

# China, India, and Russia must cooperate to ensure stability

by Ramtanu Maitra and Susan B. Maitra

The recent trips of China's President Jiang Zemin to Russia and Japan, and the forthcoming visit by Russia's Prime Minister Yevgeni Maksimovich Primakov to India, ensure that these three nations, among some of the world's most populous and physically endowed, will have begun to seek ways to develop a more specific economic interdependence for the future. President Jiang's speech at Novosibirsk during his state visit to Russia, shows that Beijing has come to realize the real importance of Russia, despite the latter's depleted economy and devastated political environment.

While China is actively moving forward to enhance its economic strength in the coming century, India has remained mentally far behind. Engaged in domestic quibbles, Indian political leaders have lost their vision, and are merely acting on a day-to-day basis to meet immediate political needs as they see them. Russia, once a superpower, wants still to be a major power, preferably an economic power, but was clearly not prepared to meet the free-market onslaught that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union.

As a result, Russia remains unfocussed, hesitant, and unresolved on how best to utilize the potentials and expertise of its own people and the experience and expertise of two large nations, China and India, to etch out a future which would make Russia once more a strong nation.

## The necessity

At a recent seminar organized by the Russian Scientific and Cultural Institute in New Delhi, a number of Russian academics emphasized that an in-depth relationship between Russia and China is not only important, but it is now in the process of maturing definitively. However, they could not come up with a similar optimism vis-à-vis the Indo-Russian relationship, although the oft-cited long Indo-Russian friendship was brought up again and again during the course of the seminar, as if to dispel the present desultory drift of these two countries' ties. At least one academic made clear that Russia would hope to see a close and fruitful relationship developing between India and China in the near future.

It is important for all of us to realize that the consolidation of an all-round relationship among China, India, and Russia is not an axis for or against any other nation or group of

nations. Such a cooperative relationship will also not preclude these three countries from having similar close political, economic, cultural, and scientific relations with countries in Asia, Europe, Africa, or the Americas. In fact, it is essential for all three countries to have other close relationships around the world, and thus participate in international policymaking to ensure peace and pave the way for long-term, steady economic growth throughout the world.

However, the vastness of these three countries, and their relative non-utilization of each other's potential, makes it urgent that Beijing, New Delhi, and Moscow get about quickly in their task to concretize joint plans which will help their own, and their smaller neighbors' long-term growth of physical economy, and prevent the periodic economic collapses which cause enormous misery to the large population living in the region.

To begin with, almost 2.5 billion people, or 42% of the world's population, live in China, India, and Russia. When one includes the rest of the Indian subcontinent, the Central Asian nations, and Indo-China, the population that needs support increases to almost 3.2 billion. In addition to this large population, which remains the responsibility of these countries, China, Russia, and India account for 22% of the world's land area, which includes 373 million hectares of arable land.

