

Business

Work on global trade accord may end by mid-March

Unionists of Citibank in S Korea go on indefinite strike
SEOUL, Sept 1: Some 200 union members of the US-based Citibank in South Korea on Tuesday launched an indefinite strike, while another US-based bank, First National Boston Bank, locked out striking workers, reports AFP.

All the 205 union members of some 500 employees at the Citibank's nine offices in Seoul and two offices in the southeastern Port of Pusan walked out, partly affecting the bank's business, a spokesman of the labour union said.

Some 160 of the striking workers converged on their Seoul headquarters and staged a sit-down strike, singing songs and chanting slogans.

The workers struck for a day Monday to press their demands before launching an indefinite strike, but the management rejected the union's demand for the establishment of a benefit fund for workers and a 15 per cent wage hike, offering instead a seven per cent wage increase.

The union has been demanding that the company use five per cent of last year's before-tax profits of 87 million dollar and set up a 4.3 million dollar benefit fund for workers, as recommended by South Korean labour law.

Meanwhile, First National Boston Bank locked out 26 union members who have been on strike for 32 days, demanding a 15 per cent wage hike, more bonus and more say of the labour union in personnel management.

Police threatened to intervene and arrest the striking workers, who, the police said, were illegally barring non-union members from entering the bank.

Fate of Jakarta's membership in INRO to be discussed soon

JAKARTA, Sept 1: The fate of Indonesia's membership in the International Natural Rubber Organization (INRO) will be discussed in the group's meeting in Bangkok next month, the Antara news agency said Monday, reports AFP.

The chairman of Indonesia's Rubber Association, Cornel, said last week that Indonesia was considering leaving INRO citing the group's inability to maintain fair prices.

By early September this year, a meeting at ministerial level will be held to discuss the (membership) matter, the official news agency quoted the Agriculture Ministry's Special General Sutato Hadiwigono as saying.

The meeting will be held in Bangkok, he added.

INRO gathers both producers and consumers of natural rubber. Indonesia has said that INRO's buffer stock management favoured consumers and had consequently disadvantaged producers by failing to stabilise prices.

Industrial output prices up by 8 pc in East Germany

WIESBANDEN, Germany, Sept 1: Industrial production prices in Eastern Germany were up by 0.8 per cent in July on an annual basis and were unchanged from June, the federal statistics office here announced on Tuesday, reports AFP.

It said production prices of metal goods were up by 1.2 per cent in the area in July by comparison with June. Rubber products were up 3.1 per cent, and paper products 1.1 per cent.

Separately, the statistics office said sales of the wholesale trade in unified Germany dropped by six per cent in nominal terms and five per cent in real terms in July by comparison with the same month last year, to 79 billion marks.

For the year's first seven months, the wholesale trade's sales totalled 558 billion marks, down six per cent in nominal prices and by four per cent in real prices from the same period last year, the announcement said.

Pyongyang's official propa-

3 Asian states forecast lower rice harvests

TOKYO, Sept 1: The unusually cool, wet summer that has hit rice crops throughout East Asia looks sure to worsen North Korea's already acute food shortages, Asian diplomats said on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

Japan, China and South Korea are forecasting lower rice harvests because of the weather, one diplomat said.

Because North Korea is further north, the effect of the cooler conditions will be more pronounced, he added.

Japan was forecasting a seven per cent drop in rice production. South Korea had estimated its output would fall between about seven and nine per cent.

Given Stalinist North Korea's poor agricultural work methods and chronic shortage of fertilizer, its shortfall was likely to reach 12 per cent, perhaps even 15 per cent, he said.

The U.S. State Department said on August 19 that Japanese visitors to North Korea were already bringing back tales of food shortages and civil unrest in the communist country.

We have heard over a period of time (reports) about food shortages and some allegations of unrest, in North Korea, department spokesman David Johnson said.

Pyongyang's official propa-

geranians have boasted in recent days of bumper grain harvests, although, as usual, they have given no reliable figures.

Nevertheless, some hints of concern have filtered through the up-beat coverage.

In a report of meetings

German Economics Minister still for EC-US farm pact

BONN (Germany), Sept 1: Economics Minister Guenter Rexrodt declared Germany's support Tuesday for the US-Europe farm trade agreement that France had insisted must be modified, reports AP.

