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# Top Hanoi Leaders Said to Have

From News Dispatches

The top leadership of North Vietnam, including party secretary Le Duan, flew to Saigon last week for major conferences on the government of South Vietnam, according to knowledgeable sources in Saigon.

Other members of the North Vietnamese hierarchy who reportedly attended the discussions were Truong Chinh, chairman of the National Assembly's standing committee, and Premier Pham Van Dong.

George Esper, chief of the Associated Press in Saigon, said in a report from Vientiane, Laos, that he had been told about the high-level meeting last week but that his attempt to send a cabled report at the time had apparently been blocked by censors.

Esper and three other newsmen flew from Saigon to Vientiane yesterday after being told that they had to leave because the new South Vietnamese government wanted to reduce the number of foreign correspondents in the country.

According to Esper, sources said the meetings in Saigon were also attended by Xuan Thuy, secretary of the Communist Party Central Committee. Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap, North Vietnam's defense minister and vice premier, had been seen in Saigon previously, the sources said.

All five North Vietnamese leaders are members of the all-powerful Politburo in North Vietnam.

Esper reported that there has been considerable speculation in Saigon that prepara-



Associated Press

A youth accused of thievery is led manacled through downtown Saigon.

tions are being made for the formal reunification of North and South Vietnam.

Last Friday, a UPI correspondent reported from Saigon that he had been told of high-level meeting between North and South Vietnamese officials at which it had been decided that the two Vietnams would remain divided for at least five years because of the different levels of economic and social development.

The same day UPI reported that preparations were under way to install the new govern-

ment of South Vietnam at the end of this week.

On the plane from Saigon to Vientiane yesterday were the French Ambassador to South Vietnam, Jean Marie Merillon, and the Vatican's controversial apostolic delegate, Monsignor Henri Lemaitre, a Belgian.

There were conflicting reports on whether Monsignor Lemaitre had been asked to leave by South Vietnamese officials or had made the decision himself.

The Vatican's representative had come under fire from some South Vietnamese Cath-

olics, including members of the clergy, for the appointment of a nephew of late South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem to a post in the Saigon diocese.

At Saigon's airport while awaiting his flight, Monsignor Lemaitre told newsmen that the Vatican, not he, had been responsible for the appointment.

The French Foreign Ministry denied allegations that Ambassador Merillon had been ordered out by the new government. Spokesmen said that he had been France's am-

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bassador to the former government which collapsed on April 30 and that his mission was at an end.

The new French ambassador in Saigon is to be Michel Huriet who was appointed representative to the Provisional Revolutionary Government before the fall of Saigon.

Merillon attempted to invoke diplomatic privilege at the airport yesterday to prevent his baggage from being inspected, Revier News agency reported. Airport officials said, however, that inspection was necessary for security reasons.

A protocol officer stood beside Merillon as a customs official opened the bags, gave a quick glance inside and closed them, Revier reported.

Only four heads of diplomatic missions assigned before the fall of Saigon still remain in the city—the Belgian and Japanese ambassadors and charges d'affaires for Laos and Switzerland.

The other newsmen who left Saigon yesterday under expulsion orders were Paul Vogle and Chad Huntley of United Press International, both Americans, and Dieter Ludwig, a German photographer who had been working for CBS and Time magazine.

Martin Woollacott earlier filed this report on the controversy surrounding Bishop Lemaitre within South Vietnamese Catholic circles.

In what is emerging as a major quarrel within Catholic ranks, several left-wing groups within the church here have

written Pope Paul VI asking for the removal of Bishop Lemaitre and Bishop Nguyen Van Thuan, President Diem's staunchly anti-Communist nephew who was appointed deputy archbishop of Saigon.

One letter accused Lemaitre of having "dragged the church into a policy of collusion with the American imperialists and their valet," former President Thieu.

A leading figure of the Catholic left is the Rev. Huynh Cong Minh, a parish priest on the outskirts of Saigon, who ran a clandestine group during the war called the Movement of Catholics for the People.

Minh emerged from his un-

derground activities the day before Saigon fell and held meetings and published two magazines welcoming the new government.

Minh is not a Communist. "I shall always be a Catholic," he said. "I shall always be tied to the church and to Rome. But our Catholic life here in Vietnam must change. We have been a small privileged and favored minority. Now we must help in the work of building socialism."

Many South Vietnamese church leaders, including some with strong anti-Communist records, issued statements welcoming the Provisional Revolutionary Government takeover.

The new authorities could be forgiven for dismissing the welcome as superficial. The whole history of Catholicism in Vietnam is inextricably intermingled with French colonialism and with anti-Communist nationalism. During the French war in Indochina the Catholic areas were the backbone of resistance to the Communists, and that continued to be the case in South Vietnam.

Thus there is considerable doubt about the continued existence of church-run schools and whether the church will be able to continue to recruit candidates for the priesthood.