

UPDATE

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US Ambassador for Vietnam Approved

The first U.S. Ambassador to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam has been confirmed by the US Senate. The senate approved the nomination of Douglas "Pete" Peterson almost a year after he was picked for the post by President Clinton. Peterson's introduction to Vietnam was as a fighter pilot during the war. He parachuted to safety after his plane was shot down, and Peterson spent the next six and a half years in a prisoner camp. Back in the United States he went into the computer business, and in 1990 he was elected to Congress. He declined to run for reelection last November on the assumption that his job as a diplomat would come through eventu-

ally, in spite of lingering opposition from a small minority who objected to normalization because the remains of some U.S. combatants are still missing. The choice of Peterson was not contested. At the confirmation vote April 10, some distinguished lawmakers who are veterans of the war spoke to praise him and support the step toward full normalization. Sen. Chuck Hagel said, "The time for healing has arrived and Congressman Peterson is the one to lead us in that direction." Sen. John Kerry said Americans were "ceasing to treat Vietnam as a war and beginning in earnest to treat it like a country."

New Score Card for AIDS in Vietnam

More than 20 years after the war, Vietnam is facing another – the war on AIDS. According to Vietnam's official government data, fewer than 5,000 cases of HIV/AIDS have been recorded. United Nations AIDS experts in Hanoi believe that this figure is unreliable since the data were gathered from death certificates and police records only. They say AIDS cases in Vietnam already number 60,000. Experts anticipate that this number will increase to 350,000 by the year 2000. The government is not denying the seriousness of the problem. Efforts

of education and prevention are on the way. The government initially began its campaign by jailing people involved in the sex industry and drug abusers. However, some officials now recognize the method to be ineffective. Instead of advocating behavior change, it drove intravenous drug users to go under-ground and further spread the disease through contaminated needles. New efforts now include major billboards and condom social marketing campaigns. Condom distribution rose from \$40 million

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US-Vietnam Debt Agreement Reached

Vietnam signed an agreement in Hanoi April 7 to pay the United States US \$145 million for wartime debts incurred by the former Saigon regime during the Vietnam war. Vietnamese Finance Minister Nguyen Ging Hung and US Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin signed the accord in Hanoi. Terms provide that Vietnam pays a "down payment" of more than \$8.5 million of interest due within 30 days of the signing. Regular payments are to begin in July and continue until the year 2019. At a US-Vietnam Economic Normalization Conference following the signing Rubin said Vietnam had made impressive progress in economic reforms. Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Nguyen Dinh Bin, said his country is committed to making its economy more favorable to US investors. He said, "We

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Improved Health Signs for Young Children in Vietnam

Reports from Hanoi say the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) placed Vietnam at the top of its global national performance list last year because the country has reduced the mortality rate for children under five years old for the fourth successive year. More than 85 percent of children in their first year are immunized every year since 1991 and 98 percent are vaccinated against polio. The rate of malnutrition among "under fives" dropped to 44 percent last year from 54 percent in 1991, according to a report from Xinhua News. In addition, School attendance reportedly is rising. More than 85 percent of school-

age children were in school in 1995, compared with 75 percent in 1991.

Dangers on city streets

Other reports, however, reveal official concern of what are called the "new challenges" of street children. Tran Thi Thang-Thang of the Vietnam Committee for the Protection and Care of Children told a meeting in Hanoi about growing problems of sexual and drug abuse of rural children being drawn to the cities. Reuters News Agency quotes social workers who say between 22,000 and 50,000 children are earning a living for themselves and their families on the streets of Ho Chi Minh

City and Hanoi. Reports describe the number as small compared to some other countries in the region.

Drug alarm for students

A senior policy official in Hanoi has reported a rise in heroin use among university students and younger members of the school population. He said heroin sellers attempt to convince students they need drugs to succeed. A United Nations Drug Control Programme reported that dealers are offering heroin packages for as little as US \$2.70 each, in an attempt to create a new market in Vietnam.

