

Business Briefs

Asia

West Natuna Gas Pipeline Launched

Indonesia and Singapore officially launched a natural gas pipeline under the West Natuna Sea on Jan. 15. Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid, accompanied by the Foreign, Trade and Industry, and Economics ministers, visited Singapore for the inauguration of the 406 mile pipeline, which runs under the South China Sea to Jurong Island. Expectations are that the pipeline will generate \$22.5 billion worth of gas sales for Indonesia, with current production contributing \$5.7 billion, about the size of Indonesia's expected budget deficit this year.

Singapore's commitment to the project two years ago contributed to keeping the project on line, and helped to create the economies of scale for Jakarta to negotiate a second gas sale for deliveries to Duyong, Malaysia. Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong was scheduled to sign a \$14 billion gas deal with Indonesia on Jan. 29, Indonesia's Mines and Energy Minister Purnomo Yusgiantoro revealed. The gas will be piped overland via South and Central Sumatra.

Minister Purnomo, a former governor in the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, played an important role in keeping the project up front in bilateral relations with Singapore, especially after President Wahid's comments in November 2000, when he accused the city-state of only being interested in money. Purnomo said that the pipeline means "we can have a Southeast Asia gas network relying on East and West Natuna as the source."

Health

Nursing Shortage Puts Care at Risk Worldwide

Experts at the sixth meeting of the World Health Organization's multi-disciplinary Global Advisory Group for Nursing and Midwifery, warned that nurses and midwives from around the globe are leaving the

health system, driven away by low pay, hazardous working conditions, and lack of career development — which is also a cause for the sharp decline in new recruits to the professions. "If the world's public health community does not correct this trend," the experts warned, "the ability of many health systems to function will be seriously jeopardized."

In addition to the aging of the U.S. and Canadian workforce and the lack of new recruits, the "skills drain," where nurses are recruited into the developed countries from developing countries, exacerbates the problem. The number of overseas nurses coming to the U.K. has risen by 42% in 12 months.

Zambia, which needs 1,500 nurses for its health-care system, has only 500 nurses currently employed. Ten years ago in Poland, more than 10,000 new nurses were being graduated annually. That figure is now down to 3,000. In Chile, of the 18,000 nurses in the country, only 8,000 are currently employed.

While the release does not mention the ravages of "managed health care," it warns that nurses from the public sector are being wooed away by the high wages offered by the private sector health-care providers. The remedy, say the experts, is to make the issue a priority on the public and political agenda.

Agriculture

Argentina, Brazil Ban Beef Imports from Europe

Fearing the spread of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE, or "Mad Cow" disease), on Jan. 16 Argentina banned the import of beef products, as well as all foods using cow, sheep, or goat meat and derivatives, from 20 European countries. Brazil adopted this measure three months ago.

The measure went into effect on Jan. 17, but government inspectors are removing from stores any such products imported prior to the issuance of the decree. Víctor Machinea, head of the National Health and Food Safety Service, is warning citizens to carefully read labels on any food products originating in Europe. At the same time, the Argentine government is publicizing the fact

that the country is free of Mad Cow disease, with the hopes of increasing its exports to Europe. The daily *Clarín* on Jan. 20 urged the government to enforce the strictest possible regulations and controls as a safeguard against the appearance of the disease.

In Brazil, an outbreak of scrapie (the form of spongiform encephalopathy which occurs in sheep) in the state of Paraná has caused alarm in Argentina, and Argentine authorities predict that the government will ban imports of any kind of sheep meat products from that part of Brazil.

Eurasia

Russian Praises LaRouche On Transport Corridors

The Indian Cabinet gave the go-ahead for a north-south transport corridor project with Russia and Iran, on Jan. 16. The decision will enable India to build a direct land link by rail and road to Russia, reducing transport costs by at least 20%, according to Indian Technology Minister Pramod Mahajan. The project, signed during the visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin to India on Oct. 3, 2000, also involves a branching link to Europe, via Iran. At present, Indian goods can reach Europe only by sea, via the Dutch port of Rotterdam.

The concept of a north-south transport corridor was agreed upon by Russia, India, and Iran at the St. Petersburg International Eurasian Conference on Transport last year, in which some 50 nations took part. *EIR* has learned that a publication called *Vestnik Yevrazii* (*The Eurasian Herald*), published in Russian and available on the Internet, carried an article on that occasion, which focussed on Lyndon LaRouche as the leading mind behind the concept of Eurasian continental development along transportation corridors. The article, by A.A. Slavokhotov, was titled "Russia Is a Main Thoroughfare," and is one example of a new surge of discussion of LaRouche's ideas in Russia.

