

Personnel issues at the CPV's seventh plenum

Le Hong Hiep

The seventh plenum of the twelfth Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV), which convened from 7 to 12 May 2018, discussed and made decisions on three key issues, namely the CPV's strategic personnel planning and management, salary reforms and social insurance reforms. Of the three issues, personnel policy decisions and changes at the plenum has attracted the most attention given their important implications for the country's political prospects.

Guided by the late President Ho Chi Minh's dictum that "cadres are the foundation of all works", the CPV has consistently put a strong emphasis on its personnel management. In the context of economic reforms under *Doi Moi*, the Party regards personnel works as an essential element in its efforts to industrialize and modernize the country. Over the years, the Party has formulated and implemented various plans and policies to improve the quality of its cadres, especially those at key levels. However, such plans and policies have not translated into expected outcomes. The Party has acknowledged that weaknesses still remain in its personnel works, including the lack of effective mechanism for appraising cadres and recruiting talents, as well as the prevalence



Secretary Kerry meeting with Ho Chi Minh officials

of corrupt personnel practices such as political patronage, nepotism or bribing for power and positions. The CPV's on-going anti-corruption campaign, which saw the prosecution of various high-ranking officials at both the central and local governments has further reinforced the importance of personnel works for the Party's legitimacy.

Against this backdrop, a draft blueprint on the Party's personnel strategy up to 2030 and beyond was presented to the Central Committee's seventh plenum for its deliberation. The blueprint is divided into five sections. The first outlines the theoretical and practical basis of the blueprint. The second reviews the current status of the Party's personnel works. The third proposes guidelines, objectives and solutions to improve the Party's personnel works. The last two sections assess the blueprint's impact once implemented and propose measures for its implementation. Some of the key measures include reforming the

procedure and methods for appraising cadres; strictly controlling cadres' power, putting an end to the practice of bribing for power and positions; introducing the rule that the party secretary of a given province or district must not be a native of the same province/district; reforming salary policies to incentivise cadres' performance and attract talent into public institutions; and, improving mechanisms to strengthen ties between cadres and the people. Once implemented, the blueprint envisions that the quality of Vietnam's bureaucracy will be strengthened and the efficiency of the entire political system will be improved. It also expects to alleviate the government's budgetary deficit by reducing the number of officials, cadres and state employees.

The blueprint served as the basis for the CPV Central Committee to adopt a resolution on the Party's personnel works at the end of the plenum. While it remains to be seen whether the CPV can successfully implement the measures proposed by the blueprint, the move demonstrated the Party's will to strengthen the quality and integrity of its cadres as well as the resilience of its political system. The adoption of the resolution should also be seen in the light of the CPV's recent efforts to crack down on corruption and to further institutional and economic reforms, both of which will hardly be successful without a cleaner and more capable cadre system, especially at the leadership level.

The seventh plenum was also widely expected to elect additional members into the Politburo, the highest decision-making body of the Party. The additional members were expected to replace Mr Dinh La Thang, who was removed from the Politburo in May 2017 on corruption and economic mismanagement

charges, and Mr Dinh The Huynh, who is seriously ill. Instead, the plenum saw the election of additional members into the Party Secretariat: Mr Tran Cam Tu, Standing Deputy Head of the Central Committee's Inspectorate Commission, and Mr Tran Thanh Man, Chairman of the Vietnam Fatherland Front (VFF). Mr Tu was also elected Head of the Inspectorate Commission after Mr Tran Quoc Vuong vacated the position to focus on his other post as Standing Member (i.e., Executive Secretary) of the Secretariat.

Since December 1993, the Party's Inspectorate Commission has always been headed by a Politburo member. As such, the Party's assignment of the position to Mr Tu rather than an existing Politburo member suggests that Mr Tu will likely be elected into the Politburo in future. His current appointment will give him the necessary authority to oversee the Party's anti-corruption campaign. Similarly, Mr Man also stands a good chance of being elected into the Politburo as the VFF in recent decades has normally been headed by a Politburo member. Mr Man's rather young age (56) and Southern origin may also play to his advantage as the Politburo is currently dominated by Northerners while the Party normally seeks a relative balance in the regional representation of its top decision-making body.

Le Hong Hiep Fellow at ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute

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Evangelizing post-Doi Moi Vietnam. The rise of Protestantism and the state's response.

Chung Van Hoang

Protestantism is one of the fastest growing and dynamic faiths in Vietnam. The Protestant community in Vietnam, present since 1911, has been a small one until the last decade of the 20th century. For a long while, Protestant churches, missionaries, pastors and followers in northern, central and southern Vietnam experienced difficulties in conducting missions and dealing with different political regimes. Until 1975, the total number of Protestants was around 200,000 and this number did not vary much over the next decade. However, since *Doi Moi* reforms in 1986, Protestantism's growth has been phenomenal. In 2013, the religion was found to be present in 62 out of 64 provinces and in 2015 the total number of followers was roughly 1.5 million, a seven-fold increase from 1975. Despite its rate of growth, Protestantism faces many difficulties in terms of theology, religious competition, cultural conflict and response from the political regime.

