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SOVIET UNION

1. Comment on new Soviet agricultural decree:

The new Soviet agricultural decree issued jointly by the party and government on 9 March continues the trend away from centralized planning. Khrushchev initiated this trend in 1954. Instead of receiving extremely detailed plans from the central government, as in the past, collective farms and the rural governing bodies will receive only the over-all state requirements. They will have wider latitude in determining methods of fulfilling these goals.

The decree's attack on central planning for agriculture is an implied criticism of the head of the State Planning Committee, M. Z. Saburov, who was promoted to the rank of first deputy premier only two weeks earlier.

The decree and other recent Soviet statements on agriculture indicate that measures of control by the government to assure fulfillment of over-all requirements will become more strict. The decree calls for an increase of obligatory deliveries, but does not give figures indicating whether the increase will exceed the anticipated rise in production. It is, therefore, not yet possible to assess the effect the decree will have on the incentive program.

An increase of deliveries to the state, whether or not accompanied by an increase in total output, would allow the government to raise urban consumption, increase exports to pay for needed imports, or expand state reserves of food products.

SOUTHEAST ASIA

2. Laotian government signs cease-fire with Pathet Lao:

Laotian government and Pathet Lao representatives signed a cease-fire agreement on 9 March covering the northern provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua,

according to the American army attaché in Vientiane. French officials doubt that the Pathet Lao will live up to the agreement.

A subdivision of the provinces, in order to administer the agreement, appears likely, with the eastern part of each remaining in Pathet Lao hands.

Comment: Although the Geneva agreement specified a cease-fire throughout Laos, Pathet Lao forces, apparently under Viet Minh direction, have conducted sporadic attacks against royal government forces in the north. It would now appear that the Laotian government has at least temporarily abandoned any plan for reasserting its authority by force in these provinces and that it is prepared to acquiesce to the territorial foothold granted the Communists at the Geneva conference.

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