Letter From Mao Zedong to I.V. Stalin Outlined A Plan For Plantation Of Rubber Trees

On The PRC Mainland

August 17, 1951

Comrade Filippov!

In accordance with your proposal, the Chinese government has convened a meeting on the issue of planting rubber trees in China.

As a result of the meeting, a plan was developed, which we intend to implement immediately.

I am enclosing the plan, dated August 11, 1951, submitted to me by Comrade Chen Yun, Chairman of the Financial and Economic Committee (FEC) of the Central People's Government, and Comrade Bo Yibo, his deputy.

I request that you review it and give appropriate instructions. Mao Zedong.

Basic Plan for Planting Rubber Trees on the PRC Mainland. "To Comrade Mao Zedong. Copy of the CPC Central Committee.

On August 2, 1951, the Federal Economic Commission and the Ministry of Forestry and Virgin Land Development convened a joint special meeting with the participation of representatives of the provinces of Guangdong, Guangxi, Yunnan, and Sichuan, as well as the heads of forestry agencies under the military-administrative committees of Central China, Southwest China, and East China.

At the meeting, the issue was studied and a basic plan for planting rubber trees on mainland China was developed, which was as follows.

1. Areas on the mainland suitable for planting rubber trees:

a) Rubber trees may be planted in Guangdong and Guangxi provinces from the 24th parallel to the southern coast, with the exception of the east coast of Guangdong Province, which is frequently hit by typhoons. In Guangdong Province, south of the 22nd parallel, and in Guangxi Province, south of the 23rd parallel, Brazilian rubber trees, which also grow in Malaya, Indonesia, and Hainan Island, can be planted.

Currently, 14 very tall Brazilian rubber trees have been preserved for ornamental purposes in Maoling and Lingshan Counties. In the area north of the 22nd and 23rd parallels, Indian rubber trees can be planted, which yield 30-40% less rubber than Brazilian rubber trees. These areas also have some Indian rubber trees preserved for ornamental purposes.

In the areas from the 24th parallel to the southern coast, there are over 10 million mu (1 mu equals 1/16 hectares) of uncultivated land located in hilly terrain. Planting this area with rubber trees would not only avoid reducing food crops, but would also strengthen the area against water and wind.

b) In Yunnan Province, south of 25 degrees north latitude and west of 102 degrees east longitude. Under the influence of the warm Indian Ocean current, temperatures there remain high and there is sufficient rainfall, making it suitable for planting rubber trees.

In Cheli County (south of Pu'er), during the war with Japan, returning Chinese emigrants created a park where they planted 5,000 Brazilian rubber trees. The Kuomintang government neglected to protect them, so only 500 trees remain to this day, while the rest were trampled by cattle.

In the marshy area west of Longling (on the Yunnan-Burma Highway), there are a small number of Indian rubber trees. In terms of rainfall, temperature, and soil, Yunnan Province is in no way inferior to Hainan Island in terms of rubber tree growing. This is one of our main rubber tree growing areas in the future. However, the disadvantage

is that this region is still marshy and malaria is widespread. It is also sparsely populated and communications are poor, so rubber production there will not be as fast as in Guangdong and Guanxi provinces.

c) In Sichuan Province, in the Yangtze River valley from Luzhou to Wanxian.

Along the Yangtze River, within 0.5 km from the banks, Indian rubber trees can be planted. Of the rubber trees planted during the war with Japan, 542 large and small Indian rubber trees remain in the Chongqing area. The results of rubber production trials conducted there in 1948 showed that the average rubber content in the tree's yield was 15%, but the annual rubber yield from a single tree can be determined through trials in the current and future years.

The area suitable for rubber tree planting in the Yangtze River Valley is small. It is estimated to be only 500,000 mu.

Furthermore, rubber trees must be planted simultaneously with corn, so they can only be used for experimental purposes.

2. Seed source. Brazilian rubber tree seeds can be imported from Hainan Island, but seed for Indian rubber trees is in short supply. Importing them is also unlikely. They say that in Indonesia, by law, if seeds are stolen and taken to the mainland, the offenders are executed. Regarding the export of seeds from If India and Burma are affected, it is also unknown whether they can be freely exported from there. There are no rubber tree plantations in the liberated areas of Vietnam. Therefore, obtaining Indian rubber tree seeds is difficult.

We are currently searching for seed-producing Indian rubber trees in various provinces of southern China. If we can find up to 100 such trees, we will be able to plant them en masse using their seeds.

3. The pace of rubber tree planting. A rubber tree produces rubber within 8 years from planting. Taking into account the time required to determine the start date of rubber production, the percentage of rubber content, and the quality of the rubber, a total of about 10 years will be required. To expedite rubber production, we cannot conduct small-scale experimental plantings; we must begin immediately with rubber tree planting over large areas. Fortunately, the rubber tree planting will be done without damaging currently cultivated fields, so we will not lose anything even if the trees we plant produce little rubber. Although we will incur additional costs in planting rubber trees, we will still achieve our goal of creating forests.