## India's role in the Land-Bridge

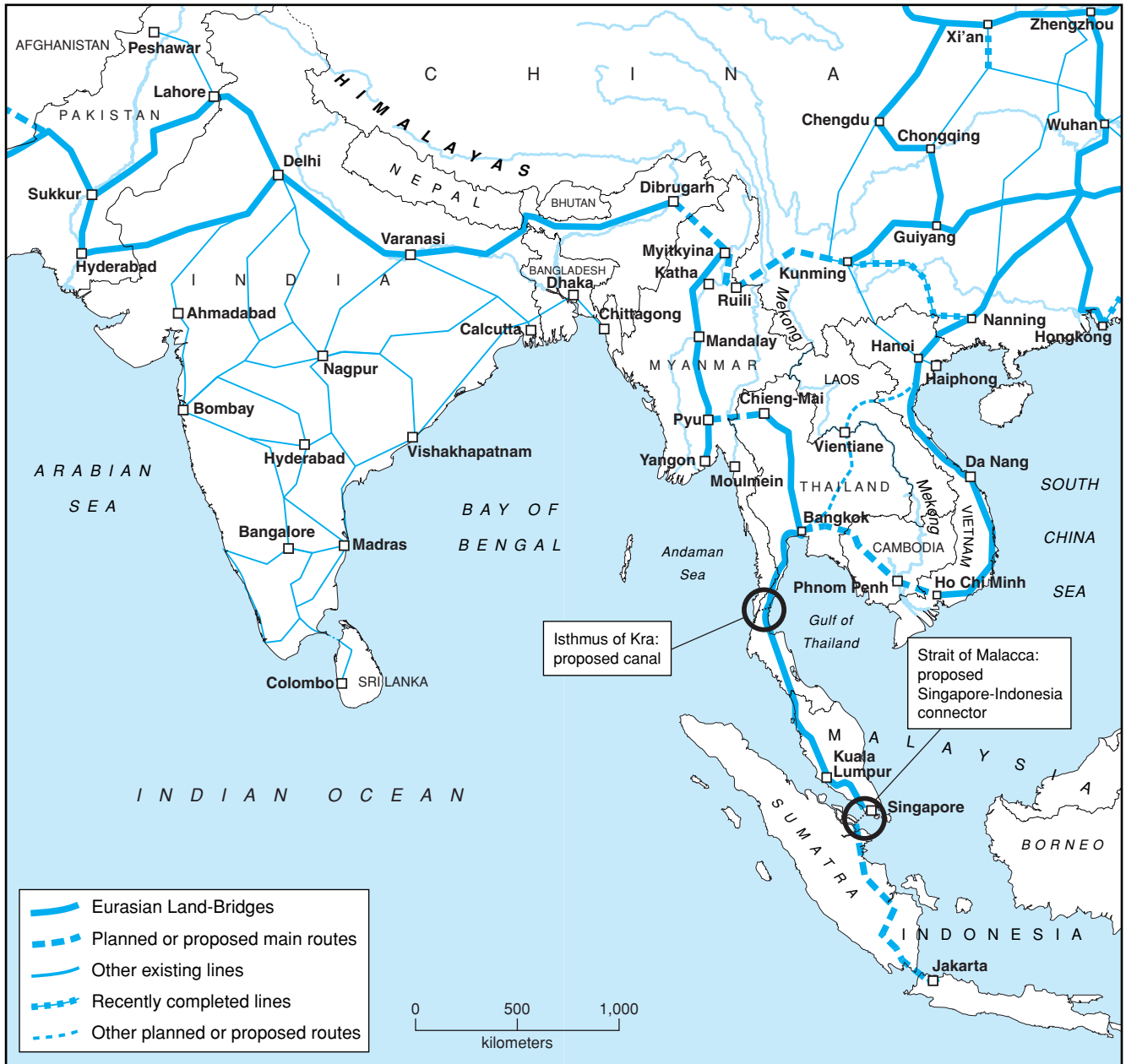
While China has taken the leadership in developing the Eurasian Land-Bridge, which would connect China through Central Asia and Russia to Europe, India has taken very little notice of it. To a large extent, India's inability to develop an economic relationship of substance with Pakistan has worked as a damper on India's participation in the Land-Bridge.

At the same time, India, like China and Russia, has a long historical relationship with the Central Asian nations, and India's participation in the Land-Bridge will be warmly welcomed by these nations, because it will strengthen the security of Central Asia. Central Asian leaders have made this known to New Delhi.

Without an economic and political rapprochement be-

FIGURE 1

India's rail links to the southern route of the Eurasian Land-Bridge



tween New Delhi and Islamabad, India's participation in trade and commerce along the Land-Bridge will remain somewhat piecemeal. India, however, can link up to the Land-Bridge at a number of points. In the east, India can connect to the Land-Bridge through Myanmar, linking northeast India to China's Yunnan province in the south.

