of Vietnamese people were unemployed and workers and state employees had faced many difficulties, including shortages of consumer goods and medicines. Low standards of housing, hygienic conditions and cultural life were prevalent in many areas and “negative

manifestations” in society had increased. Corruption by state employees and party cadres was widespread and often went unpunished.

Responsibility for the crucial shortcomings and mistakes—identified as “subjectivism, idealism, simplistic thinking and action, impatience, yielding to one’s own wishes and the tendency to leave everything drifting”—rested primarily with the CPV central committee, the party political bureau and secretariat, and the Council of Ministers.

Basic guidelines for economic and social policy aimed at stabilizing the socio-economic situation. It was planned to concentrate manpower and wealth on three major targeted programmes concerning grain and foodstuffs, (ii) consumer goods, and (iii) export goods. Agriculture should be at the forefront of socialist industrialization and was to be supported by heavy industry and the infrastructure. The state-run sector was the “mainstay” of the economy, but both party and government had to recognize the long-term necessity of the “small production commodity economy” and the importance of the “private capitalist economy” to a number of sectors. It was essential to eliminate “bureaucratism” and state subsidies and to develop economic planning based on “economic accounting and socialist business methods”, managed according to the principle of “democratic centralism”.

Foreign policy and international tasks. Vietnam would continue to fulfil its internationalist duty towards Kampuchea and Laos, and fully supported the readiness of the Heng Samrin government in Kampuchea to negotiate with opposition individuals and groups to realize national concord on the basis of excluding the “Pol Pot clique of genocidal criminals”. Vietnam was ready to begin negotiations on normalization of relations with China “at any time, at any level and in any place”.

The role of the party. The CPV and other mass organizations required renovation in a number of respects, primarily in terms of organization and attitude. Following the congress a campaign would be launched to purify the party, to overcome corruption in the state machinery and to dispel “negativism” in society.

Mr Pham Hung, a Vice-Chairman of the Council of Ministers (Deputy Premier) and Minister of the Interior, announced to the congress on Dec. 17 that Mr Truong Chinh, Mr Pham Van Dong, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers (Prime Minister) and Mr Le Duc Tho, the fourth-ranking member of the political bureau, had decided not to stand for re-election to the central committee (thereby resigning their political bureau and secretariat posts) “on the grounds of advanced age and failing health”. However, Mr Pham Hung said that all three (until then the country’s three most powerful leaders) would serve as advisers to the central committee.

The political bureau held a meeting on Jan. 6, 1987, and subsequently issued a statement formally entrusting Mr Truong Chinh, Mr Pham Van Dong and Mr Le Duc Tho with responsibility to serve as advisers to the CPV political bureau. At the meeting the political bureau established a “work statute for the comrade advisers”, which included the role of contributing their opinions on “strategic issues in the socio-economic, national defence, security, foreign affairs and other fields” and the resolution of “certain specific issues”.

The Agence-France Presse news agency reported on April 1, 1987, that Mr Nguyen Co Thach, a Vice-Chairman of the Council of Ministers and Minister for Foreign Affairs, had recently announced that Mr Truong Chinh and Mr Pham Van Dong would “leave their posts” at some time during 1987.

At the closing session of the congress on Dec. 18 it was announced that Mr Nguyen Van Linh, 71, had been elected to the post of CPV general secretary.

This post had been held for the last five months by Mr Truong Chinh, the previous general secretary, Mr Le Duan, having died on July 10, 1986 [see 34809 A]. Mr Nguyen Van Linh was considered a leading reformist and, as secretary of the party committee in Ho Chi Minh City, had introduced policies which provided incentives for private agricultural and industrial production.

A member of the CPV political bureau and secretariat in 1976–82, Mr Nguyen Van Linh was removed from membership of both these leading organs at the fifth party congress, held in 1982 [see page 31591], ostensibly for reasons of health, although reports suggested that he had been penalized for his unsupportive attitude towards the completion of socialist transformation in the southern provinces. He remained secretary of the party committee in Ho Chi Minh City. Mr Nguyen Van Linh’s reappointment to the political bureau was confirmed by the official party newspaper *Nhan Dan* on July 7, 1985 [see page 34101], and at the funeral of Le Duan in July 1986 he was identified as a secretariat member, later being referred to in the Vietnamese media with the unique title of “standing member” of the secretariat [see page 34810].

On the final day the congress elected a new central committee, enlarged from 116 full and 36 alternate members to 124 full and 49 alternate members (of whom a total of 92 had been re-elected). The Vietnam

News Agency (VNA) reported on Dec. 25 that the changes in the central committee reflected “a determination to renovate the party's leadership in accordance with the realities of the Vietnamese revolution”.