4. Based on the above and after discussing this issue with experts, we have concluded that rubber tree cultivation is feasible in the three areas of mainland China mentioned above. And if so, then rubber can be harvested. The rubber yield will undoubtedly be much lower than in the South Sea Islands, and also lower than on Hainan Island. However, to obtain the required annual rubber harvest, we can plant rubber trees over a large area and thereby achieve the required production.

We believe that in the past, rubber trees were not grown on a large scale on mainland China not because they did not grow, but because they yielded little rubber. At that time, domestic rubber sales were limited, and it was impossible to compete with the rubber produced in the South Sea Islands on the international market. However, the external and domestic situation has now changed. We need to plant our own rubber trees.

5. Based on the above, we propose:

a) This year and next, sow 20,000 mu of land with rubber tree seeds, with the expectation of producing 10,000 rubber tree saplings per mu. Simultaneously, in 1954, it was decided to plant 4,500,000 mu of rubber trees on the mainland, including 4,000,000 mu in Guangdong and Guangxi provinces and 500,000 mu in Yunnan province. The planting will primarily be Brazilian rubber trees.

In 1956, the area planted with rubber trees will be increased by 2,500,000 mu.

Over the course of several years, experiments will be conducted in Sichuan Province and southern Fujian Province over an area of several hundred thousand mu. If 25 rubber trees are planted on each mu, a total of 175,000,000 rubber trees will be planted. Assuming that each tree produces 1.5 pounds of rubber annually, then in 10 years, the annual rubber harvest will be at least 100,000 tons. Even if each tree produces only 1 pound, it will still be possible to harvest 70,000 to 80,000 tons of rubber per year.

b) During the same period, on Hainan Island, where there are currently 680,000 rubber trees on an area of 200,000 mu, the area planted with rubber trees will increase to 500,000 mu. In ten years, an annual rubber production of 100,000 tons will be achieved. At this meeting, a plan for planting rubber trees on the mainland was specifically discussed. A plan for planting rubber trees on Hainan Island will be developed at another meeting.

6. Planting rubber trees on such a large area on the mainland and Hainan Island in a short period of time is a complex and colossal undertaking. To accomplish this important task, we make the following demands on the Party committees of the districts where rubber trees will be planted:

a) This year, 620,000 jin of seeds must be collected on Hainan Island for the mainland. The administrative districts of Central South China, Southwest China, and East China must instruct the various provinces to make every effort during August, September, and October 1951 to search for Indian rubber trees that produce seeds and report the results to the Ministry of Forestry and Virgin Land Development so that the seeds can be distributed uniformly.

b) In accordance with the first subparagraph of the fifth paragraph of this plan, the relevant provinces must prepare the necessary amount of land for sowing seeds, calculated to yield a number of seedlings sufficient to plant the planned area.

c) According to the first subparagraph of the fifth paragraph of this plan, the relevant provinces must allocate land totaling 4,500,000 mu in the designated areas by the spring of 1954 for rubber tree planting. Reclaiming such a large amount of virgin land within two and a half years is a very difficult task, especially in sparsely populated areas. Therefore, the relevant provinces must carry out the necessary preparatory work.

d) The Ministry of Forestry and Virgin Land Development and the Ministry of Education of the Central People's Government, together with the people's governments of the administrative regions, must mobilize some students and faculty from forestry departments at universities and institutes to participate in the selection of land for sowing seeds and virgin land plots for planting seedlings.

e) Mandate the Guangdong and Fujian Provincial CPC Committees to recruit rubber plantation workers expelled from the South Sea countries in the past, as well as those who will return in the future, for retraining and dispatching them to work in areas where rubber trees will be planted.

f) Staff forestry agencies, establish special rubber planting offices in provincial, regional, and county governments, and train workers to carry out the planting of rubber tree seeds.

g) Appoint one member of each Party committee bureau, from the provincial, regional, and district committees to the district committees, to lead the rubber tree planting work.

7. At this meeting, it was impossible to calculate the funds necessary for planting rubber trees, nor was it possible to determine the form of ownership of the rubber plantations. Over the next few years, when planting virgin lands over an area of over 7 million mu, it will be necessary to rationally utilize the reserve power of local peasants. Thus, private ownership will significantly exceed public ownership, or a combined private-public ownership of rubber plantations will have to be adopted. Therefore, this question remains open.

If the CPC Central Committee approves this basic plan, we request that the Central Committee disseminate it to the various bureaus of the Central Committee and the relevant provincial committees so that work on implementing this plan can begin locally.

Chen Yun. Bo Yibo.