Rexrodt appeared to contradict what Chancellor Helmut Kohl said last week when Kohl backed the visiting French premier, Edouard Balladur, in saving Germany also had problems with the Blair House agreement, named for the US government guest house where the agriculture talks were held last year.

German government leaders have presented a divided picture on the Blair House agreement, which calls for a 21 per cent cut in European Community-subsidised food exports over six years.

President Kim Il-Sung had last week in North Hamgyong province, the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) quoted him as saying crops were doing well in all areas despite the unfavourable chilly weather but urging redoubled efforts for a constant upsurge in production.

Kim also called for further increases in the output of chemical fertilisers, agricultural chemicals and herbicides, the agency said.

North Korea's already flagging economy suffered a devastating blow with the collapse of the Soviet Union and its satellites. The abrupt end of its barter trade agreements with the east bloc meant Pyongyang has had to pay scarce currency for all vital imports.

Recent travellers have talked of factories idled for lack of fuel.

A report this month in the Washington Post said visitors to North Korea had reported the appearance of a new slogan on government billboards in the countryside: "Let's eat two meals a day, not three."

It said a woman who had recently visited relatives near the industrial city of Wonsan reported her son's family ate rice "once a year, as a delicacy," but was lucky because it had bean vines growing around the house.

United News of India quoted Environment Minister Kamal Nath as saying the bones could have fetched more than 225 dollar per kg (100 dollar per pound) in China.

Nath said the government would step up security in its national game reserves to stop poaching.

Over \$ 670,000 worth of tiger skins, bones seized in India

NEW DELHI, Sept 1: Indian police have seized from wildlife poachers a record haul of tiger skins, bones and other pelts, worth more than 670,000 dollar, news agencies said on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

Eight tiger skins and 287 kg of tiger bones were netted in two separate raids in North Delhi on Monday night, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported.

The haul, the biggest ever made in India, also included 43 leopard skins and about 100 other pelts including otter, fox and jackal, PTI added.

The agencies said a Tibetan refugee and an Indian were arrested, but the head of the poaching gang escaped.

The animal parts were meant for export through India's far northern region of Ladakh to China, where the skins would go to the for trade and the bones would be used in traditional medicine, the agencies added.

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About 100 banking officials arrested for corruption

HONG KONG, Sept 1: Authorities have detained about 100 financial officials including six bank managers on corruption charges in southwest China, a report said Tuesday, according to AP.

The officials, from banking, credit and insurance firms, were detained in Sichuan Province, the Chinese-controlled newspaper Ta Kung Pao said, quoting a report from the China News Service.

Last week, the ruling Community Party launched a nationwide anti-corruption drive. Courts across the country have handed out harsh sentences, including the death penalty, in several major graft, bribery and embezzlement cases.

Ta Kung Pao said Sichuan authorities investigated 102 corruption cases in the banking system in the first half of this year.

