

The Eurasian Land-Bridge is on the international agenda

by Mary Burdman

Even as the present world financial system lurches toward its much-deserved end, the world's greatest project, the Eurasian Land-Bridge, is continuing to take shape. The construction of this vast network of rail, water, road, and communications links, is going on. Building the Land-Bridge is a cornerstone of China's national and foreign policy. Iran, on a smaller scale, is following the same agenda. And, the other nations of Eurasia—including Russia, and the nations of the Indian subcontinent, Central Asia, Southeast Asia, and eastern Europe—are not just watching. The Land-Bridge is “on the agenda,” and part of the national policy debate in all these countries.

The issue of the “New Silk Road” has been raised in anticipation of the April summit between Chinese President Jiang Zemin and Russian President Boris Yeltsin. The question posed to Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Grigori Karasin, in an interview with the Moscow trade union newspaper *Trud* on March 11: “Will the issue of the Silk Road and the Baikal-Amur Railway come up at the Jiang Zemin-Boris Yeltsin summit?” indicates what hangs in the balance at this time. For Russia, Kazakhstan, and other Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) member nations, the contrast is most extreme: Either they continue to feed the voracious demands of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and their own hordes of native bandit-capitalists, or they rebuild their wrecked industrial economies with the Land-Bridge project. For India, Pakistan, Turkey, and the nations of Southeast Asia and the Middle East, the Land-Bridge project is the only means by which they can build their way out of the physical isolation created by the failure, throughout the 20th century, to build the modern rail and other transport and communications net-

works necessary to unite Eurasia.

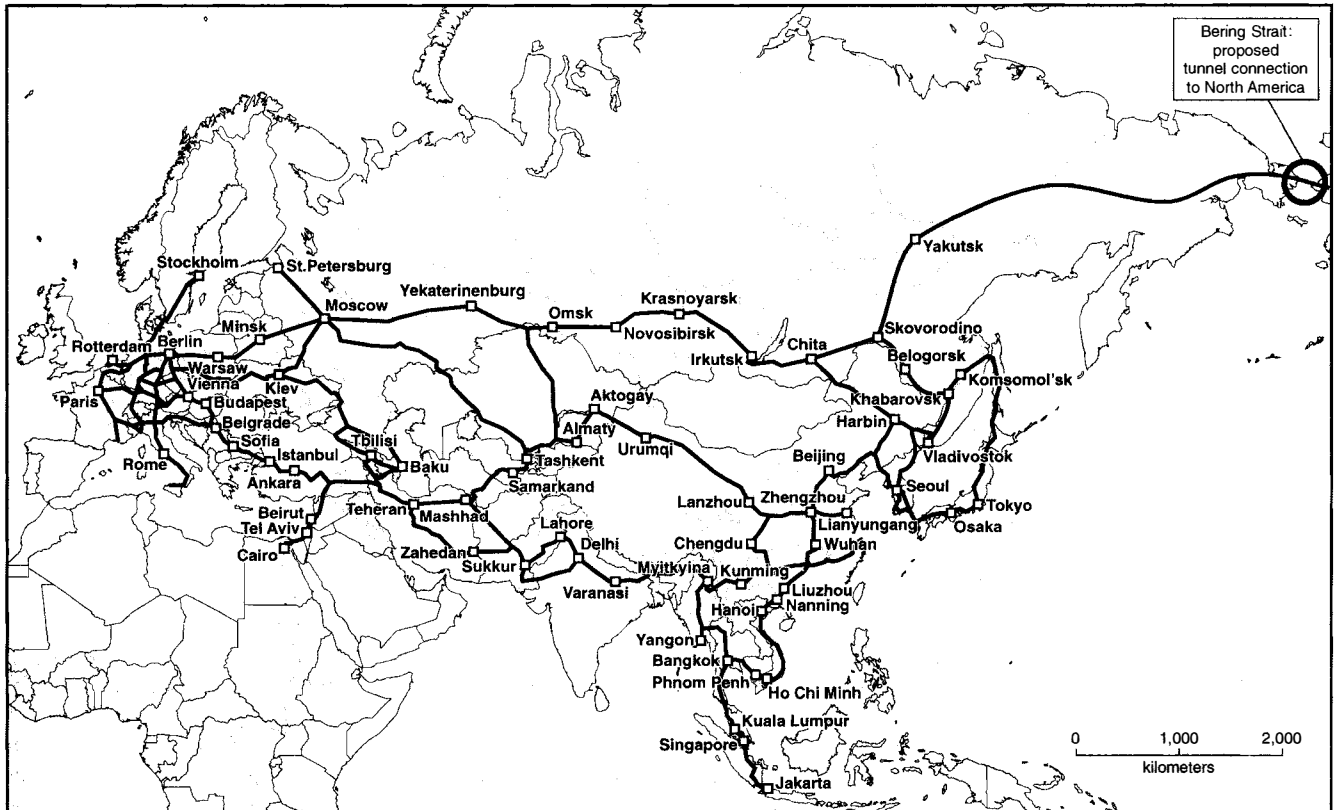
Since the turn of the year, the Schiller Institute and *EIR* have expanded their political drive to make the Eurasian Land-Bridge “the agenda” for governments around the world.

