

International Intelligence

Malaysia Gives Nod to Trans-Asia Rail Study

The proposed Trans-Asia Railway project linking Singapore to Kunming, China, was given a boost when the Malaysia Cabinet approved a study into the Malaysian section of project. Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Ling Liong Sik said the study by two consultants was presented to the Cabinet Sept. 27.

The idea for the \$2.5 billion project was mooted by Prime Minister Dato' Seri Mahathir bin Mohamad at a summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) several years ago. Dr. Ling, who is chairman of a special committee overseeing the project, said the route would link Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam to Kunming, the capital of southwest China's Yunnan province. There would also be links to the Lao capital Vientiane and the Port of Bung Anh in Vietnam as well as to Myanmar.

Dr. Ling said that, with the completion of the study and its approval by the government, the matter was expected to be discussed at the ASEAN summit later this year. "If these recommendations are accepted, all the ASEAN countries can work together to have the links," he said. The railway would stretch 5,000 kilometers. He added that, if all the governments accepted the recommendations, preliminary work would start soon. The whole project is expected to be completed by 2006.

Jakarta Court Drops Charges vs. Suharto

The South Jakarta District Court dropped multimillion-dollar graft charges against Indonesia's former President Suharto on Sept. 28, after an independent team of doctors testified that Suharto, 79, was senile, and mentally and physically unfit to stand trial. The court also lifted his house arrest. "The ruling is primarily based on facts produced by a total of 60 doctors from three different teams who have examined the defendant, deeming him permanently unfit to stand trial," reported one of the judges. Suharto was accused of stealing \$571 million from

the state by funneling money from seven charity foundations he chaired into the businesses belonging to his family and cronies.

Prosecutor Mughtar Arifin told the hearing that he would appeal to the Jakarta High Court. Teten Masduki, coordinator of Indonesian Corruption Watch, agreed, saying, "The Supreme Court should issue a decree for an *in absentia* trial." However, House of Representatives Speaker Akbar Tandjung, who is also chairman of Suharto's Golkar party, said that the court's decision should be respected, adding, "The public should accept the reality." Subsequently, Akbar has indicated that the door may not be completely closed on further legal action.

The government tried to deflect some public anger over the charges against Suharto being dropped, by announcing that his youngest son, Hutomo "Tommy" Mandala Putra, would begin serving a prison sentence on Oct. 2 for an \$11 million-plus land scam.

However, demonstrations that were getting under way in the morning, just before the hearing started, degenerated into clashes with police when the court's ruling became known. Some 30 people were wounded and at least one killed, in what was described as the most violent demonstrations in Jakarta since 1998. Police reported that clashes continued late into the night, with protests ongoing in Central Jakarta, near Suharto's private residence.

France Takes on Britain Over Yugoslav Sanctions

The French bearded the British lion over the European sanctions against Yugoslavia on Sept. 29, by issuing a statement as president of the European Union, that the EU "as it had committed itself to do, must put itself in a position to rapidly lift sanctions taken against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on account of the regime of President Slobodan Milosevic."

Indeed, how the issues of the sanctions and The Hague War Crimes Tribunal arrest warrant against Milosevic are resolved, could determine whether there is a fairly peaceful post-Milosevic transition, or a social explosion in Serbia that would trigger a

NATO military intervention.

The British Foreign Office reacted immediately to the French call (which was reportedly worked out with Russia), stating its strong opposition against "immediate lifting" of sanctions.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair also persuaded visiting Croatian Prime Minister Ivica Racan to declare that no one should expect a "substantial change" to come soon in Belgrade as a result of Vojislav Kostunica's election victory. Croatian President Stipe Mesic stated that sanctions should "not be lifted" until Yugoslavia passes "a law on cooperation with The Hague Tribunal, and . . . they hand over war criminals."

Such rhetoric is custom designed to weaken the most rational forces in Belgrade, and to reduce the margin for Russian mediators to maneuver in the highly unstable situation.

Foreign Collision with Kursk To Be Researched

Russian Vice-Adm. Vladimir Valuyev, first deputy commander of the Baltic Fleet, has announced that the oceanographic vessel *Akademik Mstislav Keldysh* has begun work in the Barents Sea, looking for evidence that the *Kursk* submarine collided with a foreign vessel. Valuyev said that "the research equipment on board the *Mstislav Keldysh* is to collect fragments around the hull of the sunken submarine. In the opinion of the Navy Command, these fragments should include parts of the hull of the foreign submarine which caused the accident."

According to the Sept. 28 issue of the Russian daily *Kommersant*, Valuyev is convinced that the *Kursk* collided with another vessel of lesser tonnage, travelling at a higher speed. He says that in this type of collision, it is usually the hull of the submarine that is underneath that is damaged. The submarine that was on top, after losing parts of its hull casing, was able to leave, despite the explosion of the *Kursk*. Valuyev believes that the collision caused high-pressure air tanks, which are underneath the *Kursk*'s outer hull, to explode, and this then caused the detonation of the *Kursk*'s main weaponry.

