

*Support Grows in Burma for Constitutional Changes
And, corruption trials in Vietnam may be signs of power struggles*

Hello, and welcome to As It Is from VOA Learning English.

I'm Christopher Cruise in Washington.

Today on the program, we report on corruption trials in Vietnam. Experts say the trials may represent a power struggle among political leaders.

"I believe that at the very top level of the Vietnam Communist Party there are people who are relatively untainted by corruption, there are also people who are deeply, deeply involved in corruption."

But we start our show in Burma. Support is growing in that country for changes to its constitution. The changes would permit opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi to seek presidential office.

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Possible political change for Burma and Vietnam: our subject today on As It Is.

Support Grows in Burma for Constitutional Change

Burma’s constitution bars opposition leader and Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi from presidential office. But that could change before the country’s next presidential elections in 2015. Burma’s parliament might make changes to the constitution that could open the competition to the National League for Democracy leader.

Last month, some of Burma’s most powerful political leaders said they support changing the constitution. But they did not say what changes they would support.

One part of the constitution says a presidential candidate cannot have family members who hold foreign citizenship. National League for Democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi was married to British author Michael Aris. He died in 1999. Their two adult sons are British citizens.

Another part of the constitution says presidential candidates must have military experience. Until recently, Burma did not permit women to serve in the military.

Current Burmese President, Thein Sein, has said he will not seek a second term. In January, he told reporters that change should be possible for a healthy constitution.

Many people in Burma believe if Aung San Suu Kyi became president it would show the country's reform efforts were successful. Many Burmese saw her long struggle against the former military government as a reason to hope conditions would improve.

In Rangoon, recently demonstrators gathered to call for constitutional changes. One protester noted that Aung San Suu Kyi had already won the presidency once.

She says in the 1990 election they elected Aung San Suu Kyi to become the president of the country, but still she is not the president. She says this is totally against the will of people in the country and it is why the constitution needs to be amended.

Last month, the central committee of the ruling party voted to support 51 different constitutional amendments -- including changes that would permit Aung San Suu Kyi to be a candidate.

Richard Horsey is an expert on Burmese politics. He says President Thein Sein's support of the constitutional changes is a good sign. But he says the president cannot guarantee an amendment will be approved.

"We have a consensus among all the key political stakeholders in the country that some sort of constitutional change is required, but that is very far short of a consensus on what precise clauses need to be changed and what the new language should look like - - and when this should take place."

You are listening to As It Is, a program designed to help you learn to speak, read, write and understand everyday American English.

Now, a report on corruption trials in Vietnam: possibly the result of a power struggle among the country's political leaders.

Anti-Corruption Campaign or Power Struggle in Vietnam?

In the last few months, Vietnam has put some officials on trial for corruption. Several Vietnamese leaders launched the campaign. The government says it is ordering severe punishments -- including death -- to try to end corruption. But some experts say the trials are really about a fight for power among the country's top leaders.

Alexander Vuving is a Vietnam expert at the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies. He says some of the country's economic problems have been caused by poor organization and illegal payments at state-run companies. Mr. Vuving says leaders of the ruling Communist Party know the Vietnamese people are angry about the problems.

"They really want to do something to show the population to restore the regime's legitimacy and so to rescue the regime from corruption. But also as a propaganda device to restore trust for the population."

Some experts say the anti-corruption campaign is linked to a fight for power between Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung and the Chairman of the Communist Party, Nguyen Phu Trong.

Mr. Vuving says the prime minister is part of a group that uses its position to become rich without helping Vietnamese society. He says Mr. Trong is part of a group that opposes corruption and is leading the campaign to end it.

“I believe that at the very top of the Vietnam Communist Party there are people who are relatively untainted by corruption; there are also people who are deeply, deeply involved in corruption. So you have both ice and fire in the same Politburo.”

The anti-corruption campaign already has targeted several top officials and business leaders who are closely linked to the prime minister. Carl Thayer of the University of New South Wales in Australia says this shows the campaign is more of a political fight than an effort to improve government operations.

“Dismantling corruption is really in the government is aimed at the prime minister because he’s responsible and it’s his cronies and friends who have benefited from it.”

The media is reporting about the corruption trials. But there are few signs that the public believes the government is serious about ending corruption.

Jairo Acuña-Alfaro is an anti-corruption and reform policy adviser at the United Nations Development Program in Vietnam. He says officials must start with lower levels of government if they want to persuade the public that they are serious about ending corruption.

“All these cases that are being discussed are very far away from the ordinary citizens. What the Vietnamese citizens want to have is a public administration that is free from corruption, alright, that is free from abuses, that is free from a, a lack of respect. In order to do that, you know, there has to be some work in terms of addressing the incentives, for these public officials, you know to, you know to address publicly and transparently, you know, what are those incentives, what are those rents that they receive from the public sector and then, you know, put, you know, put the house in order.”

And that’s our program for today. It was written in Special English from reports by Gabrielle Paluch in Bangkok and Marianne Brown in Hanoi.

Thank you for spending some of your time with us today.



I'm Christopher Cruise reporting from VOA Learning English headquarters in Washington.

June Simms will be here tomorrow with another edition of As It Is. I hope you'll join her then, here on The Voice of America.



Contact information for VOA Learning English:

Postal address:

**VOA Learning English
Room 3400
330 Independence Ave SW
Washington, DC 20237
United States of America**

Email us at: LearningEnglish@voanews.com

Or go to our website -- learningenglish.voanews.com -- and click
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