EIR's Special Report, “The Eurasian Land-Bridge: The ‘New Silk Road’—Locomotive for Worldwide Economic Development,” was first published in German, in November 1996, and in English, in February 1997. This is the only comprehensive report on both the current status of the Land-Bridge, and on what economic, scientific, and political measures must be taken to realize this project in the 21st century.

Since Schiller Institute founder Helga Zepp LaRouche presented the English edition of the report at a conference in Washington, D.C. on Feb. 5, *EIR* conferences have also been held at UN world headquarters in New York City; in Vienna, Austria; in Stuttgart and Düsseldorf, Germany; in Stockholm, Sweden; in Copenhagen, Denmark; and in Mexico City. More are to come. These conferences have all drawn attendance from international diplomats, government officials, private industry, political organizations, and the press.

On March 5, the London-based Arabic daily *Al Hayat* published a feature on the Eurasian Land-Bridge, based on *EIR's* report. *Al Hayat* is the largest-circulation international Arabic daily. The article, titled “The Fate of the World Is Determined by Infrastructural Corridors Linking Europe and Asia,” states that China and the other land-bridge nations have already invested billions in the projects, which are “a strategic, political aspect of Chinese foreign policy,” and challenge the United States to change its adverse policies toward nations whose role is vital to building the Land-Bridge, including Iran.

Eurasia: future main routes of the Eurasian Land-Bridge



On March 3, the Mexico City daily *Excelsior* reported that “the New Silk Road offers help to mankind,” and contrasted the impact of the Land-Bridge to the destruction of national economies being wrought by the IMF. The article references *EIR*’s Land-Bridge report, and states that what is crucial about China’s plans, is that they will force other nations to define their own policies on this great project. What is unique about China, *Excelsior* wrote, is that the IMF is not involved there, which is why China is the only nation in the world whose real economy is on an upward trend.

Building economic corridors

On March 26, China’s official Xinhua news agency put out a release entitled “Northwest China to Revitalize ‘Silk Road.’” It states:

“Northwest China is stepping up efforts to build an economic corridor along the second Eurasian Continental Bridge, opened for traffic in 1992, to revitalize the ancient Silk Road. The railway, which links Lianyungang in east China with Rotterdam, the Netherlands, runs 10,800 kilometers with more than 4,100 kilometers passing through China, mainly in northwest Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, Ningxia

Hui Autonomous Region, and Shaanxi, Gansu, and Qinghai provinces.

“Serving as the bridgehead, the Alataw Port in Xinjiang bordering Kazakhstan, has become China’s second largest railway port, with an annual transport capacity of 3.5 million tons. The gold passage, as the railway is called, supported by highways, airlines, and fiber optic lines, offers good opportunities to provinces and regions along the tracks, especially to northwest China, which benefits from markets in east China, Central Asia, and Europe. The area spares no efforts to prepare for the westward shift of China’s economic development. An electric railway, which runs from Shaanxi’s Baoji city through Gansu to Zhongwei in Ningxia, was open to traffic in 1995, and has become another passageway to China’s coastal areas.