War Against AIDS with Help from a Soap Opera

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in 1991 to \$117 million in 1995. A popular Vietnamese TV soap opera, "Wind Blows Through Dark and Light," features a trucker, its central character, to have contracted the disease through his many interludes while traveling. Playing this character is Le Tuan Anh who is already something of a celebrity. Mr. Le says, "the soap will encourage sympathy rather than the disgust usually reserved for the AIDS victims." Despite all these

efforts, Vietnamese doctors and nurses "are ill-equipped, outnumbered and losing ground to the insistent march of the powerful virus," according to Pat Correll, a clinical research coordinator at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey in Newark. In the AIDS clinics, for example, nurses are forced to re-use latex gloves. The newest drugs, protease inhibitors, are virtually unheard of in Vietnam. Even the common drug, AZT, is in such

short supply that only the wealthy can afford it through private practitioners. The life expectancy of an AIDS victim in Vietnam is only about 3 years compared to about 8 years in the United States. "We are further along in the AIDS epidemic than Vietnam is," reported Correll at the International Conference on AIDS in Vancouver, BC last summer. "If they can learn from our mistakes, it will help them."

by Tyler DuLam

HISTORY SHELF

Tay Son Revolution United Vietnam After Era of Warfare and Division

From the late 1500's to the late 1700's, the two ruling families in Vietnam fought each other for control of the country. This internal power struggle was the longest war in Vietnamese history and cost many Vietnamese lives.

During that time, Vietnam was officially ruled by the Le dynasty, but the actual political and military power was with the Nguyens and the Trins. The leaders of these families were Lords who were supposedly helping the Le dynasty to rule Vietnam. But instead of governing, the two families regularly waged war against each other. Le was powerless to resolve this internal conflict. He led a puppet government.

Vietnamese people grew discontented. Uprisings spread across the country and all but one was crushed – the Tay Son Revolution. At the time, this was the first successful revolution in the history of Vietnam to be led by the working/farming class. Previous revolutions or leadership changes were led by an elite group of the ruling family.

The Tay Son revolution started in 1771 from a village called Phu Lac (currently Phu Phong) in Binh Dinh province, central Vietnam. The leaders of the revolution were Nguyen Nhac, Nguyen Lu and the great Nguyen Hue, who later crowned himself as Quang Trung Emperor. In a few short years, the Nguyen brothers eliminated the two fighting lords and defeated the occupying Chi-

nese (who were brought into Vietnam by Le Chieu Thong, the last Emperor of the Le Dynasty). The Nguyen brothers also defeated Thailand, invited to Vietnam by Nguyen Anh, a relative of the lord Nguyen, who later became Gia Long Emperor. But the most important accomplishment from the Tay Son Revolution was the unification of Vietnam after an era of division.

Nguyen Hue achieved most of these victories. Without him the Tay Son revolution would just be another peasant uprising. Unfortunately Nguyen Hue died shortly after Vietnam was unified. He was at the young age of 39. His death left the Vietnamese people and the country with many unfinished political, economic and military reforms, including an unsettled border dispute with China.

by Trung Do

Debt Agreement is Signed

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have been actively building and perfecting the legal system in conformity with the market economy and conducting administrative reform to improve the investment and business environment in Vietnam." Richard Albrecht, Executive Vice President, Boeing Commercial Airplane Group attended the conference, according to the sponsors the US-Vietnam Trade Council's education affiliate the US Vietnam Forum.

Community Clinics for Haiphong

Dr. Nguyen Minh Thang has told friends in Seattle about a new program the government of Vietnam is introducing in Haiphong to help young adults cope with some of the most important decisions in life – family planning, disease prevention and life style choices. Thang, Senior Scientist for the Committee of Population and Family Planning, was an important supporter for the Greater Seattle Vietnam Association during the two years he was taking post-doctoral studies at the University of Washington. He described the health initiative in Haiphong during his brief stop on his way to a meeting in New York. The program is designed to be implemented eventually at several locations in Vietnam. It calls for six community units, two in Haiphong City and four in outlying areas of the province.

New Copyright Treaty to Protect Against "Pirates"

In another step toward total normalization, the U.S. and Vietnam agreed on terms for a bilateral copyright treaty. The agreement, announced April 17 in Hanoi, is designed to protect intellectual property like computer software and compact discs. CD's sell in Vietnam for about \$2, and according to reports Microsoft estimates 99 percent of the computer software in Vietnam was "pirated."

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UPDATE



Greater Seattle Vietnam Association

A grassroots, non-profit, incorporated and registered organization dedicated to helping the people of Seattle create and maintain cultural and business links with the people of Vietnam.

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