This remains the most talked-about point of connection. In addition, India would also benefit if a link-up were made through Ladakh, in India's Jammu and Kashmir province, to the Karakoram highway, which leads to Kashi in China's

Xinjiang province. The third connection can be made through the Niti pass, a pilgrim's route through the Himalayas that would connect China's Tibetan plateau to India's state of Uttar Pradesh. As of now, New Delhi has not made any formal request to Beijing, but seminars have taken place recently indicating some forward movement in this direction.

Developing the Land-Bridge to its full potential requires enormous manpower, extensive political agreements, and the ability to provide security for the route, to generate capital for larger investments, and to garner essential technologies. At

this point, neither China, nor India, nor Russia, has an independently established capability to deal with such massive development projects that need to be executed immediately. While China is building its physical infrastructure in a hurry against many odds, Russia has lost a good part of its physical assets built during the Bolshevik days. There is a high level of despondency prevailing in Russia today.

India, meanwhile, has made no effort in recent years to speed up its slow economic growth, nor did it succeed in abolishing widespread poverty, and, as a result, it is now burdened with a dilapidated infrastructure that is growing worse by the hour. India's failure to provide primary education, basic health facilities, safe drinking water, and adequate mass transportation is crippling its economy and posing a threat to the society as a whole. Barring a few opportunist politicians, some chauvinists who are afflicted with anti-China or anti-Russia diseases of yore, and those who dream of unlimited Western help in the form of economic liberalization and reform, very few Indians any longer believe that present-day Indian leaders have the vision or the wherewithal to bring about a definite improvement in the near future. At the same time, those who promote India's stronger relations with Russia and China, do not venture beyond the usual rhetoric of cultural, civilizational, and traditional ties.

### **Areas for cooperation**

It is only natural that these three countries must cooperate in a number of areas, a few of which we indicate here:

As President Jiang said in his speech in Novosibirsk, Russia is still today a powerhouse in various areas of frontline science and basic technologies. In these areas, both India and China can benefit immensely from in-depth collaboration. Russia has a much stronger base for the metallurgical and heavy engineering industries. Russia has a highly developed—in fact better than most of the top industrialized nations in the world—indigenous research and development base, particularly in the areas of medicine, space, high-energy physics, and nuclear science. It also possesses a large number of scientists and engineers in the R&D sector.

Both China and India have the skilled manpower to handle the advanced technologies, as well as the capital goods, which they are importing on a large scale through foreign direct investment. In both nations, more emphasis has been put on developing indigenous technologies and less on industrial R&D. On the other hand, Russia's successes in the areas of defense production, space and satellites, nuclear science, and medical technology have been remarkable, but it lags badly in manufacturing technology.

### **Energy for the future**

The five Central Asian republics, which together with Russia and many other former members of the Soviet Union constitute the Commonwealth of Independent States, are sitting on about 20 billion barrels of proven oil reserves and at

least 7 trillion cubic meters of natural gas reserves, according to some estimates. The Central Asian countries do not have the manpower or the expertise to exploit these vast resources. Already, a large number of Western explorers, riding piggyback on their countries' political, economic, and military power, have moved into the area. There is a serious case, however, for more extensive Russia-India-China cooperation in energy exploitation.

China and India are both energy-starved nations. There is no question that when they meet the basic necessities of all of their citizens, the power requirements in both these countries will soar. Russia, on the other hand, has large energy reserves, and its immediate economic development does not foresee importation of energy sources. Rather, Russia has the expertise to explore these fields, and because of its past relations with the Central Asian countries, it has a developed human infrastructure in these countries. The Central Asian nations remain apprehensive of becoming too dependent on Russia, and would feel a lot more comfortable if China and India were to cooperate with Russia to develop their energy fields.

At a certain level this relationship has begun to gel, although haltingly. China and Kazakstan have signed agreements to the effect that China will help to develop the Kazak oil fields and pipe oil into China.

China National Oil and Gas Exploration and Development Corp. (CNODC) has signed a memorandum of understanding with India's ONGC-Videsh to tap oil and gas in Central Asia. Unfortunately, the memorandum of understanding has not gone beyond expression of the understanding, i.e., it has produced nothing concrete yet.