“The incipient Southern Xinjiang Railway will further promote the role of the continental bridge. Gansu province plans to electrify the tracks in its boundary and build a double track between its capital of Lanzhou to Baoji at the beginning of the next century.

“The railway takes the lead in attracting investments into the central and western parts of China. Provisional statistics

show that more than 18,000 cooperative projects and 22.5 billion yuan [\$2.7 billion] worth of goods supply have been agreed among the areas along the line. Centered around the railway, large-scale key projects, pillar industries, trade centers, and high-tech zones are booming in the northwest, while cities and towns are linked with each other to form a city belt or an economic corridor."

Since the beginning of 1997, China has opened up an international information center, using the latest telecommunications technology, in the port of Lianyungang, the Chinese "bridgehead" city, "to collect, exchange, and process information on policies, urban construction, and transportation in all areas along the continental bridge which links Asia with western Europe," Xinhua reported. Already, container traffic in the port has increased 47-fold since the Land-Bridge's inception.

Time for 'investment cooperation'

In his interview with *Trud*, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Karasin was also asked: "Will the subject of investment in the development of the Baikal-Amur Railroad [see *EIR*, Feb. 14, p. 9] as a potentially new Silk Road from Asia to Europe be raised during P.R.C. President Jiang Zemin's visit to Moscow during the discussion of economic problems?" Karasin responded:

"First, I would like to point out that raising economic cooperation to a considerably higher level is a top priority for Russia and China. It is both sides' general opinion that sound long-term projects and lasting ties between major companies and enterprises should form the backbone of that cooperation.

"However, the time is evidently coming to move on to investment cooperation. There are major companies in the P.R.C. and in our country capable of implementing this kind of cooperation, possibly with the involvement of third countries as well. The sides may determine specific objects of cooperation, including the Baikal-Amur Railroad, during mutual consultations within the framework of existing intergovernmental organs (the subcommissions for trade and economic cooperation and transport). The legal base for this is already in place: An agreement on the promotion and mutual protection of investments was signed in 1990."

Russia is, of course, the nation in which the first Eurasian Continental Bridge, the Trans-Siberian Railway, was built in the beginning of this century. Now, Russia's policy elites are discussing reviving, and completing, the "Far North" branch of the Land-Bridge. Plans for a trans-Russian railroad in the far north have existed since the 1930s. Rail lines already connect St. Petersburg via Archangel to Vorkuta, and then to Labytmangi, east of the Urals. Final completion of the Baikal-Amur Mainline (BAM) is also being considered. As Russian policymakers stress, the most important reason for reviving the BAM, is that in huge, empty, northeast Russia, exist reserves of oil, gas, and minerals so vast that they dwarf even those of Central Asia.

But the problems are great. Container traffic on the Trans-Siberian has *fallen sevenfold* in the last few years. To attempt to deal with the problem, the International Coordinating Council of the Trans-Siberian Railway, including Russia, Germany, Poland, Belarus, Hungary, Finland, South Korea, and Japan, has become a permanent working group, after a meeting in the South Korean capital Seoul on March 2. Sweden has observer status in the group, and China announced its wish to become a permanent member, the Russian railway minister announced.

Russia's southwestern rail network, which connects Central Asia, via Charjo, directly to eastern and northeastern Europe, also exists; economic revival is essential to make this connection "work."

During March 24-27, Chinese Vice Premier and Foreign Minister Qian Qichen visited Moscow, to prepare the upcoming China-Russia summit. On March 27, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Gennadi Tarasov announced that, at the summit, "For the first time in Russian-Chinese relations, the declaration will give a joint assessment of the transition to a multi-polar world," Moscow Interfax reported. "The document will set forth the principles of Russian-Chinese partnership."

In the wake of this summit, Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan will sign a five-party treaty to scale down military forces in their border regions. This treaty will upgrade the military confidence-building measures for their borders (the longest borders in the world) signed by the five nations a year ago in Shanghai, during Yeltsin's visit to China. The new treaty will put troop deployments within a 100-kilometer zone along the borders under its purview, and ensure military transparency, for the first time, to decrease the possibility of accidental military conflicts. Minister Karasin called the treaty "a unique contractual document which sets an important precedent for the guarantee of stability in the Asia and Pacific region. Its significance can hardly be overestimated."

