

Thieu Picks

A New Premier

Saigon

South Vietnam President Nguyen Van Thieu named a new premier last night, and said his government intends to defend its remaining territory against the Communists.

In a 35-minute broadcast speech, Thieu announced that he has removed General Tran Thien Kheim from the office of premier and replaced him with the leader of the lower Vietnamese house, Nguyen Ba Can.

Can has been actively associated with Vietnamese labor leaders in the past. He is not one of the country's better-known politicians.

Thieu said that Can would head a new "government of war and national union," the other ministers in which have yet to be named.

The president made it clear that his government intends to fight on, and he denied rumors that he had made some kind of deal with the Communists to cede to them the northern part of the country.

He called on the people and armed forces to remain calm and steady, and to defend the remaining national territory.

Thieu conceded that the recent catastrophic reverses suffered by his armed forces were partly the result of "cowardice, and the lack of

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determination of a number of our military leaders."

He said the Vietnamese people are determined to fight on.

He also blamed the loss of so much territory on foreign news agencies, publications and radio stations, especially the BBC and the Voice of America.

He charged that the latter two stations had "spread rumors by the Communists and saboteurs in our ranks, a result of which we lost several provinces in the First and Second Corps Areas (in the northern part of the country)."

He also blamed the U.S. Congress.

"Decreased United States aid during the past two years has seriously affected the morale of our troops," Thieu said, "as well as the faith of the Vietnamese people in American promises."

He added: "I have told the Americans that we need at least \$1.5 billion per year to defend the entire territory of South Vietnam. If we get only \$700 million then we will be able to defend only one-half of our territory."

The president said that the Americans recently told him that with a supplementary appropriation of \$300 million the war could be won soon.

"I said," Thieu added, "that this is absurd, \$300 million would be enough for only 30 days of fighting. It is

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especially absurd considering the Americans, who fought the Communists for six years with billions and billions of dollars have withdrawn, leaving us behind to continue fighting without money and without B-52s."

He said he therefore hopes that Congress would appropriate more money.

The president demanded that the government maintain "stability in the rear."

Political and military pressures are mounting against Thieu.

The forces arrayed against him include a number of ranking military officers, civilian politicians, including the entire Senate, and leaders of both the Catholic and Buddhist churches.

But none of these elements, either alone or in concert, seems capable of unseating Thieu against his will. Despite the whirlwind of coup rumors circulating in Saigon, chances seem remote that Thieu would leave office by force any time soon.

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