

## Gorbachev: Food shortage not nearly met

MOSCOW -- President Mikhail S. Gorbachev called on the Communist Party Wednesday to take urgent steps to ease chronic food shortages - the Soviet Union's "biggest wound" - but he indicated the problem would exist for years.

The party's policy-making Central Committee began a two-day meeting largely devoted to agricultural reform, including a search for ways to increase the food supply and improve traditionally dreary rural life.

The 58-year-old Kremlin leader, himself the son of a southern Russian peasant, said conditions in some regions of the countryside were at a "critical level," with mass migration of their population to cities.

Productivity on Soviet farms is so low, he said, the Soviet Union still must go abroad to buy "large quantities of grain, meat, fruits, vegetables,

sugar, vegetable oil and some other staples" to meet domestic demand.

Gorbachev, once the party's overseer for agriculture, called for "an agrarian policy that will be able to restore the peasant as the master on the land, and dependably solve the food problem."

"Further delay in this matter is simply inadmissible," he said.

Among the measures endorsed by Gorbachev was an "extensive transition to leasing," or allowing work collectives and individuals to work state-owned farmland in exchange for a fee. He also said "more flexible prices" for crops purchased by the state would go into effect Jan. 1, 1990.

Before Gorbachev spoke on farm policy, the 300-member Central Committee moved to elect its top leaders, including Gorbachev, to the new parliament.

The Communist Party is one of 30 organizations with the power to choose one-third of the 2,250 representatives in the new Congress of People's Deputies.

Despite the publicity touting this campaign as the Soviet Union's first multicandidate election, the Communist Party chose to nominate just 100 people for its 100 seats. Party members had suggested more than 31,000 names.

The deputies elected by the party in a secret ballot include most members of the 12-man ruling Politburo, 26 workers and seven collective farmers, the official Tass news agency reported.

The food problem is likely to produce far more discussion at the Central Committee plenum, since the party's conservative agriculture chief, Yegor K. Ligachev, apparently disagrees with Gorbachev on a solution.

In recent appearances, Ligachev has skipped lightly over Gorbachev's plan to lease state-owned fields to farmers, making them "masters of the land" and providing an incentive to produce more.

Instead, Ligachev has emphasized collective farming - the traditional system that has left consumers standing in line for meat and vegetables.

Tass, reporting on the first day of the plenum, said Gorbachev called the country's continued food shortages, which necessitate the rationing of meat, sugar and other staples in many regions, "our society's biggest wound."

Tass did not immediately provide a detailed account of Gorbachev's remarks on the new measures being contemplated in agriculture, but its initial report indicated the Kremlin leader was resigned to ongoing food shortages in the next several years.

No one has proposed allowing farmers to own outright the land they till, or the breakup of the giant collective and state farms that have been the backbone of Soviet agriculture since the days of Stalin.

Gorbachev told the Central Committee collective and state farms have "huge potentialities" that can be exploited with the right management techniques.

Whatever the decision on leasing, the Central Committee is likely to agree on the need to ease the poverty and isolation of rural life. It is also expected to order the dismantling, at least partially, of an agricultural superministry created in 1985.

The Central Committee has the power to change the membership of top party bodies like the Politburo and Secretariat. Tass said it would reconvene Thursday to discuss Gorbachev's farm report.

## Import ban unlikely to have impact on city streets, although Colt drops model and refuses to tell numbers

WASHINGTON -- Experts said Wednesday the Bush administration's ban on imports of semiautomatic rifles would have scant impact on crime since so many of those weapons already are in circulation and more are being manufactured domestically.

"The lifting of the import permits ... will reduce the supply of assault weapons to gun dealers in the country," said Cheryl Epps, legislative analyst for the International Association of Chiefs of Police, but "many assault weapons are manufactured domestically."

The suspension won't have any effect on crime "because the flow of weapons will remain the same if domestic manufacturers fill the void," she said.

However, the growth of the domestic arsenal promised to take a decline, too, with an announcement by Colt Industries Inc. on Wednesday that it was voluntarily suspending sales of its domestically produced AR15 semiautomatic assault-style rifles.

Colt would not say how many of the weapons it makes. "If it is determined by the government review that semiautomatic rifles are not appropriate for the commercial market, we will not sell the AR15 in that market," said Colt spokesman Mike Dunn.

Bush administration drug director William J. Bennett welcomed Colt's decision as "an act of civil responsibility."

On Tuesday, Bennett announced the suspension of pending import permits for more than 110,000 semiautomatic rifles, referred to as "assault-style" because they look like machine guns.

The White House stressed Wednesday that there were no plans to curtail sales of similar rifles produced domestically.