Qian Qichen held discussions with Yeltsin and with Yevgeni Primakov, his Russian counterpart. In the interests of preventing any "Cold War" interpretation being put upon the Sino-Russian strategic partnership, Qian Qichen said at his meeting with Yeltsin that these relations, which have worldwide impact, are not an alliance directed against other countries (clearly referring to the United States), Xinhua reported on March 25.

Primakov followed suit at a joint press conference, saying that the strategic partnership with China has not been created against a third country. "We intend to stabilize the international situation and to make the relationship of the countries equal," he said.

Political progress in the southern tier

At the same time, Indian Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda was also in Moscow, to discuss reviving Russian-In-



Since the turn of the year, the Schiller Institute and EIR have expanded their political drive to make the Eurasian Land-Bridge "the agenda" for governments around the world. Here, Schiller Institute founder Helga Zepp LaRouche briefs an audience in New York City on the Land-Bridge proposal, on Feb. 27. The Chinese banner reads, "We warmly welcome the Silk Road Lady."

dian economic and trade cooperation. On the visit, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Tarasov said that "the sides took the decision to bring Russian-Indian multilateral cooperation to the level of strategic partnership," and that "an agreement on Russian-Indian annual summit meetings has been reached."

What role the subsequent political impasse inside India—the result of the Congress Party President Sitaram Kesri unilaterally pulling out of the United Front government coalition—will have, remains to be seen. During Deve Gowda's short term in office, several vital steps were taken to improve India's relations with Eurasian nations, especially China, Russia, and Bangladesh. The visit of Jiang Zemin to India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal in November-December 1996, was a breakthrough. India's ties to Bangladesh, essential for a "southeast connection," were put on the best level they have been in years. In addition, there is the potential, with the Nawaz Sharif government in Pakistan, for an improvement of relations between India and Pakistan. A setback in any of these improving ties at this critical point, could have long-term effects, by limiting the potential for the southern tier of the Land-Bridge.

Russian-Chinese diplomacy will expand. Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin plans to make "an Asian tour" in late May and early June, during which Moscow and Beijing may sign up to seven documents on major economic projects,

according to "well-informed sources in the Russian government," Itar-Tass reported on March 27. Chernomyrdin is expected to visit China, Mongolia, and Southeast Asia, most likely Vietnam. Among projects to be discussed are laying a gas pipeline from Siberia through Mongolia and China to South Korea and, possibly, Japan. Cooperation to build nuclear and hydroelectric projects are under discussion, and China and Russia are also to finalize the project to throw a bridge across the Amur River, according to Itar-Tass.

Russian Foreign Minister Primakov has also been invited to visit China, likely in the second half of the year.

Other projects have already been finished. The new Hongchun-Kraskino railway was linked up on March 17. This railway, part of the overall Tumen River Free Economic Area development zone, connects China's Jilin province to the Hasans District of the far eastern Primorye province. In addition, the first Chinese-Russian fiber optical cable began operation on Jan. 28, after joint inauguration ceremonies were held in Harbin, Heilongjiang province, and Khabarovsk in Russia, ultimately connecting Beijing and Moscow through the domestic telecommunications systems of each country. China-Japan and China-Republic of Korea fiber optical cable projects are already in operation. "China will also complete a number of large international optical cable projects, including the China-Southeast Asia land optical cable project, the universal optical cable project, the Asia-Europe optical cable project, and the China-North America submarine optical cable project," *Renmin Ribao* reported.

China's ties to Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev spent ten days in China on Feb. 12-22, beginning with a vacation at the invitation of the Chinese leadership, and ending with a two-day official visit, his third to China since 1993. Chinese Premier Li Peng and President Jiang Zemin have visited Kazakhstan, in 1994 and 1996, respectively.

The link between China and Kazakhstan is essential to the Land-Bridge. Until 1990, there were *no* rail links between the Central Asian nations and China, or to Iran or the Indian Subcontinent. When the rail line first opened in 1992, border problems kept freight transport traffic to a minimum, but it has expanded rapidly since. But much must be done to realize even the full capacity of the current railroad technology and stations of the railroad pass from Druzhba, Kazakhstan to Alashankou, China, which can handle up to 12 million tons of freight in both directions. This was one of the primary issues discussed between Nazarbayev and Jiang Zemin.

