

The North Vietnamese Prepare For First Peaceful Tet in Years

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HANOI, North Vietnam, Jan. 31 (Agence Franc-Presse)—Firecrackers sputtered in the streets of Hanoi far into last night as the nation prepared for its first peacetime Tet, or Lunar New Year, in years.

Children, braving the cold in excited groups, rejoiced until a late hour.

Strings of colored electric lights link the two sides of some streets or snake along buildings, including Government offices and shops. Even the austere army headquarters is draped with bulbs.

The young have started early, but the grownups are also preparing to celebrate. They are stacking fireworks for midnight Friday, when a huge display is scheduled and big crowds are expected.

There are already crowds in the shops all the day as people buy lights, cakes, cloth and food and drink. Food and a few sticks of incense will be placed by the oldest members of families on altars to their ancestors.

Dressmakers have never been so hard-pressed and foreigners

are likely to be asked with a smile: "Can we leave yours till afterward?" Sewing machines can be heard whirring well into the night.

In the night too there is the distant whistle of locomotives, no longer camouflaged for the raids and brought back into service in force.

The roads are jammed with buses, bicycles, jeeps and trucks as the population continues rolling back to the capital. Hundreds of thousands have returned in the past week. Many will go back to the country to spend Tet with relatives.

The wounds of the city are healing. Cracks in buildings are fewer and there are not so many gaping bomb craters.

Hanoi is putting on its best clothes—especially the women, who have left their khaki uniforms behind and wear jumpers and silk scarves. As soon as they can they will be wearing their multi-colored tunics again.

For the first time in many months a discreet touch of lipstick is becoming a common sight.