### **Need for food security**

India and China, with a combined population of more than 2.2 billion people, depend heavily on rice as their main cereal. Out of the 2.2 billion, perhaps close to 500 million or so can do with wheat as their staple food. China, with only 90 million hectares of arable land, has almost reached a plateau in rice productivity. India's productivity has remained low—India produces close to 82 million tons of rice with an average yield of two tons per hectare—but it has a much larger area of arable land. India's problem, like China's, is its inadequate management of water.

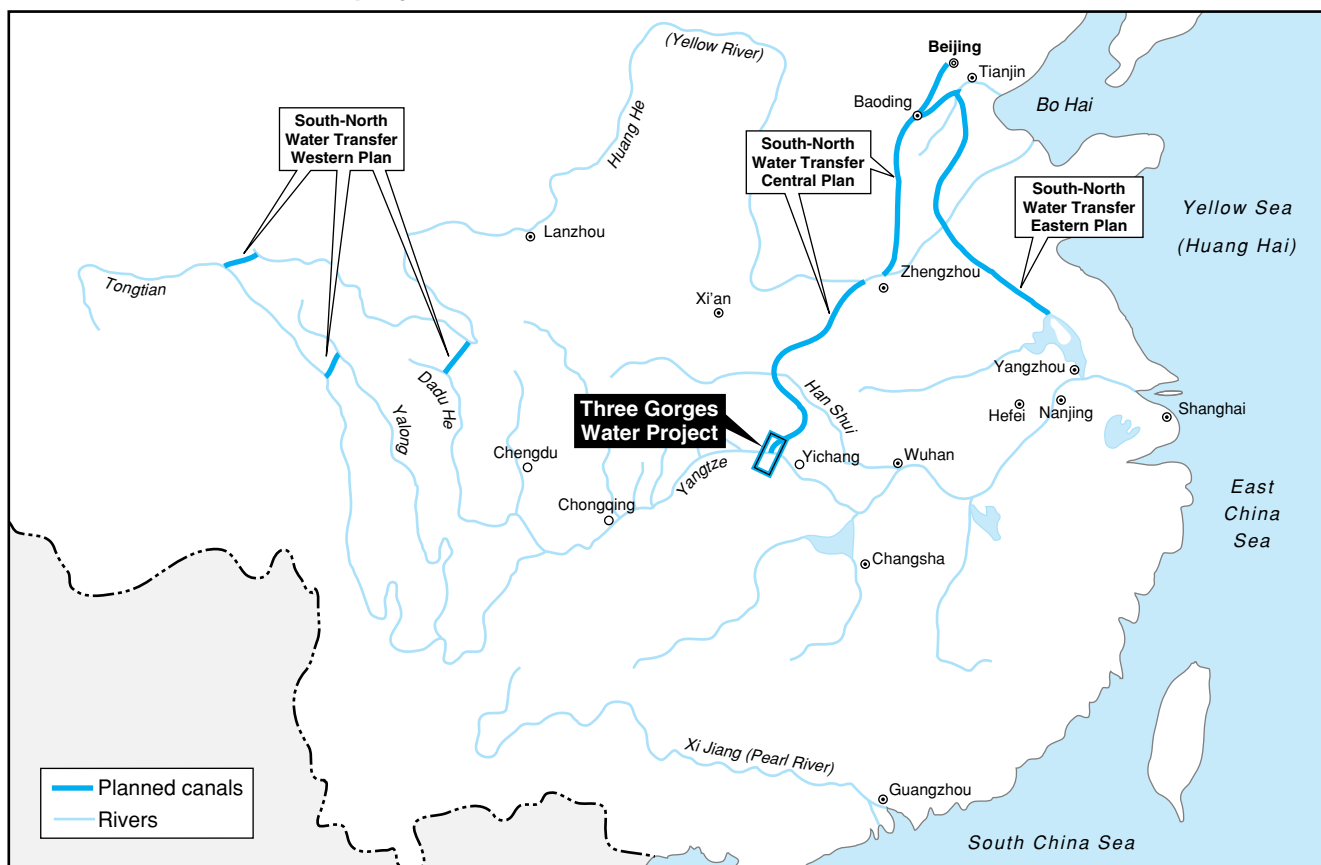
Russia has a vast agricultural production base, but has a genuine limitation on its ability to utilize irrigation—only 4.5% of Russia's arable land is under irrigation. Agriculture in Russia as a whole suffers from serious structural deficiencies, although in terms of variety of crops and non-cropping activities, the sector is well diversified.

