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# Looking For an Exit in Saigon

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SAIGON, April 16 (AP)—They want out.

The young Vietnamese woman at the U.S. consulate with a cable from a former GI in Denver that reads, "I love you Phuong. I want to marry you."

"Isn't this enough to get me a passport?" the woman asks. It isn't.

The Saigon lawyer with two daughters at Barnard College, New York, waiting at the Interior Ministry, a bagful of piasters in his hand for speeded-up paperwork.

"They will kill me if I stay here. I will pay anything to leave," he said. No one wants his money.

And there is the former Special Forces camp cook, the U.S. Agency for International Development mission driver, the uncle of the commander of a paratroop regiment outside Saigon, and on and on.

They all want out from imperiled Saigon, tens of thousands of Vietnamese who fear being left behind when the Americans finally leave their country.

How to get out?

There are three ways. The legal way, the illegal way and the American way.

The American way is "Operation Talon Vise," a reported U.S. military project that envisages rescuing 200,000 or more Vietnamese whose lives may be endangered by their association with 20 years of American policy in Vietnam.

But few Vietnamese can be found in Saigon who have any faith left in the American promise. Officials in Washington are not very optimistic either. They say a combination of events is forcing the U.S. government to virtually write off the project.

"Unless there is a ceasefire or an agreement by the North Vietnamese army to let the South Vietnamese leave peacefully, we will have a real mess," predicted one State Department official.

A Vietnamese colonel in logistics who was trained in the United States echoed the State Department official.

"Think it through," he said. "If the American plan went into effect, we would immediately lose all senior police, military and government officials, because they would be the first to go.

"On the list would be the command staffs of all the combat units around Saigon. Tell me, who fights the war while all these people leave?" he asked. "And who will keep government functioning? It is all a pipe dream."

With the American way barely a slim hope, many Vietnamese are trying for the legal way. This means getting a passport issued and an exit visa.

Even in normal times, only the privileged Vietnamese could travel abroad. Recently visas were restricted to businessmen, but now all

visas have been suspended except in exceptional cases.

Thousands of Vietnamese who claim to be the exceptional case have bogged down the Interior Ministry with applications. Stories are circulating around Saigon that massive bribes are required, but in fact, checks at the Saigon airport indicate that few passports are being issued at all.

Only President Nguyen Van Thieu has the authority to open the visa escape hatch.

"Thieu will have his own way out in the end, like Lon Nol," said the daughter of a Foreign Ministry official. "But we'll all be left behind."

President Lon Nol of Cambodia left Phnom Penh for overseas about 10 days before the complete American withdrawal from the besieged city.

The U.S. embassy has offered to speed up the paperwork on visas for relatives of Vietnamese girls who married GIs and who are now living in the United States. Each morning they throng the U.S. consulate, along with former girl friends of soldiers.

The U.S. embassy promises to complete necessary paperwork for legitimate applicants in 10 days to two weeks.

The third way out is the illegal route, fleeing the country without papers like the Hungarians and Cubans in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

There is no land route of escape because the neighboring countries of Laos and Cambodia are in Communist hands. That leaves the sea.

Some Vietnamese families are known to have left already, leasing large fishing boats and coastal vessels and sailing off to Singapore and the Philippines.

However, some have been turned back by Vietnamese navy patrols.

Many of the hundreds who plan to leave by boat are waiting "for the right time" a total collapse of government before they leave.

"When that time comes, the Vietnamese navy will be too busy rescuing their own families to worry about the rest of us on the high seas," commented one Vietnamese who has paid the equivalent of \$5,000 for a place on a large fishing vessel for his family of five.

Aboard ship, he said, will be a doctor and his family, arms to repel pirates, "and a diplomat to negotiate when we reach a foreign port," he said.

There is one final way out that lots of Vietnamese are talking about—suicide.

"My wife and I have made a pact that if all else fails, I will shoot her and the two children and then myself," said a lawyer. He told close relatives that his associations with past Saigon governments and the Americans, "means death, or the equivalent, under the Communists."