Investors worried over Thai govt action

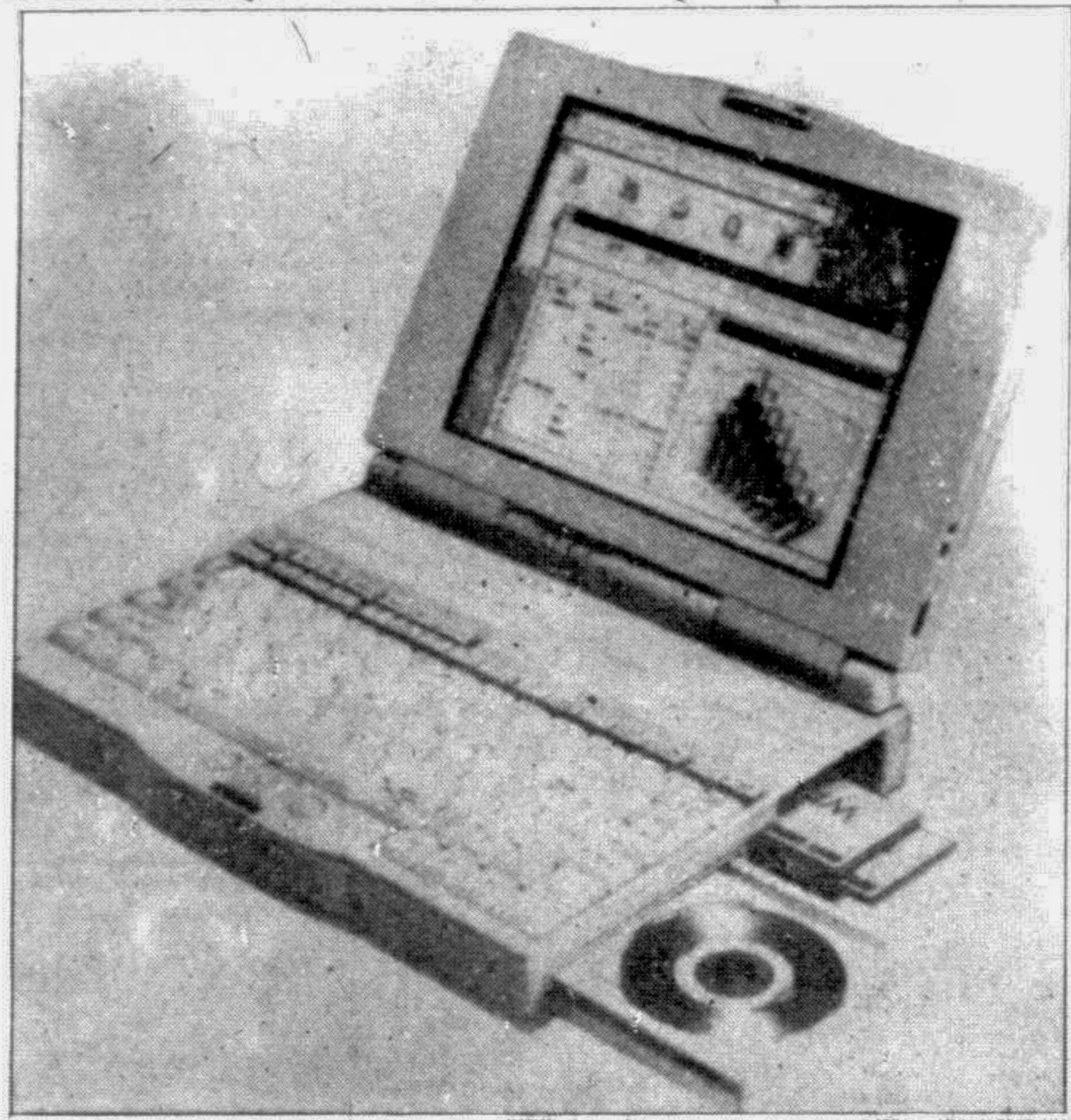
motorists by Thursday.

The majority owner of the road developer is the Japanese construction company Kumagai Gumi. Several Thai banks are the other major shareholders.

Some businessmen viewed the court order as use of state power to force a private company to come to terms with the government. It came on the heels of Monday's demonstration by 500 expressway authority employees calling for opening of the road.

"It's very damaging to investor confidence," said Marshall W Parke, managing director of Manatee Ltd, a merchant banking and venture-capital firm.

"Anybody involving in contracting for the government, or in financing those projects with the government, has got to be greatly concerned," he said.



Japan's electronics giant Matsushita unveiled a new notebook computer with a mini CD-ROM drive in Tokyo yesterday. The 486-based Windows machine features a monochrome and colour LCD screen and is also compatible with pen-input system. It will go on sale under the Panasonic brand name in Japan, the USA, Britain, Germany and Canada next month, priced at 268,000 yen (2,580 dollar) to 668,000 yen (6,430 dollar). — AFP photo

that there will be sufficient time for printing and circulation of the complete Uruguay Round documents prior to a formal signing of the agreements at a ministerial conference in April 1994," he said.

Seeking to speed the process along, Sutherland said it was "disturbing" that only 54 of the 116 GATT members had presented comprehensive offers on market access for goods. He urged the others to do so immediately.

"I can already see that all government will have to make major efforts to make the ultimate market access deal substantial and attractive at a multilateral level," he said.

He said "not a great number of issues" need to be resolved

on services, where offers have been presented by 73 countries, and he expects the chairman of the negotiating group to produce a revised text by the end of September.

Sutherland announced plans to establish an informal group to flesh out provisions on institutional issues such as a proposed multilateral trading organisation and a dispute settlement mechanism. The group would be chaired by ambassador Julio Lacarte-Muro of Uruguay.

The GATT Director General also said he had initiated consultations on giving special attention to the needs of the least developed countries as specified in the original Punta Del Este talks.