As a result of the available potential, China, India, and Russia remain major agricultural producers. It is important that these three countries, in order to ensure their security, ensure long-term food security for the region.

Recent news coming out of rice research centers does not

FIGURE 2

**Planned water diversion projects in China**



provide much hope for India or China or other Asian nations like Japan, Indonesia, and the Koreans. According to a recent study by the Bangkok-based Asian Rice Foundation (ARF), developed nations are slashing grants for rice research. More than 90% of world rice production and consumption is in Asia. According to the ARF, production of rice in the next 30 years must increase by 70% in Asia in order to remain affordable to the poor. But the situation facing the Philippines-based International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), for example, is grim. It has been forced to cut its budget 30-40% in the 1990s, and slash the number of national staff to one-third. The reason is, that, except for Japan, all developed nations are cutting back on rice research.

In light of this developing catastrophe, both India and China, along with Japan, the Koreans, and Indonesia, must go full throttle with their own research efforts to develop new rice strains favorable to the conditions that prevail in these areas.

**Managing vast water resources**

From the northern and southern faces of the Himalayas, a number of mighty rivers emerge. Some originate from the northern face and travel eastwards into China. The Tsang-Po,

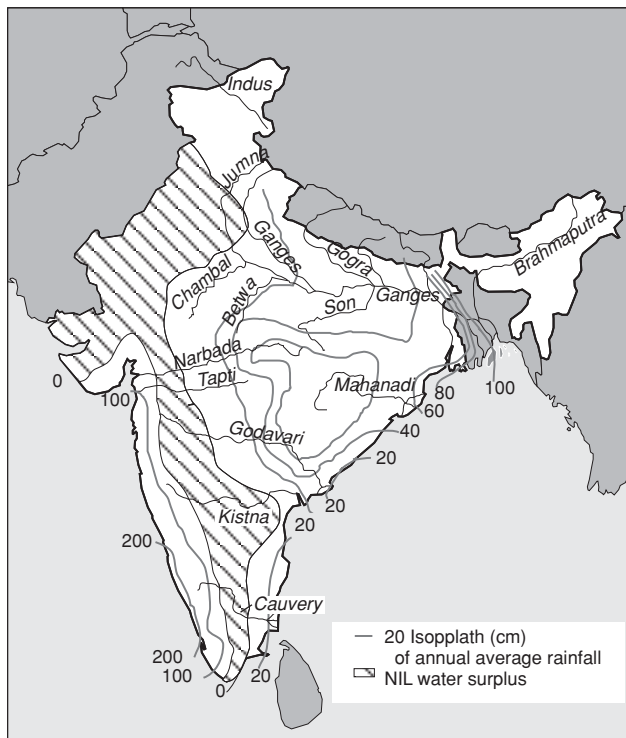
which becomes the Brahmaputra once it enters the easternmost part of India, brings all the snowmelt and monsoon waters to inundate the Indian subcontinent, particularly Bangladesh. The bulk of Brahmaputra's water during the monsoon, however, comes from the southern slopes of the Himalayas, carried by such mighty tributaries as the Subanshiri and the Dhanshiri rivers. Water carried by the Brahmaputra does little good, except some natural dredging during the monsoon season, but causes immense destruction in Bangladesh, flooding vast areas, including many major towns.