Before his departure from Beijing airport on Feb. 22, President Nazarbayev noted that Jiang Zemin had made an exception to meet with him, while mourning the death of China's national leader Deng Xiaoping, the newspaper *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*, published in Kazakhstan's capital of Almaty, reported on Feb. 25.

"In 1995 the railways transported 1.2 million tons of

freight through the border station, and 2.5 million tons last year," Nazarbayev said. "This to a great extent follows from the fact that last year trade turnover between Kazakhstan and China reached \$500 million. This year the freight turnover might increase by a further 1 million tons." He also said that Kazakhstan needs new air corridors across China, to the other nations of Asia.

To achieve full use of the rail link, Nazarbayev said, construction of a second railway from China should be speeded up. Kazakhstan is currently developing the Druzhba railroad station and building additional terminals there with the help of a \$75 million loan from the Ex-Im Bank of Japan.

Jiang Zemin supported the importance of increasing freight transport, and announced that he had instructed the Chinese government to accelerate the construction on the Chinese side, of a second line of this railroad, which will go directly to Almaty.

Nazarbayev also proposed that Chinese oil companies take part in tenders for the privatization of Kazakh oil and gas facilities, and told Jiang that the two countries might cooperate in the joint construction of oil and gas pipelines starting in southern Kazakhstan, to western and central China.

The two nations' joint economic commission, now headed by ministers, will be upgraded. In the future, it will be led by the respective deputy prime ministers, and is scheduled to hold regular meetings.

Nazarbayev did not mention the more fundamental issues Kazakhstan faces. His nation, like Russia, is being looted wholesale—with the collaboration of Russian and Kazakh financiers. At this point, according to the Russian journal *Ekspert* of Dec. 16, 1996, some 90% of the country's industry has been sold off to foreign investors, many of them "off-shore" companies. Some firms have even been given away to cover their debts. The total realized from this "fire sale" has been in the range of \$3 billion. Now, Kazakhstan effectively does not control its own natural resources; since the industries are foreign-owned, it can barely collect taxes.

No support for British-run separatists

But on the vital question of security, in the wake of recent disturbances, wildly bruited about in the international press, among some of the Uighur-speaking population of Xinjiang Autonomous Region, Nazarbayev was clear. He said that the issue of Kazakhs living in China is always touched on in his discussions with China's leaders. While he has an interest in their welfare, "Kazakhstan in no way supports any kind of separatism," he stated.

China is a huge multi-ethnic country, and while aspirations for self-determination among "so-called minorities" are "understandable," said Nazarbayev, "we can in no way welcome the idea of separation. There are 6,000 peoples and ethnic groups in the world. If all of them were to decide to declare sovereignty one day, then numerous helpless, dwarfish countries would emerge on the planet along with the

existing powerful countries that are striving for development and prosperity, and this would mean chaos, permanent wars, and endless conflicts," *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda* reported. "Stability in China, with its population of almost 1.5 billion, meets the interests of not only that country itself, but of the whole world."

Shanghai to Paris

Uzbekistan is also looking to the Eurasian Land-Bridge for its national future. At his year-end press conference on Dec. 27, 1996 in Tashkent, President Islam Karimov spoke of building a "Shanghai-to-Paris railroad."

In answer to a question from a Russian journalist, Karimov said: "You ask how realistic is the grandiose route that would link us with the port of Shanghai [via the city of Kashi in far western China]. I want to tell you: We are in the process of negotiations with China and Kyrgyzstan regarding this project. The P.R.C.'s Five-Year Plan envisages construction of a rail link to Kashi within three years. This project has been designated as a priority in China. The task of the two countries—Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan—is to build a rail link to Kashi from our side. We are currently conducting negotiations and mapping the route.

"This project could be very significant. It can link Shanghai and Paris. The rail line will traverse 12 countries. It has already been completed everywhere else—all that remains is to build this segment.