Slavokhotov contrasts the enthusiasm for new, Eurasian development perspectives, to the "end of history" and "clash of civilizations" ideology of Alvin Toffler,

Francis Fukuyama, and Samuel Huntington. Slavokhotov suggests the conceptions of Russian historian and philosopher Lev Gumilyov (the son of the poet Anna Akhmatova) as a better point of departure for thinking about the peoples of Eurasia, then writes:

“In addition, it is appropriate during discussion of this topic, to adhere to the principles of the antipode to monetarist economics, which has acquitted itself so poorly in Russian conditions—namely, physical economy, the theory developed by the American researcher and political figure Lyndon H. LaRouche, founder of the Schiller Institute and continuer of the ideas of G. Leibniz (1646-1716).

“In 1989, under LaRouche’s leadership, a concept was developed for political cooperation and economic development in continental Europe and Eurasia. By 1993, this concept had been honed into the idea of creating a bridge among the Eurasian countries, i.e., a program for development of the economy and infrastructure of all Eurasia.

“Also valuable in this connection, are the ideas of L. LaRouche’s co-thinker, the Russian scientist P. [Pobisk G.] Kuznetsov, who has put forward the idea of developing global life-support systems, and called for the elaboration of an international program, subsuming the social production system of any country, at any level of economic development, and any form of property ownership.”

Infrastructure

Malaysia May Go It Alone To Get Bakun Dam Built

Malaysia is considering reviving construction of the Bakun Dam in Sarawak, Northeast Kalimantan (Borneo), one of the world’s largest dam projects. The dam is crucial to Malaysia’s long-term strategic power requirements. When complete, the hydroelectric dam will have a capacity of 2,400 megawatts.

Malaysia is also interested in the project because of the technological spinoffs, principally the technology transfer associated with the manufacture and laying of exten-

sive undersea power cables, linking the dam’s output to the Malay Peninsula. (There are similar such projects that would link continental Asia to the adjoining archipelagos.) A government spokesman underscored that what Malaysia learns in building the dam can be exported to its neighbors, and serve as a catalyst for the power sector and for the creation of new manufacturing industries.

When the dam was put on hold two years ago, the cost was estimated at 13.5 billion ringgit (Malaysia’s currency, roughly \$3.5 billion); experts think the cost now would run to RM 20 billion, for which Malaysia might turn to local and international bond markets. Estimates are that the dam would take seven to eight years to build, by which time Malaysia will have outgrown its current power-generating capacity.

South Africa

Witwatersrand University Opens Nuclear Curriculum

South Africa’s Witwatersrand University opened the first post-graduate course in the Physics, Engineering, and Safety of Nuclear Power Reactors, the Panafrican News Agency reported on Jan. 15. South African Deputy Mineral and Energy Affairs Minister Susan Shabangu was on hand for the opening. The course will consist of eight modules covering the basic science, engineering, technology, and safety of nuclear power reactor design.

Prof. John Watterson said that the university “is proud to be able to provide a course which is both academically significant and of direct importance to the development of an alternative power source in South Africa.”

The course will also focus on gas-cooled reactor technology and other issues of direct relevance to the evaluation of the Pebble Bed Modular Reactor (PBMR), which is a reactor design being developed in South Africa as a potential alternative electricity generation source. The course was developed by the university in collaboration with the National Nuclear Regulator and the PBMR company.

CHINA will fund the construction of a rail link from Tbilisi, Georgia to Kars, Turkey, enabling it to transport commodities to Europe via Central Asia. Turkey attempted to build the project in cooperation with Georgia in 1997, but the effort failed in 1999 because of financial strains caused by International Monetary Fund conditionalities and the earthquake in Turkey.

THE GERMAN government is willing to transform one-fifth of the 70 billion deutschemarks (roughly \$35 billion) which Russia owes Germany, into physical economic investments, the weekly *Der Spiegel* reported in a review of the Jan. 6-7 talks between Russian President Vladimir Putin and German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder.

TAIWAN’S highest court has ruled against greenie Prime Minister Chen Shui-bian’s (Democratic Progressive Party) decision to cancel a \$5.6 billion nuclear power plant, which was one-third complete. The ruling said that the cabinet did not have the authority to scrap the plant, and ordered the Parliament (controlled by the Kuomintang, which is expected to back the plant) to vote on the future of the facility.

SCARLET FEVER broke out in Washington, D.C. in January, infecting at least five students and a teacher at one elementary school. The disease, caused by a streptococcus, can be cured with antibiotics, as long as it is caught in time. Given economic and health conditions in the District, parents may have confused the symptoms with a cold or flu, and didn’t send the children to a doctor right away, allowing it to spread.

CORPORATE bankruptcies in Japan reached an all-time high in 2000, according to figures released by the Teikoku Databank economic research agency on Jan. 19. The total liabilities of those firms which collapsed last year, amounted to 24.0 trillion yen (\$200 billion), 77% more than the year before.