The *Far Eastern Economic Review* reported on Jan. 1, 1987, that almost half of those removed from the central committee had been, or still were, ministers or vice-ministers responsible for some aspect of the Vietnamese economy. Other ousted members had held positions in provincial or city administration, the party and the Army. According to official figures the average age of the new central committee was 56 and over 43 per cent of the members had university or higher academic degrees.

The composition of the new political bureau, in the order as announced on Dec. 18, was as follows (\* indicates new member; for previous political bureau):

*Full members.* Mr Nguyen Van Linh, Mr Pham Hung, Mr Vo Chi Cong, Mr Do Muoi, Senior Gen. Vo Van Kiet, Senior Gen. Le Duc Anh, Mr Nguyen Duc Tam, Mr Nguyen Co Thach, Senior Gen. Dong Sy Nguyen, \*Mr Tran Xuan Bach, \*Mr Nguyen Thanh Binh, \*Lt. -Gen. Doan Khue, \*Maj. -Gen. Mai Chi Tho.

Alternate member. \*Mr Dao Duy Tung.

Mr Nguyen Co Thach and Senior Gen. Dong Sy Nguyen were alternate members in the previous political bureau. Mr Tran Xuan Bach and Mr Nguyen Thanh Binh had both been appointed to the secretariat at the fifth congress in 1982 [see page 31591]. Lt. -Gen. Doan Khue was a Deputy Minister of National Defence and had been the commander of military region V operating in Kampuchea since 1978. Maj. -Gen. Mai Chi Tho was the brother of Mr Le Duc Tho and had been deputy secretary of the Ho Chi Minh City party committee under Nguyen Van Linh, reportedly becoming acting secretary when the latter moved to concentrate on central party duties in late 1986. Mr Dao Duy Tung was chairman of the CPV propaganda department and editor of the Communist Review (*Tap Chi Cong San*), the political and theoretical journal of the CPV.

Outgoing members of the political bureau were Senior Gen. Van Tien Dung, then Minister for National Defence [see below for his removal from this post in February 1987], Senior Gen. Chu Huy Man, director of the Vietnamese People's Army (VPA) political general department and a Vice-Chairman of the Council of State, and Mr To Huu, a former Deputy Premier. Senior Gen. Van Tien Dung (who retained his central committee seat) and Senior Gen. Chu Huy Man had been heavily criticized for their autocratic style at the preparatory congress of CPV units in the VPA held in October 1986. Mr To Huu, a conservative who had supported the devaluation of the dong with effect from April 1985 and the introduction of a new currency in September 1985 [see 34101 A], had been replaced as a Vice-Chairman of the Council of Ministers in June 1986 [see 34809 A].

The new party secretariat was radically altered from the one appointed in March 1982 [see page 31591], comprising eight newly appointed members. The composition of the new secretariat, again in the order as announced, was as follows (\* indicates new member):

Mr Nguyen Van Linh, Mr Nguyen Duc Tam, Mr Tran Xuan Bach, \*Mr Dao Duy Tung, Mr Tran Kien, \*Mr Le Phuoc Tho, \*Lt. -Gen. Nguyen Quyet, \*Lt. -Gen. Dam Quang Trung, \*Mr Vu Oanh, Mr Nguyen Khanh, \*Lt. -Gen. Tran Quyet, \*Mr Tran Quoc Hoan, \*Mr Pham The Duyet.

According to a report in the *Far Eastern Economic Review* on Jan. 1, 1987, Mr Nguyen Khanh had been appointed to the secretariat some years after the fifth congress in 1982. Mr Le Phuoc Tho had been party secretary for Hau Giang province. Lt. -Gen. Nguyen Quyet and Lt. -Gen. Dam Quang Trung had served as commanders of military regions IV and I respectively. Mr Vu Oanh had been a director of the central committee agriculture department. Lt. -Gen. Tran Quyet had been a deputy Interior Minister. Mr Tran Quoc Hoan had served as a deputy secretary of Ho Chi Minh City party committee under Mr Nguyen Van Linh [see above]. Mr Pham The Duyet had been acting chairman of the Vietnam Confederation of Trade Unions. Hanoi radio on Feb. 16, 1987, broadcast a Council of State communique issued that day which decreed a number of changes in the composition of the Council of Ministers and alterations to some of its ministries for the previous government reshuffle carried out in June 1986.