"What sources of financing will be brought in? We have some ideas, which are too early to discuss right now. I can only tell you with absolute certainty that international corporations and well-known companies are showing great interest in this project. The most important point is that this is not fantasy—this is a real project that can be realistically implemented within five years."

On internal Uzbek rail building, Karimov said: "The rail link under construction will run from Zarafshan to Nukus. . . . The second project—building a Guzar-Baysun-Kumkurgan rail link—also is a very large and complex project, because it involves a mountain crossing. . . .

"The project of building a highway from Angren through the Kamchik mountain crossing is currently in the implementation stage. This motor transport route also is very complex because it will require two tunnels. We should be finishing it in 1997. This highway will enable us to link Tashkent with the Fergana Valley, bypassing the territory of Tajikistan's Leninabad Oblast. We have no problems with financing these projects. . . . The highway project can be completed within 1.5 years."

Tajikistan is also expanding ties to China. President Emomali Rakhmanov announced that he had signed a decision on establishing border trade and speeding up development of a road project from Tajikistan to China through the Kulma Pass, Tajik radio reported on Feb. 18. The decision envisages the opening of a border trading zone along with China in the

Chinese provinces along the new Eurasian Continental Bridge, and main connections



A map produced by a Chinese government agency. Reprinted with permission of the Organizing Committee of the International Symposium on the Economic Development of the Regions Along the New Euro-Asian Continental Bridge.

territory of Murgab District (about 300 kilometers northeast of Khorog, the center of Gorno-Badakhshan), in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region. The Security Ministry of Tajikistan, the Customs Committee, and the leadership of Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region are charged with negotiating with the Chinese side on issues of opening a crossing point with simplified procedures, a place for border trading, on procedures of crossing the border, and other issues.

The southern tier of the Land-Bridge

Work is also going on along the “southern tier” of the Eurasian Land-Bridge. In March 1996, China’s National Peo-

ple’s Congress approved a long-range development plan, to accelerate development in China’s central and western areas so as to realize “common prosperity for the entire country in the next century,” Xinhua reported. As a result, in the first half of 1996, growth in investment in infrastructure and technological renovations in these areas exceeded that in coastal areas for the first time in many years.

One of the most important projects to be realized in this plan, was the completion on March 10 of rail-laying for the Nanning-Kunming railway in south-central China. This is vital not only for developing this region, but also to expand rail links between China and South and Southeast Asia. The

“Nankun,” as it is known, is the most expensive railway the nation has built, but, begun in December 1990, it was finished three months ahead of schedule. The 898.7-kilometer Nankun starts in Nanning, capital of Guangxi province, and ends at Kunming, capital of Yunnan province. One section of the line runs north to Hongguo, in Guizhou province. The single-track electrified Nankun railroad has a short-term carrying capacity of 10 million tons, and a long-term one of 30 million tons annually.

Building the railroad was very expensive, because of the rough, mountainous terrain, which reaches 2,000 meters in elevation. The project included 477 bridges and 258 tunnels, including the 183-meter-high Qingshuihe Bridge, China’s tallest railway bridge, in Guizhou. The Nankun connects up with the Changsha-Nanning and Nanning-Fangcheng railway lines in the east and the Chengdu-Kunming and Guiyang-Kunming railways in the west, and will connect southwest China with the southern ports of Fangcheng, Qinzhou, and Beihai.

The railroad will enhance economic cooperation between China and Southeast Asia, Chinese officials stated. It is also regarded as China’s largest poverty-relief project of the 1990s. One-quarter of China’s poorest, 15 million people, live along the rail line. The railroad should be in operation by the end of this year.

A Chinese-Myanmar joint expert group has completed a study on a land and water transport route from Yunnan Province in south China, via the Irrawaddy River Valley in Myanmar (Burma), Beijing’s *Zhongguo Xinwen She* reported in early March. The report concludes that it is feasible to open an outlet into the Indian Ocean, via Yangon (Rangoon), the Myanmar capital, which is an ocean port. Currently, both the Chinese and Myanmar ministries of communications, and the Yunnan provincial government, are working on a draft accord on coordinated land and water transport.

