

# Business Briefs

## Science

### Mars has magnetic field reversals, data show

Data from the Mars Global Surveyor spacecraft's magnetometer has revealed banded patterns of magnetic fields, with contiguous bands pointing in opposite directions. The data were reported in the April 30 issue of the journal *Science*. There is no global magnetic field at Mars today, as there is on Earth, but there are remnant magnetic fields in the rocks.

The most likely explanation for the pattern Mars Global Surveyor found, is that there were periodic magnetic field reversals on Mars, as there are on Earth. NASA scientist Jack Connerney reported at the end of April that these magnetic stripes bear a striking similarity to patterns found on the Earth's ocean floor, where the upwelling of material from the core takes place when tectonic plates spread apart. The pattern of the magnetic fields reflects the periodic changes in polarity of Earth's field. Scientists propose that a similar process may have taken place early in Mars' history, when its core was still liquid. The reversal of the polarity of Mars' ancient magnetic field, they believe, is preserved in these alternating bands.

## Asia

### China, India set to reopen trade routes

India and China have "inched closer" to agreement on the crucial issue of trade routes, at their "joint working group" talks in Beijing on April 26-27, the *Times of India* reported on May 5. "We are hopeful that more trade routes will be opened, so that the economic progress of the entire region can be swift," an Indian official said. "Development of [India's] Northeast implies normalization of trade ties with Myanmar and Beijing."

Prof. Meera Sinha Bhattacharya of India's Institute of Chinese Studies told the Iranian News Agency in Beijing that the main thrust of the Joint Working Council is to "search for the resolution of contentious issues in a peaceful manner, to open up more

economic and cultural contacts, and to arrive at an understanding for a new strategic relationship." She said the meeting "was able to reach some understanding over opening of the trade routes, and it is expected that formal agreement would be signed soon."

Due to the tension caused by the fleeing of the Dalai Lama into India in 1959, the nine trade routes between the two countries were all closed, and only two have since been reopened.

Meanwhile, the India-China Joint Business Council was scheduled to meet in New Delhi on May 15, under the joint auspices of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry and the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India. The meeting will explore the potential for expansion of economic and commercial relations between the two countries, including specific projects involving technology transfers and joint ventures. It will also identify new areas for cooperation, such as joint bidding in third countries, participation in project tenders, equipment supply, and infrastructure projects.

## Middle East

### Turkey, Syria set to revive Hijaz Railway

Turkey and Syria, which were on the brink of a major war last September, have signed an agreement on land, air, and sea transportation links between the two countries, the newspaper *Al-Hayat* reported on April 30. The talks were held in April in Damascus between officials of the Transport Ministries of Turkey and Syria, and were described by an official communiqué as aiming at "constructing bridges and expanding the networks of mutual trust on the basis of historical relations of friendship."

The agreement makes a direct reference to the concept of the Eurasian Land-Bridge, stating that "the two sides bear in mind that Damascus will become a linking knot for a number of rail lines linking Europe, Central Asia, and Iran in the north, and Saudi Arabia and Jordan in the south, so that these lines become arteries in one body." The two sides agreed to revive the "Hijaz Railway," which was built at the beginning of this century by German engineers as a twin line of the "Ber-

lin-Baghdad Railway." The Hijaz Railway extends from Istanbul, to Halab and Damascus in Syria, to Jordan, and to Medina in Saudi Arabia.

The 2,000 kilometer rail line needs to be reconstructed. The Turkish government has shown great interest in financing the project. Turkey has also offered to give Syria 100 locomotives and rail cars in a contract to help Syria start transport on the line. The two sides have also agreed to open more navigation and aviation lines between the two countries ports and airports.

## Trade

### Barter deals grow, as Germany's trade falls

Germany's trade partners in Asia, Ibero-America, Africa, and eastern Europe are calling for barter deals involving 10% of its exports, Hans-Jürgen Müller, the head of the Federal German Export Trade Association, told the daily *Die Welt* on May 3. German firms agreed to such requests in only half of the cases, resulting in about 5% of German trade with "emerging market" countries being barter deals.

However, this is just the beginning. There is a rapid increase in requests for barter deals because of the lack of hard currency in the crisis regions and the huge demand for German goods.

Meanwhile, German trade is continuing to shrink, including with European Union member states. Federal Statistical Office figures released on April 30 showed that German exports in January 1999 were down by 6.5% compared to the year before, and imports shrank by 11.1%. Exports to Russia were down by 57.8%. The decline of 21.0% to the Netherlands, one of the biggest German foreign trade partners, is a very alarming sign. Only exports to China grew by a two-digit margin (16.7%). Even more severe is the shrinkage of German imports, which is now about to hit the other EU members. On average, German imports from the EU were down by 13.9% (Britain -18.6%, France -12.5%, Netherlands -20.5%, and Italy -11.2%). German imports from the United States fell 7%; from Japan, 7.8%; from China, 10.7%; from Russia, 18.6%.