Mergers of existing ministries created new ministries of Agriculture and Food Industry, of Energy (incorporating Power and Mines and Coal) and of Labour, War Invalids and Social Welfare. A Ministry of Information and a Commission for Economic Relations with Foreign Countries were created, while the Government Committee for Nationalities (which had established policy on ethnic matters) was abolished. Six new Vice-Chairmen of the Council of Ministers were appointed, including Mr Nguyen Co Thach, who retained his position as Minister of Foreign Affairs. (According to the *Far Eastern Economic Review* of March 5, 1987, he had also been appointed Chairman of the new Commission for Economic Relations with

Foreign Countries). Mr Pham Hung was replaced as Minister of the Interior by Maj. -Gen. Mai Chi Tho, but retained his position as a Vice-Chairman. Senior General Van Tien Dung was replaced as Minister of National Defence by Senior Gen. Le Duc Anh, a Deputy Minister of National Defence and the architect of Vietnam's invasion of Kampuchea in late 1978 [see 29613 A]. The full list was as follows:

- Mr Pham Van Dong Chairman
- Mr Pham Hung Vice-Chairmen
- Senior Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap (Deputy Premiers)
- ‡ Senior Gen. Vo Van Kiet
- Mr Do Muoi Mr Vo Chi Cong
- Senior Gen. Dong Sy Nguyen
- † Mr Nguyen Co Thach
- \* Mr Nguyen Khanh
- † Mr Nguyen Ngoc Triu
- \* Mr Tran Duc Luong
- † Mr Doan Duy Thanh
- † Mr Nguyen Van Chinh
- \* Mr Nguyen Khanh Minister, General Secretary of the Council of Ministers
- \*Maj. -Gen. Mai Chi Tho Interior
- \* Senior Gen. Le Duc Anh National Defence
- Mr Nguyen Co Thach Foreign Affairs
- Senior Gen. Vo Van Kiet Chairman of the State Commission for Planning
- \* Mr Dau Ngoc Xuan Minister, First Vice-Chairman of the State Commission for Planning
- Mr Do Quoc Sam Chairman of the State Commission for Capital Construction
- Mr Dang Huu Chairman of the State Commission for Science and Technology
- † Mr Nguyen Van Chinh Chairman of the Government Inspectorate
- Mr Phan Van Tiem Chairman of the State Pricing Commission
- † Mr Hoang Quy Finance
- \* Mr Nguyen Cong Tan Agriculture and Food Industry\*\*
- Mr Luu Minh Chau Director-General of the State Bank
- Mr Phan Ngoc Tuong Construction
- Mr Bui Danh Luu Communications and Transport
- \* Mr Pham Minh Hac Education
- \* Mr Phan Thanh Liem Engineering and Metals
- Mr Doan Duy Thanh Foreign Trade
- Mr Phan Xuan Dot Forestry
- \* Mr Tran Hong Quan Higher and Secondary Vocational Education
- Mr Hoang Minh Thang Internal Trade
- Mr Phan Hien Justice
- \* Mr Nguyen Ky Cam Labour, War Invalids and Social Welfare\*\*
- † Mr Vu Tuan Light Industry
- Mr Nguyen Tien Trinh Marine Products
- \* Mr Vu Ngoc Hai Energy\*\*
- Mr Dang Hoi Xuan Public Health
- Mr Hoang Duc Nghi Supply
- Mr Nguyen Canh Dinh Water Conservancy
- \* Mr Tran Van Phac Culture
- \* Mr Tran Hoan Information\*\*
- \* New appointment.
- † Altered portfolio.
- \*\* Newly constituted ministry.
- ‡ In an interview with AFP on April 1, 1987, Mr Nguyen Co Thach announced the recent promotion of Gen. Vo Van Kiet to Permanent Vice-Premier, a position he described as the “most responsible among the Vice-Premiers”.

**Mr Tran Duc Luong** had been chairman of the National Assembly's science and technology committee and director of the geology department of the Council of Ministers. **Mr Dau Ngoc Xuan** was hitherto a

Vice-Chairman of the State Planning Commission. **Mr Nguyen Cong Tan** was a former Vice-Minister of Agriculture and a vice-chairman of the Hanoi people's committee. **Mr Pham Minh Hac** was a former Director of the Education Science Institute and a member of the National Assembly's science and technology committee. Mr Tran Hong Quan was promoted from the rank of Vice-Minister. **Mr Nguyen Ky Cam** was a former party secretary in Nghe Tinh province. **Maj. -Gen. Tran Van Phac** was a former Vice-Minister of Culture and a deputy director of the VPA political general department.

