

## **Vietnam's President Phuc dismissed amid Trong's anti-graft drive**

**Observers look at whether swift succession will help avoid intraparty struggle**

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HANOI -- Vietnam's parliament held on an extraordinary session on Wednesday and formally approved the resignation of President Nguyen Xuan Phuc, state media reported, following a similar decision by the Communist Party's Central Committee on Tuesday.

The session is also expected to have covered Phuc's successor, with party chief Nguyen Phu Trong seen as among the candidates and such a move would consolidate his power base. But state media reported that Vice President Vo Thi Anh Xuan was named to take on the role of president on an interim basis.

Observers are cautiously monitoring the situation to see if a swift succession would help avoid an intraparty power struggle.

Phuc's resignation is seen as a de facto dismissal to take responsibility for corruption scandals during the pandemic. Vietnam held another extraordinary session of parliament on Jan. 5 and decided to replace two deputy prime ministers for the same reason.

Normally, the parliament convenes twice a year, but two extraordinary sessions have already been held this month.

For the selection of the successor to Phuc, several options are likely to be discussed in the party, including one in which Trong would hold an additional office on top of being party chief. Another possible successor is To Lam, the public security minister, as he has supported the party's anti-corruption campaign.

In Vietnam, four important positions are held in order of party hierarchy: general secretary, president, prime minister and chairman of the national assembly. The president is positioned as the head of state and attends international conferences and other events as the country's representative. The head of state also plays a ceremonial role.

Among business and diplomatic observers, there has been speculation on power struggles within the Communist Party over Phuc's resignation.

"With this dismissal of Vietnam's President Nguyen Xuan Phuc, Vietnam could enter in a time of political instability in the [view] of the international community and foreign investors," Ha Hoang Hop, a visiting senior fellow at Singapore's ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, told Nikkei Asia.

"Everybody is asking how much of this is a sincere pursuit to get rid of corruption versus an internal power-grab move, a la [Chinese President] Xi Jinping style," Hop said. "Further rumors on the coming dismissal of Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh just bring more uncertainty to Vietnam's politics and development."

After the death of President Tran Dai Quang in 2018, Trong, who has been general secretary of the party since 2011, doubled as president. That double duty lasted until the party congress in 2021, when Phuc was elected president.

In China, the general secretary of the Communist Party has doubled as president since 1993.

*Additional reporting by Kim Dung Tong in Ho Chi Minh City*