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SYRIA

## WORK BEGINS ON 5-YEAR PLAN TO BOOST AGRICULTURE

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## [Text]

Work has started on drawing up a detailed draft for the sixth five-year plan (1986-90). Few details of the plan have been released, but particular efforts will be made to increase investment in agriculture and industry, according to Minister of State for Planning Affairs Sabah Baqaji. If recent trends continue, it is likely that most of the extra finance will be directed to agriculture or agro-industry.

The fifth plan (1981-85) signalled a shift in economic policy towards setting more modest targets, while trying to cut imports and reduce the increase in public spending. Tight controls on expenditure have been evident in recent budgets, as has been the priority accorded to agriculture. In the 1985 budget, total expenditure rose by 4 per cent from the previous year, planned investment in agriculture increased by 23 per cent.

The 1981-85 plan called for a 7.6 per cent annual increase in gross domestic product (GDP) and a progressive reduction in the trade deficit - exports were to grow by 6.5 per cent a year, while the planned annual increase of imports was to be kept at 3.4 per cent. According to the government's 1985 statistical abstract, GDP actually rose by less than 1 per cent a year between 1981-84, at constant 1980 prices.

External trade contracted during the period of the fifth plan: imports fell to fSyr 16,155 million (\$4,115 million) in 1984 from fSyr 19,781 million (\$5,039 million) in 1981; exports dropped to fSyr 7,275 million (\$1,854 million) in 1984, compared with fSyr 8,254 million (\$2,103 million) in 1981.

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