The group carried out the study on land transport routes linking up Dehong Dai-Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan and the Myanmar ports of Bhamo and Myitkyina, and other water transport routes connecting with Yangon. A highway linking the Dehong Prefecture in Yunnan province and Bhamo in Myanmar can be readily converted to a high-grade road, and the river section between Bhamo and Yangon can, in some areas, accommodate vessels of over 3,000 tonnage. It is expected that construction of a terminal in Yangon with nine berths for vessels of over 10,000 tonnage will be completed this year, and it can provide an all-weather shelter for vessels of up to 15,000 tonnage. The proposed transport network can cut short the journey time by about one week compared with the route of 3-5,000 kilometers along coastal areas in southeastern China, the study group reported.

The Thai and Laotian transport and communications ministers met to discuss rail and other transport improvements on Feb. 3, the *Bangkok Post* reported. Thai Transport

and Communications Minister Suwat Liptapallop met his Laotian counterpart, Phao Bounnaphone, to discuss improved use of the “friendship bridge” across the Mekong River, linking Nong Khai with the Laotian capital, Vientiane. The bridge was opened in 1993, but use has declined sharply. To promote rail transport of goods and passengers from Thailand to Laos via the bridge, construction of railway tracks on the Thai side from a new Nong Khai railway station to the middle of the bridge will be completed in July. Laos has contracted Pacific Transportation, a joint venture between the Laotian government and Sahaviriya Co., a Thai firm, to construct the railway from that point to Vientiane in two years at an estimated cost of \$40 million. Laos also plans to extend the rail line to other provinces up to its border with China.

Openings to India

Another “Cold War” barrier between nations, this time between India and China, could also fall. Jiang Zemin and Deve Gowda and their foreign ministers held talks on increasing mutual confidence on their joint border, closed since the 1962 war, during Jiang’s visit to New Delhi.

Indian press reported in March that India is to withdraw the Army brigade guarding the center section of its Himalayan frontier with China, which includes the Niti Pass linking India and Tibet. This section of the border includes the disputed Bara-Hoti plain, a pasture at 13,000-foot elevation. During the 1962 border war, opposing Indian and Chinese forces had massed along the edge of this plain, and, for years following, troops had faced each other across the plain. However, in the past several years, the area is now only patrolled by the Indo-Tibetan border police, and herdsman have again begun to graze herds in the pasture.

The pasture is near the 16,000-foot Niti Pass, one of the “easiest” passes linking India and Tibet. Since 1962, motorable roads have been built on either side—the Xinjiang-Lhasa highway in China, and an extension of the Delhi-Rishikesh national highway on the Indian side. If linked, the roads would open up border trade, because Indian manufacturing centers in Punjab, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh are only 600 kilometers (a day’s truck trip) away.

In addition, on the Chinese side, a project to build a major highway on the Tibet-Qinghai plateau was begun on March 5, Xinhua reported. China’s central government is spending over 400 million yuan (\$48 million) on the project, to upgrade a 400-kilometer section of the highway connecting Lhasa with Nyingchi Prefecture in eastern Tibet.

India is also expanding ties to the west. On Feb. 22, the foreign ministers of Iran, Turkmenistan, and India signed an agreement in Teheran, to increase transit among the three nations. An agreement on customs procedures will facilitate passage of cargo through the Iran-Turkmenistan border rail station at Sarakhs, opened in 1994. Improvements at the station are expected to increase its capacity five- to eightfold.

Because of the impasse in Indian-Pakistani relations, and the lack of any rail connection from Pakistan to western Iran, India has been expanding its transport ties to Iran as a gateway to Central Asia.

Among the many projects agreed upon are the creation of a joint shipyard on the Caspian Sea at the Iran-Turkmenistan border, and the construction of a jointly run petrochemical complex in Iran. The three leaders also discussed plans to lay a natural gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Iran, to provide India with fuel. Current plans provide for shipping the fuel to India by sea, but there has been discussion of laying a pipeline to India across Pakistan.

The same week, Kazakh Transport Minister Yuri Lavrenko discussed increasing trade with Iran's President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. Kazakhstan is expected to join the tripartite agreement in the near future. Other states are projected to join later.

Expanding ties with Europe

Nations of eastern Europe, while under enormous pressure from the disastrous "shock therapy" policies of the IMF which have prevailed there since the beginning of the 1990s, also are looking at the potential of trade and economic ties with the East.

