

How Are Things in Hanoi? Jittery

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SAIGON.

The North Vietnamese government has taken super-precautions against American air strikes but shows no signs of "being shattered," according to travelers from Hanoi.

These travelers said diplomats in the Communist capital told them the regime had even set up "coffin centers" in Hanoi even though no strike has been made on the city.

"Hanoi is divided into districts (similar to American precincts), and the government is supposed to be setting up coffin centers in each district to distribute coffins in case of death," one traveler reported. "Frankly, we are mystified by these super-precautions by the government."

These sources say the older generation—those who remember bombings of World War II and the French-Indochina War—are frightened by the air strikes. But the younger generation "has been stiffened" in attitude and morale.

"But the whole population is more miserable than afraid," one traveler reported. Since the first bombings last August, military vehicles in Hanoi have been camouflaged with tree branches and "military people on the streets even have little twigs in their hats," the travelers report.

"When you drive down the streets of Hanoi or Halphong (Hanoi's seaport), you can see trenches and pillboxes all around," one traveler said. "The Hanoi government has evacuated all the children from Hanoi and other major cities—at considerable expense. It costs 15 dong

(about \$8) to move and maintain a child in the villages.

"From an economic point of view, this is causing considerable distress. Why put the people to such an enormous distress without necessity? No one believes the Americans will flatten Hanoi just now."

TRAINING

In major towns, "you see defense training," another traveler said. "There are people huddled in parks with bamboo sticks. They have to work during most of the daylight hours. So the government is probably trying to keep the people's minds off the bombings. But it seems difficult to keep up this type of tempo for long."

After the August raids and the first raids in February, Hanoi had a number of public demonstrations.

"But by mid-February the government stopped all these demonstrations," one traveler reported. "They now say it's not safe to have such a large number of people in one place at one time."

Other observers in Saigon who carefully watch developments in the North said the demonstrations might have reduced production too much. Others noted that the Chinese Communists also had stopped their large-scale public protests.

"But the bombing raids have not yet shattered the Communist regime," one traveler reported. "In a country

like North Viet Nam, you can't shatter the regime unless you split the (Communist) party.

"If the party splits, then this would be reflected quickly among the population. But there's no impression of a split. Of course, there's Ho Chi Minh on the liberal (pro-Soviet) side and Truong Chinh, President of the National Assembly, on the other (pro-Peking) side."

"But there's no reason for them to split—they must stick together."

One traveler said: "The economic situation is extremely bad. Cars, for example—they are not an index really, but do show a certain state of economic development. All the cars you see in Hanoi would not equal the cars you see on only one street in Saigon."

FEAR

"There's nothing in the shops; the women rarely wear the long Vietnamese dresses seen everywhere in Saigon because the people get only six meters (about six and a half yards) of cloth a year. There are no restaurants in Hanoi—the former Paris of the East. You see only tea shops. There's no gaiety anywhere."

Diplomats from the European Communist countries have "a superiority complex with the Vietnamese," one traveler said. "They complain they can't buy soap—or they

can't get anything they want."

French sources—with diplomatic contacts with North Viet Nam—reports that some North Vietnamese have attempted to leave their homes around military targets, fearing American bombs. The North Vietnamese army has fired into crowds to prevent evacuation.

However, one traveler from Hanoi said "there's no evidence of anti-government activity. The people have been reduced to such a state economically and through regimentation that they don't care if they get shot the next day. It's a sort of apathy."

"They believe once they conquer South Viet Nam (which has the most productive rice land) then it will be paradise—and this means something for them individually. There's enthusiasm for that."

"But the regimentation of their life is close to that of Communist China. I've been told that in Hanoi itself, each family is registered to live in a certain house—and one person can't stay in another house even for 24 hours.

"Because of their low economic state, the people prefer to have war (in South Viet Nam) than their present existence, thinking that when the south is won, things will get better in the north.

"But I asked one Vietnamese man 'what career do you want your son to follow?' He

replied 'Oh, here, we can not think in terms of our son's career. There is only a present here—there is no future.'

"There's no doubt the people have confidence in Ho Chi Minh," the traveler reported.

"They think he will prevent an occupation by the Chinese Communist armies and he won't allow the people to be regimented to the extent of communizing the farms, like in China. The people know that is the last straitjacket of the Communist apparatus and that their life would be much harder. So the people know that though their life is hard it hasn't yet gotten to the state of Chinese-like cynicism life."