

# Business Briefs

## Medicine

### Drug-Resistant HIV Is On The Increase

In the United States, 63% of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)-positive patients treated with the triple medication cocktail fail to control the infection after three years, and show the presence of drug-resistant virus. In 2000, these drug-resistant HIV strains made up 20% of new infections in the United States.

Resistance to older drugs such as AZT in patients already under treatment is at 70%. Patients with HIV strains resistant to reverse-transcriptase inhibitors and protease inhibitors are basically untreatable, and their numbers are growing rapidly. In 1997, only about 3-5% of new HIV cases were resistant to at least one drug. Primary resistance to drugs used for treatment is a worldwide phenomenon, with some countries in Africa reporting 50% resistance, and some regions of Brazil with similar percentages.

This means that the current treatment regimen is quickly becoming ineffective, and without the development of new drugs or other treatments soon, the ability to control the infection in the majority of new cases may be lost in the near future.

## Transportation

### Japanese Journal Covers Eurasian Land-Bridge

The September 2001 issue of the Japan National Railroad's quarterly rail journal, *Railway And Transport Review*, gave significant coverage of the Eurasian Land-Bridge economic development program. Its feature, by a retired railway engineer, is entitled "Central Asia's Rail Network And The Eurasian Land-Bridge," and a companion feature, "Restoration Of The Silk Route," is about the TRACECA rail system in the Georgian Republic by two Georgian engineers (see *EIR*, Nov. 2, 2001). The articles promote the concept of a Land-Bridge in Japan, and attempt to garner public support for the Japanese government's several programs to pay

for upgrades and reconstruction of several rail lines.

The articles give a lot of maps and detail about how these lines are being built up, going over each city on each route, detailing where lines are missing and are required to be built, where gauges do not match, and where customs clearance needs to be improved between countries to get freight moving. The articles conclude that it would be greatly to Japan's advantage to use the China-based Land-Bridge, if the problems of gauge and customs changes between China, Central Asia, and Europe could be solved, and if the remaining lines in Iran and Turkey could be built to complete the land-bridge.

The magazine is published by the East Japan Railway Culture Foundation, set up by the government rail company for the purpose of "invigorating regional culture through railways; sponsoring research and studies on railway management and technology; and promoting railway-related international cultural exchanges." The foundation sponsors "research on railway management and technology, as well as future-oriented railway studies . . . to stimulate transport-related studies and to nurture young researchers."

## Public Health

### South Africa Brings Back DDT To Save Lives

South Africa, which returned to using the pesticide DDT, has drastically reduced the number of malaria cases. In the Zulu and northern KwaZulu Natal Province, doctors were overwhelmed with cases, with one doctor alone treating up to 130 patients a day. In one year, the number of malaria cases in this region has dropped by more than 70%, from 41,000 to less than 10,000, with 44 lives claimed this year, the Dec. 16 *Baltimore Sun* reported.

During World War II, the U.S. Army used DDT by the ton, dropping it in advance of landing Allied troops; after the war, farmers, health-care workers, and others were part of an international effort to make DDT the cornerstone of an ambitious program to eradicate malaria from all parts of the globe.

After traces of DDT were found in breast milk in the 1960s, and because of the lying by the fanatical environmentalists, most especially Rachel Carson in her book *Silent Spring*, more than 80 countries banned DDT use. South Africa had begun using DDT in 1948, banned it for agricultural use in 1976, but continued its use for malaria control until 1996. In the 1990s, South Africa ended its use of DDT in favor of "more environmentally benign insecticides," but these proved far less effective.

By 1999, South Africa faced a crisis when more than 62,000 became ill with malaria, resulting in more than 340 deaths. So, the government responsibly returned to the use of DDT. The World Health Organization estimates that 300 million people a year are afflicted with malaria and more than 1 million die from it. About 90% of the victims live in Africa, and most are young children.

As one official put it, by using DDT we are saving lives. The number of lives needlessly lost over the last 30 years by the banning of DDT were easily in the tens of millions.

An editorial in the Dec. 24 *Baltimore Sun* endorsed the use of DDT to fight malaria. "DDT is saving lives in South Africa and in two dozen other tropical countries ravaged by mosquito-borne malaria," it said.

"The pesticide, banned by most of the world as an environmental menace, is the most effective, economical weapon against the deadly disease that kills over 1 million people each year.

"Expensive alternative insecticides did not work; malaria cases and deaths soared until DDT spraying resumed.

"Mosquito eradication remains the primary control strategy. DDT will be the hard choice for tropical countries that have seen an enormous toll of death and suffering from malaria."

## Eastern Europe

### ILO Says Health System At Sub-Saharan Levels

A survey by the International Labor Organization (ILO) released in Geneva on Dec. 10, warned of a big threat to public health in the

**THE FIVE-NATION** economic cooperation proposal for Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is set to be finalized early in 2002 in India. The Thai proposal for an east-west corridor with India, through Myanmar, is the centerpiece.

