

# India, ASEAN Build Highways of Opportunity

by Gail G. Billington

During March and early April, a series of bilateral and multi-lateral meetings in Asia put the pieces in place for major new collaboration between the ten members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and India, the major power in South Asia, and the second most populous country on Earth. Moves are afoot for India to join East Asia's major powers—China, Japan, and South Korea—as the newest ASEAN “dialogue partner.” An ASEAN summit with India has been proposed by Cambodian Prime Minister Samdech Hun Sen, whose nation, the Kingdom of Cambodia, takes over as ASEAN chairman in the coming year. Such a summit could lead to a more formal relationship, and would certainly mean the extended ASEAN dialogue involves nearly half of the world's population.

The tour of India's Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh to China, Thailand, Myanmar, and South Korea during March 29-April 7, was followed by the tour of Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee to Singapore and Cambodia on April 7-11. Shortly before the Indian leaders' tours, Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri and Cambodian Foreign Minister Hor Namhong visited New Delhi, and Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra made two trips to the Indian capital.

The density of India-ASEAN exchanges during this period astounded journalist Dinesh Sharma, writing for the April 13 *Bangkok Post*: “Never before has such a flurry of diplomatic activity and high-profile visits been seen on the Indian-ASEAN front. This is the first time since India adopted its much-touted ‘Look East’ policy in the early 1990s that concrete projects have really taken off.” Sharma ticked off four major initiatives in a week: the first direct flight between New Delhi and Beijing; an undersea cable between India and Singapore; a trilateral agreement among India, Myanmar, and Thailand for a road to be completed in two years; and a direct air link between Guwahati in Northeast India and Bangkok, Thailand.

## Eurasian Land-Bridge or Bust

The April 5-6 “India-Myanmar-Thailand Ministerial Meeting on Transport Linkages,” held in Yangon, Myanmar, made clear that the central focus of this new partnership is very concrete: filling in missing links in the east-west and north-south transport infrastructure grid, involving roads,

bridges, and rail. This focus had earlier set the stage for Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri's meetings with Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee, which led to agreements worth \$260 million, including construction of a railroad in southern Sumatra, cooperation between the two nations' space institutes, and the signing of nine other memorandums of understanding.

Lt. Gen. Khin Nyunt, First Secretary of the ruling State Peace and Development Council of the Union of Myanmar, addressed an audience including India's Minister of External Affairs Shri Jaswant Singh, Thai Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr. Surakiart Sathirathai, and Myanmar's Minister for Foreign Affairs U Win Aung. He singled out Myanmar's historical, cultural, religious, and economic role as the link between the civilizations of the Ganga Basin and the Mekong Basin. “Never before have the foreign ministers of the three countries come together in such a manner to develop common regional solidarity,” and thus “to deepen the integration of our economies,” he said. “The purpose of this meeting is to discuss and agree upon land transport linkages that would link our three countries and the two regions to which we belong.”

India's Jaswant Singh replied, “The road network connecting our three nations will become a highway of opportunity.

## New Delhi-to-Bangkok Road by 2004



Source: EIRNS.

## Malaysia Launches Hi-Speed Rail

The *New Straits Times* reported on April 14 that Malaysia had opened its first high-speed railroad link, with help from Germany's reconstruction bank, the Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW). Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad launched the link between Kuala Lumpur and the Kuala Lumpur International Airport, about 50 km away. Dr. Mahathir said this "monumental achievement" proved that Malaysia can do things against

all odds, and laid the basis to proceed with a series of rail links to its regional neighbors.

The Prime Minister noted that the project was set to take off in early 1998, with domestic financing fully in place, when the Asian currency crisis hit. "Standard and Poors downgraded the country's rating and no one was willing to lend us money," he said. Tight liquidity in the domestic financial market resulted in the underwriters of the financing package withdrawing their commitments, and the project was stalled for almost a year. The company came up with a new financing plan. Germany's KfW, Bank Pembangunan and Infrastruktur Malaysia Berhad were willing to fund a portion of the project cost, when the government gave assurance it would back the project.

nity. Let us jointly begin the process of weaving our part of Asia together, through multi-modal infrastructure links. . . . India's emphasis on connecting the Northeast to the outside world could not have come at a more propitious time, for it is part of a larger project to build Eurasian land and rail corridors that could connect Singapore to Istanbul and Europe, via both the Subcontinent and China."

The Yangon meeting agreed to support the complementarity among regional development initiatives: the Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand Economic Cooperation group (BIMST-EC); the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation; and the ASEAN-India Dialogue. The countries agreed on construction of a highway (see map) to be completed within two years, linking India's New Delhi, Moreh, and Tamu on the border with Myanmar, to Kalemmyo, Monywa, Mandalay, and south to Mae Sot, Thailand and on to Bangkok. In addition, the three countries agreed to build a highway from Myanmar's Tavoy (Dawei) deep-water port to Kanchanaburi, Thailand, and shipping links to Indian seaports. On April 4, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen had opened his country's newest and longest bridge, which will link Thailand's Trat province with Cambodia's southwestern Koh Kong province. The mile-long bridge spans the Gulf of Thailand and will open a new link to Vietnam.

The Yangon meeting is all the more important in exposing the evil intent of the George Soros-funded Burma Watch, which has encouraged the economic and political isolation of Myanmar, casting it as a "pariah nation," and thus intentionally sabotaging prospects for the future of a nation of more than 50 million people. Two of the most serious challenges confronting Myanmar date to its British colonial occupation, including the extension of Britain's Opium Wars in Asia, and divide-and-conquer rule among and between the various ethnic peoples which make up Myanmar. Financial speculator

Soros' funding of efforts to prevent the development of the Golden Triangle—the necessary precondition for the final eradication of the drug economy—is directly connected to his role as the world's leading sponsor of drug legalization, as well as his opposition to the institution of the sovereign nation-state.

For previews and information on LaRouche publications:

## Visit EIR's Internet Website!

- Highlights of current issues of EIR
- Pieces by Lyndon LaRouche
- Every week: transcript and audio of the latest **EIR Talks** radio interview.

<http://www.larouchepub.com>

e-mail: [larouche@larouchepub.com](mailto:larouche@larouchepub.com)