

China Briefs

China-Laos Modern Rail System Begins Operations

The China-Laos modern rail system, connecting the southern Chinese city of Kunming with the Laotian capital, Vientiane, began operations as the first train made its maiden voyage Dec. 4. China's President Xi Jinping met online with Thongloun Sisoulith, General Secretary of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party Central Committee and Lao President, to witness the ceremony. The 1035 km railway (645 miles) is the central piece of China's Belt and Road Initiative in Laos, converting Laos from a *landlocked* country to a *land-linked* hub.

With a maximum operating speed of 160 km per hour (100 mph), trains running on the route will take passengers from Kunming to Vientiane in about 10 hours, including customs clearance time, stopping at 21 towns along the way. It will eventually connect Kunming with Singapore through Laos, Thailand, and Malaysia, in what will be known as the Pan-Asian Railway. It is just part of an even larger plan, the Trans-Asian Railway, which will connect China with the ASEAN countries and provide quicker transport from the inland areas to the Southeast Asian ports.

The construction itself is a masterpiece of engineering, traversing some of the most difficult terrain in the world, with large mountains, rivers, and deep valleys, for which 167 tunnels (amounting to 590 km) and 301 bridges are required.

U.S., China Defense Ministers Plan To Meet, Possibly in Early January

According to a Dec. 2 [report](#) in the *South China Morning Post*, the Chinese Defense Ministry and the Pentagon are in discussions about a potential meeting between U.S. Secretary of Defense Gen. Lloyd Austin and Xu Qiliang, Vice-Chairman of the Central Military Commission, and Chinese Defense Minister Wei Fenghe, according to "people familiar with the matter."

"It is one of the consensuses reached during the Xi-Biden summit," one of them said. "The two leaders have ordered the militaries to discuss the arrangements." The format and details of the dialogue are yet to be completed, but a source said that a telephone call or virtual conference in early January was being considered. Sources said arms control was likely to be among the main topics of the proposed military talks.

The sources also told the *Post* that U.S.-Chinese military communications have improved recently. "The PLA's opposition to U.S. warships' Taiwan Strait transits has been toned down," they said. "They found the warships just sailed through international waters on a route that saved about a third of their journey from the South China Sea to their base in Japan."

The proposed meeting could not be more timely. The Biden Administration has increasingly threatened to treat Taiwan as an independent country, breaking every agreement reached between Washington and Beijing in the 1970s when the U.S. recognized Bei-

jing as the sole legitimate government of China, with Taiwan as part of China under the One China, Two Systems policy. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, however, has promoted Taiwan's "robust" role in the institutions of the UN, while U.S. politicians now regularly visit Taipei and U.S. military forces are acknowledged to be on the island, training Taiwan military forces. The Chinese government has stated clearly that the Taiwan question is a primary "core interest," and that any official recognition of Taiwan as an independent state would cross a "red line," requiring the use of force to preserve Chinese sovereignty.

Wang Yi In Surprise Visit to Ethiopia: 'We Will Not Interfere'

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Ethiopia Dec. 1, following his attendance at the Eighth Ministerial Conference of the Forum of China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in Dakar, Senegal. It was the highest-level visit of a Chinese official to Ethiopia since the civil war began a year ago in the Tigray region. Wang Yi, speaking at a press conference ahead of his meeting with Ethiopian Foreign Minister Demeke Mekonnen, said: "China will not interfere in the internal affairs of any country. We don't interfere in the internal affairs of Ethiopia as well. China stands against any attempt to interfere in Ethiopia's internal affairs, because Ethiopians have the wisdom to solve their problems and stabilize the situation themselves." He said the visit "demonstrates China's confidence in Ethiopia."

Despite the civil war between the

Ethiopian government of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali and the forces of the Tigray National Regional State, whose leaders were a significant part of the previous government in Addis Ababa, both sides have had excellent relations with China, which has a number of projects in the country as part of the Belt and Road Initiative.