The government of Belarus is putting great emphasis on its relations with China and Turkey, as well as Russia, according to Belarus's President Alexandr Lukashenko in his concluding speech at the expanded session of the Belarus Council of Ministers on Feb. 11. Lukashenko said that "Belarus can and should play a more active role in achieving mutual understanding among CIS states." He added, "Among our relations with other states, I would like to single out those with China and Turkey. Our relations with the P.R.C.—a global power and a member of the UN Security Council—are assuming a character of political partnership. This must be valued. But our economic cooperation, despite all agreements and potential possibilities, is running in place. . . . We can already see a prospect for cooperation of Belarus, Russia, and China. It may be very efficient cooperation.

"The same situation holds with Turkey—full understanding at the Presidential level is not supported by appropriate work of the government, ministries, and other state administration bodies. . . . For the time being, the potential of agreements at the higher level, particularly with Russia, is obviously not used to its full capacity. This should be improved."

The Moscow newspaper *Rossiskaya Gazeta*, in an article titled "Eurasia, Belarussian-Style" on Feb. 15, stated, "Belarus is actively seeking new markets, and its leaders are visiting countries in Asia probably as frequently as they are Moscow. In the past two years, the republic has created a fairly extensive diplomatic and marketing network in virtually all the Asian countries and on transport routes to them. In the time since the referendum alone, Belarussian delegations have visited China, Singapore, Malaysia, and Turkey. Their

immediate plans include India and South Korea. The results of the 'Asian campaign' are telling in the republic's favor."

The article described a Belarus tractor manufacturers' agreement to supply Pakistan, a joint venture with China for automobile production, and the setting up of a "free economic zone in Brest with China's active participation."

"Belarus has established the closest of contacts with the P.R.C.," the article stated. "Virtually the cream of the Belarussian industrial elite took part in the latest China trip: automobile and instrument manufacturers, electronics experts, chemists, and manufacturers of agricultural equipment, potassium fertilizers, and medical preparations.

"In addition to specific programs, a serious bid has been made to implement a project for a transcontinental transport route between Asia and Europe. The Chinese side is extremely interested in the economic development of a 'cross-roads' en route to Europe and the Baltic, which is what Belarus is."

Kazakhstan's President Nazarbayev has also announced that he wants to expand economic relations with Lithuania. Nazarbayev said that he regards Lithuania's Klaipeda seaport as of "exceptional importance" for Kazakhstan, at a joint press conference in Almaty on March 7 with visiting Lithuanian President Algirdas Brazauskas. Nazarbayev said that Kazakhstan is prepared to invest in the construction of a new terminal with a throughput of up to 8 million tons at Klaipeda, to facilitate exports of crude oil, which Kazakhstan would pump through existing pipelines across Russia to the Baltic Sea, and onward to Europe. Nazarbayev said that oil could also be shipped across Russia by rail.

Brazauskas said that Lithuania also wants to gain access to Chinese and Southeast Asian markets via Kazakhstan, through the Druzhba-Alashankou (Euro-Asian Continental Bridge) rail connection. Nazarbayev said that this was a question of "mutually beneficial cooperation," and stressed the importance of signed economic and trade accords and an agreement on freight and other services related to shipping Kazakh goods via Klaipeda. Nazarbayev and Brazauskas said bilateral relations, especially economic ones, had increased, Moscow Interfax reported.

To the south, Ukrainian Prime Minister Pavlo Lazarenko and Georgian Minister of State Niko Lekishvili discussed cooperation at a meeting in Kiev on Feb. 14, Interfax reported. Lazarenko stated that "the main issue for Ukraine and Georgia to decide in the current year is to start Poti-Odessa rail-ferry service," and "reaffirmed Ukraine's preparedness to participate in the supply of pipes and pumping equipment for the oil pipeline" from Azerbaijan across Georgia. Cooperation in power plant construction, power engineering, and food supplies for Georgia was also discussed. Ukrainian First Deputy Communications Minister Oleksandr Hneletskyy said that construction had begun of the fiber-optical communications line to link Ukraine and Georgia, part of the China-Germany fiber-optical line.