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He also decided to present third-class Labour Order to head coach Park Hang-seo from the Republic of Korea, midfielder Nguyen Quang Hai and goalkeeper Bui Tien Dung for their excellent performance during the tournament.

Earlier, Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc had promised to honour the squad members with certificates of merit in recognition for their hard work and success.

The Vietnamese U23 team will face Uzbekistan's in the final in Changzhou Sports Centre at 15:00 pm on January 27.

Under Park, Vietnam ranked second in Group D with four points. They defeated Iraq in the quarter-finals and Qatar in the semi-finals, becoming the first Southeast Asian country to enter the final round of the championship.

Hai scored four goals out of seven for Vietnam, including the only one in Vietnam's 1-0 win over

Australia in the group stage, which played a decisive role in pushing the team to the second position.

Dung, meanwhile, was a hero at the goalmouth of Vietnam. He saved four penalties in five matches, in which three were from a penalty shootouts in the quarter-final and semi-final games leading to Vietnam's victories.

### **PM awards certificates of merit to U23 team members**

Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc on January 26 decided to present certificates of merit to 31 members of Vietnam's U23 football team for their excellent achievements during the ongoing Asian Football Confederation (AFC) U23 Championship in Changzhou, China.

The awardees include 21 players and head of the Vietnamese delegation, coaches, technical manager, interpreter and doctors of the team.

In addition, PM Phuc also proposed President Tran Dai Quang to present a first-class Labour Order to the whole team and third-class Labour Orders to coach Park Hang-seo, goalkeeper Bui Tien Dung and midfielder Nguyen Quang Hai.

Vietnam became the first Southeast Asian country to enter the final of the championship after beating Qatar 4-3 in the penalty shootout following a 2-2 draw in the official time of the semifinal.

It was the second match in a row in this tournament in which Vietnam had to play more than 120 minutes. The players were exhausted, but this did not prevent them from enjoying victory for the second time.

Goalkeeper Bui Tien Dung saved two kicks from Qatari players while Nguyen Quang Hai, who scored both goals for Vietnam in the match, failed to beat keeper Mohammed Al Bakari.

Defender Vu Van Thanh was the last player to shoot the penalty for Vietnam. Millions of people held their breath and burst into tears of happiness when he succeeded.

The Vietnamese team will play against Uzbekistan in the final on January 27.

Vietnam's Consulate General in Shanghai has asked the tournament organising committee and local authorities to create favourable conditions for and take measures to ensure security and safety for Vietnamese fans who will come to Changzhou to support the Vietnamese team, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Vietnamese fans are advised to contact citizen protection hotlines of the Vietnamese Consulate General in Shanghai at 86.21.68555698; 86.13636427223; 86.13262651727; and the number 84.981848484 in Vietnam in case they need emergency assistance.

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