Illegal loans to Iraq
Issue of Italian witnesses may delay start of Drogoul's trial

ATLANTA, Sept 1: An attorney for a former banker charged with making 5.5 billion dollar in illegal loans to Iraq, says a federal appeals court ruling probably will delay the start of his client's case until November, says AP.

A three-judge panel of the 11th US Circuit Court of Appeals on Monday authorised prosecutors to put Drogoul to interview 13 Italian witnesses about the loans.

The panel reversed a ruling by US District Judge G Ernest Tidwell, which had blocked the depositions. Prosecutors will have to ask Tidwell to delay the start of Drogoul's trial scheduled to begin in October.

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For the equivalent of about 19 cents, the price of two pounds (one kilogram) of rice, people were able not long ago to buy numbered tickets for a drs 32,000 jackpot — 160 times Vietnam's per capita income and about 46 times the average annual salary in Hanoi. Other prizes included televisions, appliances and gold.

So many Hanoi residents want a shot that lottery officials plan to adopt a high-tech Western "Lotto" game later this year.

Launched in 1967 as a way to raise money for public works, the Construction Lottery of Hanoi still clings to its original mission. Profits are used to build schools and hospitals.

Adicts will buy tickets every day, even if they have no money," said a seller who gave his name only as Kim. "They'll borrow from their friends."

Another salesman, Trung Van Kinh, said some cus-

tomers buy up to 300 tickets at a time.

Like factory worker Nguyen Van Hough, who buys about 10 tickets a month, most people consider the lottery a form of entertainment. Hough compares it to drinking beer, and observed: "Some people say it's one model of capitalism."

Unemployment rises to 11.7 pc in France

PARIS, Sept 1: Unemployment edged up in France to 11.7 per cent in July, an increase of one-tenth of one per cent, and the number of jobless rose to a new record, the Labour Ministry said Monday.

The nature of lottery is different from the nature of gambling, (which) is only to put some money in the pocket of the individual and to cause some social evils," Thieu declared recently.

He denied there was a problem of lottery addiction, but ticket sellers tell a different story. In a country with a per capita annual income of roughly drs 200, some players become obsessed.

"Addicts will buy tickets every day, even if they have no money," said a seller who gave his name only as Kim. "They'll borrow from their friends."

Government researchers say unemployment could rise to 12.5 per cent by the end of the year.

Economic reform means big business for Hanoi lottery

HANOI, Sept 1: As economic reform brings modest prosperity to more people, Hanoi's daily lottery has come to symbolize dreams of instant wealth that no longer seem fantastic, reports AP.

Ticket sellers with home-made display tables crowd downtown sidewalks. Their business has boomed since the government began embracing free market in the late 1980s, leaving the Spartan image of communism behind.

At the beginning, there were only about 20 people selling lottery tickets in Hanoi," said Dang Thi Hao, who has done business at the same corner for 20 years. "Now there are hundreds.

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Farmers get boost in Myanmar

YANGON, Sept 1: Myanmar's impoverished rice farmers have been given a much needed boost by a recent government directive limiting fixed-price state purchases and allowing greater access to free-market trading, reports AP.

The new ministerial directive stipulates that state paddy purchases will be handled solely by the trade ministry, while cooperatives, joint-ventures and private traders will make their purchases on a free-market basis.

Analysts here say the move will greatly relieve the burden on poorer farmers, some of whom had previously been forced into debt by the need to meet government quotas.

Formerly a government monopoly, Myanmar's domestic rice trade has been granted various free market benefits in recent years, resulting in production increases.

However, spiralling prices which the government attributed to avaricious entrepreneurs and smugglers — caused serious problems in this impoverished country where rice is the main staple.

Under the directive, government purchases for state consumption, imports of fertilisers, machine utilization and more scientific methods of cultivation, Myanmar hopes to achieve a record yield this year of some 15 million tons of paddy, equivalent to about ten million tons of rice.

At a recent coordination meeting in Bassein, the capital of the rice-rich Irrawaddy division, trade minister Lieutenant-General Tun Kyi emphasized that state purchases should not be made from disaster-struck areas or from farmers with small holdings "whose harvests were just enough for their own consumption."

In the past, lower-level government officials had resorted to forced purchases of rice to meet government quotas. This in turn forced poor farmers with small holdings to sell not only

rice kept aside for personal consumption, but even that reserved for use as seedlings.

Cases were not unknown when farmers, threatened with having their land confiscated, were obliged to incur debts to meet government quotas.

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