Col. -Gen. Le Trong Tan, General Chief of Staff of the Vietnamese People's Army (VPA), Deputy Minister of National Defence and member of the CPV central committee, died on Dec. 5, 1986, aged 72.

An article in *Nhan Dan* of March 1, 1986, stated that since late 1985 the Vietnamese economy had "developed in a very complex manner"; prices had abruptly "skyrocketed" during this period, the market had "plunged into a mess" and the socialist trade sector had been placed in a "passive and awkward position". Responsibility for the poor economic situation rested with the political bureau, secretariat and Council of Ministers, all of whom had recently made "stern criticism and self-criticism".

The article went on to state that localities suffering strong fluctuations in prices had recently been allowed to reintroduce temporarily the "two-price system", whereby subsidized goods were sold to certain sections of the community. Economic reforms introduced at the eighth plenum of the fifth CPV central committee held in June 1985 had included the abolition of food subsidies [see 34101 A].

A directive was issued by the political bureau on April 8, 1986, guaranteeing to economic units the right to autonomy in production and business.

According to the directive, published in *Nhan Dan* on April 25, state-owned economic units should be held responsible for profits and losses and should also take the initiative in the formulation of economic plans. Enterprises were given permission to generate their own capital, through bank loans and, in certain circumstances, loans from foreign countries and overseas Vietnamese. It was proposed that the appointment of enterprise directors should be made experimentally on the strength of workers' votes.

On March 2, 1986, *Nhan Dan* announced that the central authorities had recently approved the establishment in Ho Chi Minh City of private enterprises in the craft and small industry sector.

*Hanoi radio* reported on April 18, 1986, that the municipal authorities in Ho Chi Minh City (where Mr Nguyen Van Linh was currently secretary of the party committee) had decentralized price controls, thereby allowing individual enterprises to establish their own distribution prices. VNA reported on June 25 that nearly 1,000 families in Ho Chi Minh City had registered to open a private small industry or handicraft enterprise.

Hanoi radio reported on Feb. 23, 1987, that the Hanoi municipal people's committee had announced temporary and provisional measures to encourage private enterprise. The proposals, which were similar to those in operation in Ho Chi Minh City, were designed primarily as a measure to reduce unemployment in the capital, estimated at 65,000 by Hanoi radio on Feb. 14.

The Vietnamese currency, the dong, was devalued from US\$ 1.00=15 dong to US\$ 1.00=80 dong with effect from Nov. 7, 1986. (The previous currency rate had been set on Sept. 15, 1985, at US\$ 1.00=15 dong upon the introduction of a new dong set to equal 10 times the value of the old dong—see 34101 A.) The *Far Eastern Economic Review* reported on Dec. 11 that the devaluation was aimed at combating an annual inflation rate of some 700 per cent. Le Monde reported on Nov. 11 that the black-market rate for the dong at the time of the devaluation was in the region of US\$ 1.00=430 dong.

Senior Gen. Vo Van Kiet delivered a report on Dec. 24, 1986, to the 12th session of the seventh National Assembly on the implementation of the 1986 *socio-economic* plan (the first year of the 1986–90 five year plan) and proposals for the 1987 socio-economic plan. He said that several important planned targets had not been met during 1986.

Total grain output for 1986 was an estimated 18,500,000 tonnes, an increase of 300,000 tonnes over 1985, but short of the planned target of 19,000,000 tonnes. Gen. *Vo Van Kiet* said that a series of natural disasters, especially in the north and central coastal region, had been partly to blame for this shortfall. The output of the consumer goods industry had risen by only 6.3 per cent, or more than 3 percentage points less than targeted. Electricity and cement production were described as "poor", and the quality of the coal mined had not been constant. The export of many goods had fallen short of the planned targets, thereby affecting the scope and effectiveness of export-import activities.

Gen. *Vo Van Kiet* stated that shortcomings in the 1986 plan were attributable directly to: (i) ill-defined policies; (ii) lack of order in the financial sector; (iii) bad relations between various sectors and localities; (iv) loose implementation of state policy; and weaknesses in the *organizational, guidance* and managerial work of the Council of Ministers. He acknowledged that the 1987 socio-economic plan must clearly

manifest a renovation and a change in direction in accordance with the resolutions of the sixth party congress.

Grain production targets for 1987 were set at 19,200,000 tonnes and it was planned to stimulate agricultural production by a system of "incentive policies". The target increase in the value of the production of consumer goods was set at 10 per cent over 1986 figures and the value of goods exported was expected to rise by 16.4 per cent over 1986 figures.