Gwynne Peirson, retired professor of criminology at Howard University and a police officer for 23 years in Oakland, Calif., said the ban on imports will have no immediate impact, but ultimately could if it is made permanent.

"I think the ban on imports will have a definite positive effect, but it will have to trickle down and we may not even see the impact next year," he said.

"So many of them have been brought in in the recent past, that they will still be in the market," he said. "The only thing the ban will do in the short run is to increase the price of the available weapons."

Gregg Risch of Handgun Control, one of the country's leading gun control advocates, said the organization is "thrilled" by the administration's action, but was even harsher than Peirson in his assessment of the possible impact on crime, saying simply: "Zero."

"There are a couple of million of

them already out on the streets, gun stores already have large stocks of ones already imported and domestically made ones, and yesterday's action doesn't do anything to stop them from selling those," Risch said.

"We're not saying it will have a tremendous effect on crime," said one Treasury Department official who spoke on condition of anonymity. "But in three to four years, we would have 1 million of those guns here."

The Colt AR15, the semiautomatic version of the military's M-16 rifle, is the most similar domestically made weapon to those whose imports have been suspended, such as semiautomatic versions of AK-47s and Uzi carbines, according to Dick Pedersen of the Treasury Department's Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms.

The suspension on imports does not affect thousands of other semiautomatic rifles awaiting import permits, Pedersen said.

## Chileans: Scare is 'Gringo lie'

SANTIAGO, Chile -- "Buy! Buy! Don't believe the gringos' lies!" chanted a street vendor of grapes, summing up the anger Chileans felt Wednesday over a U.S. scare concerning fruit from the South American nation.

Even though the action was taken after cyanide was found in two grapes exported by Chile to the United States, the president of the State Bank called the U.S. action "an aggression, almost an act of war."

The leader of the farm producers' association said, "It paves the way to terrorism against the world food trade

in the future." The nation's booming fruit export industry, meanwhile, remained paralyzed as huge inventories of fruit were being checked.

The National Exporters Association said "not a trace" of any alien substance has been found in thousands of crates of fruit ready for export that have been checked since the inspection began two days ago.

Exporters, growers and packers voluntarily suspended all their operations Tuesday night for 72 hours to allow the stored fruit to be checked.



Jeff Reiner/Daily Nebraskan

## Central Americans agree on U.N. peacekeeping plan

UNITED NATIONS -- Central American diplomats Wednesday reached an agreement in principle for U.N. peacekeepers to patrol Central America to make sure guerrillas do not launch cross-border raids.

The U.N.'s working document for the force called for up to 100 military observers to monitor Central American border areas in speedboats, helicopters and all-terrain vehicles.

Military officers and foreign ministry officials from Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, Costa Rica and Guatemala reached agreement in principle to recommend the plan today, hours before their two days of talks were scheduled to end.

"We approved the document in

the sense that we discussed the document, and there are no disagreements," said Nicaragua's deputy foreign minister, Victor Hugo Tinoco, as he left U.N. Headquarters.

The foreign ministers of five nations will now ask the United Nations to begin setting up the peacekeeping force, a step that Tinoco called "a formality."

The head of the Honduran delegation, Ambassador Roberto Flores Bermudez, confirmed that agreement in principle had been achieved.

Up to 11,000 Nicaraguan rebels have bases in Honduras from which they launch raids into Nicaragua. They are the prime focus of the U.N. peacekeeping plan.

## Life expectancy gap persists

WASHINGTON -- Life expectancy of white Americans continues to increase while that of blacks declines, and other significant health differences between Caucasians and minorities remain, according to government statistics released Wednesday.

The figures, contained in an annual Public Health Service report, show that blacks are dying younger than whites, blacks are twice as likely to die in infancy as whites and substantially fewer black women who are pregnant receive early prenatal care.

"The report shows, as have others

for as long as they have been issued, that there is a disparity between the health of our white and black populations," said Health and Human Services Secretary Louis Sullivan.

The report is a compilation of statistics previously released by the National Center for Health Statistics, which is part of the health service. It is based on figures for the years 1970 through 1986, the latest year for which comprehensive data is available.

While life expectancy at birth for whites increased from 75.3 years in 1985 to 75.4 in 1986, life expectancy for blacks declined from 69.5 to 69.4

during the period, the report said. For all Americans, life expectancy was 74.8 in 1986, up from 74.7 the year before.

For whites and the overall population, the figures were the same in 1984 as in 1985, but for blacks the 1986 decline in life expectancy followed a similar one in 1985, when it was 69.7, which Sullivan called "a disturbing trend."

The report said the life-span declines among blacks were the result of increases in deaths from AIDS, homicides, influenza and pneumonia.

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