Former Japanese PM Abe: Japan ‘Won’t Stand By’ in War over Taiwan

Former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who still heads the largest faction in the ruling LDP party, spoke virtually on Dec. 1 at a forum sponsored by Taiwan’s Institute for National Policy Research, a government-funded defense think tank set up by Taiwan’s independence-minded President, Tsai Ing-wen in 2018.

According to Asahi Shimbun, Abe said Japan and the United States could not stand by if China attacked Taiwan, asserting that the Senkaku islands (called Diaoyu Islands by China) and other Japanese islands are only about 100 km from Taiwan. He said moves against Taiwan would be a “grave danger” to Japan. “A Taiwan emergency is a Japanese emergency, and therefore an emergency for the Japan-U.S. alliance. People in Beijing, President Xi in particular, should never have a misunderstanding in recognizing this,” Abe said.

The Chinese reaction to Abe’s comments was swift and categorical, with Foreign Minister spokesman Wang Wenbin replying at a briefing Dec. 1:

“No one should underestimate the strong resolve, determination and capability of the Chinese people in safeguarding national sovereignty and territorial integrity. Whoever dares return to militarism and challenges the bottom

line of the Chinese people will have his head bloodied. Japan’s colonial rule over Taiwan lasted half a century, and it committed numerous crimes; it shoulders grave historical responsibility to the Chinese people.”

Japan seized Taiwan as a colony after defeating China in the 1895 Sino-Japanese War, and ruled Taiwan by force until 1945.

Japanese sources told *EIR* that the newly elected Prime Minister of Japan, Fumio Kishida, will not take sides in the current U.S.-China tensions, but that he is allowing political leaders of the different factions to voice their opinions. China is Japan’s largest export destination, replacing the U.S. in 2008. China accounted for 22.9% of Japan’s total exports in 2020, exceeding 20% for the first time.

Foreign Ministers of Russia, India, China Meet on Afghanistan, COVID

In their virtual meeting Nov. 26, the foreign ministers of Russia, China, and India (RIC) took a significant step in consolidating the important relationship comprising the three major countries of Eurasia.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi stressed five major principles that he believed should lay the basis for their relationship and serve as their vision with respect to the rest of the world: multilateralism; respecting the legitimate rights and interests of all countries in independently choosing their own development path; strengthening global anti-epidemic cooperation; promoting economic recovery after the pandemic; and dealing with “hot issues” through dialogue and consultation.

Both Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and India’s Minister of External Affairs Subrahmanyam Jaisankar expressed the belief that strengthening unity and cooperation

among the three countries is the proper meaning of building a multipolar world and has also played a positive role in promoting world peace and stability.

Russia and India supported China taking the presidency next year on the 20th anniversary of the trilateral relationship, and said they would support using that anniversary as an opportunity to enhance the role and the influence of Russia-China-India cooperation in the world. The joint communiqué issued by the parties criticized the unilateral sanctions and the “long-arm jurisdiction” practiced by the United States as being contrary to international law.

Foreign Minister Lavrov also observed that U.S. President Joe Biden’s “free and open Indo-Pacific” concept is not “an equal partnership” and disrupts the regional balance.

The primary subjects of the meeting were the situation in Afghanistan and the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. The joint communiqué urged the need for humanitarian assistance to that devastated country, while calling on the Taliban not to allow terrorist groups to operate within its borders. The three were also united in recognizing the need for international cooperation among all nations to deal effectively with the COVID pandemic and encouraged a waiver on vaccine property rights in order to get the vaccine to the world population in the shortest possible time.

The meeting was held despite ongoing diplomatic tensions between India and China since a military confrontation on their common border last year. Russia strongly encouraged both India and China to not skip the annual meeting, in part due to the urgency of cooperation in the Afghanistan crisis. Russian President Putin will be visiting India Dec. 6 for the yearly summit with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.