Flooding in the southern provinces of central Vietnam on Dec. 3–4, 1986, claimed at least 165 lives and caused substantial damage to crops, roads and housing.

Vietnam and China made a number of contradictory claims concerning fighting on Jan. 5–7, 1987, between troops stationed on the border in Ha Tuyen province (Vietnam) and Yunnan province (China) [see 34809 A for map and report of hostilities in this area in October 1986]. Both sides claimed that the other had instigated the fighting, which, according to Vietnamese claims, resulted in the death of over 1,500 Chinese troops.

Hanoi radio reported on Jan. 6 that Chinese infantry, supported by heavy artillery fire, had the previous day assaulted three strategic hills in the Vi Xuyen district of Ha Tuyen province. Vietnamese forces had repelled the invasion, killing up to 500 Chinese troops. Vietnam claimed that Chinese forces had launched further attacks on Jan. 6 and 7, including an invasion by a division-sized force and bombardment by artillery shells up to 18 km inside Vietnamese territory. On Jan. 8 it was claimed by Vietnam that the Chinese three-day invasion had been repelled and nearly 1,500 enemy soldiers killed.

China confirmed on Jan. 7 that its frontier guards had made "forceful counter-attacks" against Vietnamese troops, who had attacked the Laoshan area of Yunnan province. On Jan. 10 the Chinese side claimed that 500 Vietnamese troops had been killed or wounded in the ensuing fighting and rejected Vietnamese battle-dead claims as "sheer boasting". The *Far Eastern Economic Review* of Jan. 29 described Vietnamese claims of 1,500 Chinese casualties as "exaggerated", but stated that China had nonetheless suffered "considerable losses" in the fighting, largely due to the inexperience of the Chinese forces.

Vietnam claimed to have released 30 Chinese nationals on Feb. 10, arrested whilst "illegally intruding" in Vietnamese territory. The Chinese were reportedly freed at the Yu Yi border gate (the friendship border gate) situated on the border adjoining Lang Son province and the Chinese autonomous region of Guangxi Zhuang.

Xinhua (the New China News Agency) reported on March 10 a number of alleged Vietnamese provocations in the Yunnan border region including the killing of a woman on Feb. 28 and the destruction of nine homes during an artillery attack on March 6. The report stated that Yunnan border defence troops had countered the provocations of the Vietnamese troops and had destroyed a number of "enemy fortifications" and "killed and wounded many Vietnamese troops". A Xinhua report on March 19 cited three incidents in Guangxi Zhuang on March 10 and 15 in which Vietnamese soldiers who had "sneaked into China" had been killed.

Mr Eduard Shevardnadze, the Soviet Foreign Minister, paid a visit to Vietnam on March 11–13 at the end of an Asian-Pacific tour which had included Thailand (March 2), Australia (March 3–5), Indonesia (March 5–8), Laos (March 8–10) and Kampuchea (March 10–11).

Throughout the visit *Mr Shevardnadze* held discussions on the Kampuchea problem, but the Japanese news service Kyodo reported on March 13 that he had denied the existence of a new proposal to settle the issue. Kyodo also reported Mr Nguyen Co Thach as saying that Vietnam's position remained unchanged on the Kampuchea conflict.

Senator Mark Hatfield (Rep., Oregon) and Senator James McClure (Rep., Idaho) visited Vietnam on Jan. 1–2, 1987, and held talks "on issues of mutual concern" with Mr Nguyen Co Thach.

The *Far Eastern Economic Review* reported on Feb. 19 that Mr Hatfield had made a number of recommendations to President Reagan on his return from Vietnam, including the establishment of a US technical office in Hanoi and the appointment of a special envoy to Vietnam to study ways to resolve bilateral issues.

The *Bangkok Post* of Dec. 30, 1986, reported that Vietnamese troops based in Laos (numbering an estimated 40,000) had on Dec. 26 shot dead 43 Hmong tribesmen (the name by which the Lao Soung tribe of northern Laos, often called the Meo, describe themselves) as they attempted to cross the Mekong river from Paksone province (Laos) to Nong Khai (Thailand). Hmong tribesmen had maintained guerrilla resistance against the Lao regime since its establishment in 1975. Vientiane (ie official Lao) radio broadcast a statement on Jan. 5 rejecting the charge as a "fabrication by certain soldiers in the Thai

Army".—(Far Eastern Economic Review - Times - Guardian - Independent - Financial Times - International Herald Tribune - Le Monde - BBC Summary of World Broadcasts)  
(*Previous report 34809 A*)

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