One of the foremost tasks of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) is to maintain national solidarity and ethnic unity. This has been challenging because of the desire of some ethnic minority groups for autonomy, as well as the distrust between ethnic minorities and majority. Of the total 54 ethnic groups in Vietnam, 53 are minority groups which account for only 14 per cent of the total population of 92 million. Most of these groups are scattered in remote and mountainous areas (except the Khmer and Cham). The inhabitants in these areas are saddled with an underdeveloped infrastructure, high poverty rate, low-quality education and an inadequate healthcare system.

A key source of distrust between the state and Protestant ethnic minorities stems from issues of Hmong identity and autonomy. For example, two thousand-strong protests erupted in the Central Highlands in 2001 and 2004. These were reportedly provoked and financially aided by the Montagnard Dega Association with assistance from members of the United Front for the Liberation of Oppressed Races (FULRO). The protestors wanted state authorities to return

their ancestral land that was taken away by the Kinh (the majority ethnic group) and to expel the latter from the Central Highlands. They also demanded religious freedom and autonomy for all ethnic minorities in the region. Another protest took place in 2011 in the mountainous province of Dien Bien in the North with hundreds of Hmong participants demanding land allocation to welcome their returning king. The majority of protestors in 2001, 2004 and 2011 were new evangelical Protestant ethnic minorities.

Another challenge is the internal conflict between ethnic minorities who are Protestants and those who are not. Conflict and separation between the evangelical and non-evangelical Hmong, for example, are not unusual, often resulting in discord within families, bloodlines and between communities. The most contentious issue was the refusal of Protestants to continue the tradition of ancestor worship. The converts view Protestantism as the only way to alter the ethnic group's marginal status in Vietnam while the unconverted Hmong see conversion as a betrayal of Hmong ethnicity.

Another layer of complication has resulted from local authorities' active intervention to persuade Protestant Hmong to return to their folk traditions. In response, a large number of evangelized Hmong have migrated, partly to escape such interventions, and partly in the hope of escaping poverty and conflict.

In the urban areas, Protestantism is also growing among the middle-class Kinh. Churches in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi are busy during the weekdays and always full during Sunday services. To cater to the growing numbers, different divisions are set up for different ages from teenagers to older people, to facilitate Bible studies or to encourage members to provide social services. One million copies of the Bible were printed and distributed in Vietnam by the Religion Publishing House in 2014 alone. Notably, an increasingly number of Protestant church leaders and members have joined political organizations such as the People's Committee and the Vietnamese Fatherland Front. These activities signal the state and the public's open recognition of the Protestants' contribution and initial steps taken by Protestants to engage in politics.

Protestant communities in urban areas are also known for helping marginalized and vulnerable urban residents afflicted by social dislocation, family break-ups, illness and deprivation. Some Protestant services have successfully rehabilitated thousands of criminals, drug addicts, prostitutes and HIV patients, with many of them becoming converts in the process. While recognizing that

Protestant welfare services have a role to play, there is concern among local authorities that more Vietnamese will convert to Protestantism after receiving such welfare services.

There remains a stigma attached to Protestantism. While the actual number of Protestants only accounts for over 1 per cent of the population, many ordinary people still keep a distance from them because they believe that the government continues to keep a watchful eye over the Protestant community. The Protestant faith stands out due to the more visible ways it carries out its mission, its close association with Western values and its active participation in social issues. The state is also wary of Protestants because of their strong foreign connections. Furthermore, two-thirds of the 700 or so international NGOs presently active in Vietnam are faith-based organizations. Moreover, some of these Protestant-based NGOs explicitly promote religious freedom, which opens the door to more intense evangelization, further heightening the concerns of the state. As such, the state is expected to maintain a watchful eye over Protestant activities.

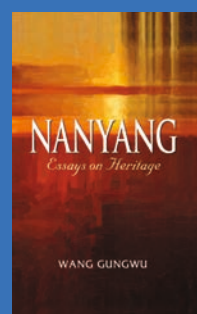
Chung Van Hoang Visiting Fellow at ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute

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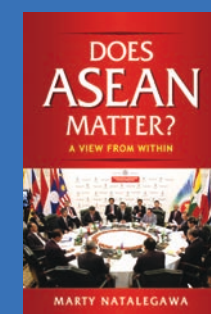
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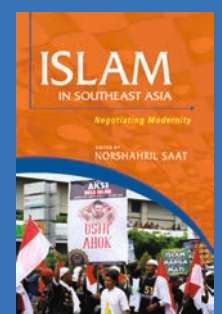
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