At the same time, China is perennially short of water. The northern China plain has been the site of some of the most devastating droughts in human history. In this century, during the Japanese occupation of China and subsequent civil wars, drought killed untold millions of peasants. Annual rainfall averages 500 millimeters for the entire north, but many rivers receive much less. In the south, average rainfall exceeds 1,000 mm. The Yangtze and its tributaries receive three-quarters of the country's annual run-off compared to only 3.8% that the Huang Ho, the Huai He, and the Hai He, the major rivers in the north, receive.

It has been acknowledged for some time in China that

FIGURE 3

**India: wide variation in water resources**



there is little choice but to transfer excess water from the southern, high-rainfall areas, to the north. One of the projects would be to tap the Tsang-Po in Tibet, and carry the water northward. It is not known exactly how much water can be channelled north, and the project requires collaboration with India, because the Tsang-Po is a riparian river. Cooperation on this project would enable India to reduce the fury of the Brahmaputra in Bangladesh during the monsoon, and it would also help China to open up fresh land for agricultural activities in the north, and enhance the flow of the major northern China rivers.

Both India, in particular, and Russia have significant experience in handling large volumes of water to irrigate arable lands. Nonetheless, the achievements of India's water planners are far short of what is required. India receives more than 80% of its annual rainfall during the 10-12 weeks of monsoon; in the remaining 40-42 weeks, India receives less than 20% of its precipitation. Moreover, the monsoon rainfall, far from being equitably distributed, varies from 60-70 inches to 5-10 inches across the country. Annually, if the monsoon is normal, India receives about 370 million hectare-meters (mhm) of rain. Of this amount, some 180 mhm runs off unused to the sea through the rivers. Another 70 mhm evaporates during rainfall. Some goes into aquifers, and about 20 mhm is held in large reservoirs.

Because of this highly lopsided distribution of rainfall, India is in need of making inter-basin transfers. It is obvious that some of the surplus water—to the tune of 180 mhm—that flows into the sea during the period of heavy rainfall, can be diverted to the water-short southern states to replenish their groundwater aquifers. A plan exists on paper, but the “cost-conscious” Indians have not made it a priority.

**Joint regional development**

Finally, one of the most important areas of collaboration among China, India, and Russia lies in developing the small nations ensconced between the three giants. For instance, Nepal's mighty rivers, which flow into the Indian plains, have an estimated capacity to generate as much as 83,000 megawatts of electrical power. This is almost equal to the total amount of electrical power that India generates today. Of this, Nepal has so far been able to harness less than 100 MW.

Harnessing Nepal's mighty hydroelectric potential will benefit not only Nepal and make it a highly prosperous nation, but will also enable the power-starved vast northern Indian plains to receive a reprieve—for a price, of course. However, Nepal, already one of the poorest nations and getting poorer every year, has no capability to exploit nature's bounty. Neither India nor China can go into Nepal and do what is needed, because it will immediately provide an opportunity to the mischief-makers to incite opposition within Nepal. The hydroelectric development of Nepal can be done, for the benefit of Nepal, China, and India, only if India and China form a joint venture consortium to build the hydroelectric plants. Participation by the Russians, who have vast experience in this area, would also be of much help.

The Central Asian nations also suffer a regional water shortage, which may pose a serious threat in the future. It is not inconceivable that before too long, the water-starved newly independent nations—Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakstan—could start shooting at each other over water.

The two main rivers of Central Asia, the Syrdaria and the Amudaria, flow through four of these five independent nations before entering the Aral Sea. Since the 1980s, reports indicate, very little water has entered the Aral Sea. The rivers, already over-exploited, provide water for 75% of the combined agriculture of these nations as well as their domestic and commercial requirements. At present, 90% of the Central Asian population does not have access to piped water.

To deal with impending water shortages in Central Asia, the Soviet Union once had plans to divert some major south-north Siberian rivers (the Ob and the Irtysh) in Russia, using peaceful nuclear explosions. Whether that construction method is used or not, it is urgent that Russia once more take up the old plan to divert some Siberian rivers to replenish the Central Asian rivers.