Two U.S. and one British submarines were in the area where the *Kursk* sank, but the U.S. and U.K. have denied that there was any collision, while refusing to allow any Russian inspection of their submarines.

Fox Threatens To Pull Army Out of Drug Fight

If Mexico withdraws its Armed Forces from the war on the drug traffic, it will face a "supranational" threat to its sovereignty, warned Gen. Carlos Demetrio Gaytán Ochoa, according to Sept. 15 press reports. In presenting his report, "Mexico's Challenges and Goals Against Drug-Trafficking," Gaytán, who heads up the anti-drug campaigns of Mexico's Defense Secretariat, shed an interesting light on the grave consequences for the country's sovereignty, should Vicente Fox, when he becomes President in December, pull the Armed Forces out of the drug fight, as his advisers have indicated he will.

"We should be careful that this threat does not overwhelm us; if we cannot control it, others could come to do so, and this we do not want," General Gaytán said. "The drug trade is one of the strongest threats to national security, and we have the right to sovereignly decide how to confront it; however, there are several foreign pressures, from organizations as well as from countries, that seek to shove aside our sovereignty, that we cede our autonomy. Mexico should be very careful, because today sovereignty is a function of our power to confront this phenomenon."

He detailed the scope of the military's involvement in fighting drugs, including that, on any one day, some 25,000 troops, or as many as 34,000 during the rainy season, are deployed in anti-drug tasks.

Israeli Anti-Terror Experts Visit India

Israeli-Indian military and intelligence relations are moving ahead rapidly, with the late-September visit of Israeli counter-terror experts. The delegation, led by Eli Katzir of the Prime Minister's Office of the Warfare

Against Terror, includes the Commander of the Israeli Police Force. The Israeli team travelled to the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir to the Line of Control, the de facto border between India and Pakistan, to prepare a "feasibility study" of India's security requirements, especially for creating fool-proof border surveillance and management.

The visit is not without controversy inside Israel, however, according to the country's major daily, *Ha'aretz*, on Sept. 28. Opponents believe that if Israel goes ahead with the sale of its Phalcon airborne early warning system to India for the Kashmir border region, that will antagonize the United States and China, with which Israel has long-standing ties. Israel hopes to improve its relations with Pakistan, one of the largest and most influential Islamic nations. At the same time, Israelis can ill afford to disrupt their growing relationship to India by refusing a particular sale, because it might annoy Pakistan.

More Details Emerge on NATO Force Structure

More details on NATO's new force structure have emerged since the Turkish General Staff gave a special briefing to the Turkish press on Sept. 22. Public relations officer Col. Salik Colak said that NATO has started to undergo changes in line with changed security conditions since the end of the Cold War. Hence, NATO has changed its "command structure" and its "strategic concept," and therefore, is changing its "force structure." The new force structure will consist of headquarters for High-Level Reaction Forces (HRF), Lower-Level Reaction Forces (FLR), and long-term forces commands.

"Force pools" used by these headquarters, will also be established. "Force pools will consist of a force of six to nine divisions that will be used by the HRF corps, and a force of 15 to 8 divisions that will be used by the FLR corps. In cases of a confrontation, suitable units will be given to the command of the corps. In times of peace, these forces will be positioned in their own countries." The new force structure is scheduled to be completed in 2001.

ZIMBABWEAN "democrat" Morgan Tsvangirai told 25,000 members of his Movement for Democratic Change on Sept. 30, "What we want to tell [President Robert] Mugabe today, is, go peacefully. If you don't want to go, we will remove you violently." He had earlier threatened mass actions, including general strikes, to force Mugabe, who bested him in democratically held elections, out by Christmas.

MUSICIANS from 25 Asian and European nations will hold joint orchestral performances for the Oct. 20-21 Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), at Seoul's Sejong Cultural Center. The ASEM Festival Orchestra 2000 in Seoul will perform Beethoven's Triple Concerto and Dvořák's New World Symphony, among other works.

INDIAN DEFENSE Minister George Fernandes was in South Africa to sign an India-South Africa Defense Cooperation Agreement on Sept. 27. The agreement envisages close cooperation between the two countries, particularly in programs on research and development and joint defense production.

SRI LANKAN officials said on Oct. 1 that the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam have mounted a ferocious attack against government troops in northern Sri Lanka, killing 56 people. The Tigers stepped up terrorist operations in the days leading up to the Oct. 10 parliamentary elections.

QUEEN ELIZABETH is generously opening her Privy Purse to resettle "refugees," according to the London *Daily Telegraph* on Sept. 26. Mind you, not Croatian, Bosnian, or black African refugees, but her poor relations. At the request of the Queen, John Parsons, Deputy Keeper of the Privy Purse, is releasing funds to the family of Simon Rhodes, a Zimbabwean businessman and farmer, who claims they have been forced to flee the country. Rhodes's mother is the Queen Mum's first cousin.