

New Korean Leader Calls For Land-Bridge Strategy

by Kathy Wolfe

..... South Korea's new President Roh Moo-hyun focussed his Feb. 25 inaugural address on the Eurasian Land-Bridge, the "New Silk Road," from the Korean Peninsula to the Atlantic Ocean, under the title "An Age of Northeast Asia Begins: A New Takeoff Toward an Age of Peace and Prosperity." Roh repeatedly called for rapid implementation of the Eurasian Land-Bridge, insisting that only the economic development of the entire Korean Peninsula and Eurasia can assure peace in Korea. "We have soon to bring the day," he said, "when passengers will be able to buy a train ticket in Pusan and travel all the way to Paris, in the heart of Europe, via Pyongyang, Shinuiju, and the many cities in China, Mongolia, and Russia." Roh cited "renowned international scholars" as authority. "Insiders are aware," as one source said, that this was "a reference to Lyndon LaRouche."

..... To head off the nuclear crisis with North Korea, President Roh is also moving rapidly for a heads-of-state summit with North Korean Chairman Kim Jong-il, planned for Beijing in April, Seoul sources told *EIR*. President Roh is quite concerned, they said, that any U.S. attack on Iraq would make the North Korean crisis almost unsolvable, and that the utmost be done to stop any conflict in both areas. The summit could also concretize peace by inaugurating the Trans-Korean Railway, which was to have run by Feb. 24. Although most of the rails have quietly been finished on the Seoul to Pyongyang line, the political gridlock of the nuclear crisis has so far made it impossible to run trains. A summit could change that.



South Korean President Roy Moo-Hyun's inauguration was marked by the most far-reaching call yet by any Korean leader, for making the entire Peninsula a "bridge" in flinging transport corridors from Pusan to Paris through China and Russia: a bold and effective peace strategy.

President Roh has several other "Silk Road" development programs in the "ten major tasks" for his new regime, Malaysia's Bernama News reported Feb. 28. Prominent are 2,500-mile paired oil and gas pipelines running from Irkutsk at Russia's Lake Baikal, through China and North Korea, into South Korea and undersea to Japan. This \$20 billion project would provide cash to Russia, free energy to North Korea, and break the stranglehold of Mideast conflict on the energy supply for China, South Korea, and Japan. Irkutsk has the largest gas reserve in Russia, a huge 1.5 trillion cubic meters.

'New Economic Engine Needed'

Roh also appointed to his new cabinet a fierce critic of the International Monetary Fund, Dr. Yoon Young-kwan of Seoul National University, as Foreign Minister, and retained Unification Minister Jeong Se-hyun, a key architect of the "Sunshine Policy" with the North under President Kim Dae-jung (who stepped down Feb. 25). Two other new ministers are on record as foes of the free-trade policies of the WTO.

"The international security environment is rather unsettling. The Iraqi situation is extremely tense," Roh began his speech. "Global concern is rising over the North Korean nuclear issue," and "the international economic situation is also deteriorating. . . . Our nation, therefore, is in urgent need of a new economic growth engine. Fellow Koreans, in this new age, our future can no longer be confined to the Korean Peninsula. The 'Age of Northeast Asia' is fast approaching. Northeast Asia, which used to be on the periphery of the modern world, is now emerging as a new source of energy in the global economy. Renowned international scholars have long predicted that the 21st Century would be the Age of Northeast Asia and their predictions are coming true. Business transactions in the region already represent one-fifth of global volume, and the combined population of

Korea, China, and Japan is four times larger than that of the European Union.

"The Korean Peninsula," Roh noted, "is located at the heart of the region. It is a big bridge linking China and Japan, the continent and the ocean. . . . It demands that we play a pivotal role in the Age of Northeast Asia in the 21st Century. Logistics bases are being perfected on land and sea and in the air, as seen in the up-to-date facilities at Incheon International Airport, Pusan and Kwangyang ports, and the projected super-speed railway systems. The country is being equipped with all requirements necessary to lead the Age of Northeast Asia in the 21st Century. . . .

"To bring about a genuine Age of Northeast Asia, a structure of peace must be institutionalized on the Korean Peninsula. It is most unfortunate that the peninsula still remains the last legacy of the Cold War of the 20th Century. In the 21st Century, we have to change the peninsula into a land that sends out messages of peace to the rest of the world. It has to be reborn as East Asia's gateway of peace, connecting the Eurasian landmass with the Pacific Ocean."

President Roh also pledged to both negotiate a peaceful settlement to the nuclear crisis, and to maintain the U.S. alliance—while transforming it into an alliance of two equal, sovereign nation-states. "So far, we have made great efforts to promote peace in the land, and the results have been remarkable. Exchanges of people and merchandise between the two Koreas are taking place routinely, on a daily basis. Inter-Korean travel routes are open on land and sea and in the air. . . . First, I will try to resolve all pending issues through dialogue. Second, I will give priority to building mutual trust and upholding reciprocity. Third, I will seek international cooperation, on the premise that South and North Korea are the two main actors in inter-Korean relations.

"I would like to emphasize again that the North Korean nuclear issue should be resolved peacefully through dialogue. Military tension in any form should not be heightened. We will strengthen coordination with the United States and Japan to help resolve the nuclear issue through dialogue. We will also maintain close cooperation with China, Russia, the European Union, and others.

"This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Korea-U.S. Alliance," Roh concluded. "The Korean people are deeply grateful for this. We will foster and develop this cherished alliance. We will see to it that the alliance matures into a more reciprocal and equitable relationship.

"Fellow citizens, for a long period of time, we have lived on the periphery. We were forced to go through a history of dependence, unable to determine our own destiny. But, today we are at the threshold of a new turning point. Opportunity has come for us to take off as the hub of Northeast Asia. We should seize this opportunity. We are a people who can bring about miracles if united. Let us all pull together with all our hearts. I invite you all to join this historic march and make a new takeoff toward an age of peace and prosperity."