**THE DEBT OF ELDERLY U.S.** households, age 65 years or older, is climbing dramatically. In 1992, just 34.5% of elderly households had debt obligations; but last year, 58.8% did, according to a study by SRI Consulting Business Intelligence. During this period, the average amount of debt owed nearly tripled from \$8,000 to \$23,000, and bankruptcies among the elderly increased from 23,890 in 1991 to 82,200 in 2001.

**THE GULF** Cooperation Council nations called for accelerating economic integration, at their summit on Dec. 30. The Council, created in 1981, includes Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar. The summit approved a customs union that is to come into effect on Jan. 1, 2003.

**SOMALIA** is threatened with the death by starvation of more than 500,000 people if food assistance is not increased, the Kenyan daily *The Nation* reported on Dec. 30. Difficulties faced by Somali families have been exacerbated by the reduction of overseas remittance income with the closure in November of the main money transfer company, as part of the U.S. war on terrorism.

**THE INTERNET** has begun to shrink. The total number of websites is shrinking as domains registered during the late-1990s Internet boom are being dropped, according to web server information firm Netcraft.

In November, 36,458,394 sites were found, dropping to 36,276,252 in December. The number of domains not renewed, exceeded the number of new registrations. This is only the second decline recorded in Internet history (the other was caused by failures at hosting companies).

countries of the former Soviet Union and Eastern/Southeastern Europe, as posed by the spread of diseases such as AIDS and tuberculosis.

Living conditions of the populations have fallen to the point that 88% of Ukrainians, and 82% of Romanians and Hungarians, are too poor to afford basic health care. In Moldova, almost no one can afford it.

In Romania, 40% of the people live on less than \$30 a month in income, which is less than even in Peru, where \$40 is the statistical minimum. Because of the collapse of the public-health system in Romania, which is the worst except for Moldova, the rate of TB infection, 65 per 100,000, is at the same level as in absolutely impoverished Sub-Saharan Africa.

In general, health-care personnel are paid so poorly (or months late), that they either depend on extra jobs to make a living and only appear at hospitals part-time, or they survive by being paid directly by the patients (whoever can afford it), as in Russia, where 40% of people's medical expenses are paid directly to doctors, nurses, and other providers, outside of the official health system channels. In Ukraine, 78% of medical personnel report earnings lower than the average for workers in general, who themselves depend on a second or third job to survive.

## Privatization

### Czech Republic's Program Fizzles

Instead of reaping \$7.1-8.5 billion through privatization of government-owned energy companies, the Czech government raised only some \$4 billion, through the sale of its national natural gas pipeline company, Transgas, and Unipetrol, a group of petrochemical companies.

The Czech failure comes as the trend toward privatization of public services, dating to the elections of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and U.S. President Ronald Reagan in the early 1980s, is now stalling and shifting into reverse, according to an article in the Nov. 19 *Wall Street Journal* entitled "Now, Public Works Seem Too Pre-

vious For The Free Market."

Transgas (which brings Russian gas to the Czech Republic and Western Europe) was bought up by German energy giant RWE, for \$3.7 billion, while Unipetrol was sold for \$326 million to another Czech company, Agrofert. The privatization of the national electricity monopoly, CEZ, was put off, because the government was not satisfied by the bidder's (Italy's ENEL) offer. "We are not a banana republic," Prime Minister Milos Zeman was quoted in the media. "The Czech Republic is no pushover that can be given undervalue bids."

The failed sales will exacerbate the budget crisis, putting increased pressure on the government, and governments throughout Eastern European, to adopt sane economic policies.

## Southeast Asia

### Thai Industry Backs Rail Projects To Stop Collapse

A White Paper by Thailand's construction industry calls for building rail links to India and China to stop the economic collapse, Bangkok's *The Nation* reported on Dec. 19.

The construction sector has shrunk to one-third of its pre-crisis level, reducing its contribution to Gross Domestic Product to 3% last year, down from 7.5% in 1994-97. The number of employees in the sector has fallen from 2.6 million, or about 8% of the country's overall workforce in 1996, to 1.1 million, or less than 5%. About 6,200 construction companies have shut their doors, while more than 10,000 other contractors are stagnant, many saddled with non-performing loans. Another 400,000 construction workers are in danger of losing their jobs in 2002 if the government fails to introduce emergency measures to assist the long-stagnant sector, Poomson Rojlerjanya, secretary general of the Thai Contractors Association, warned.

The White Paper calls for reviving the Second Bangkok International Airport project, the proposed 234 kilometer loop railway around Bangkok, and the Metropolitan Rapid Transit Authority's subway project, as well as the rail links among East, Southeast, and South Asia.