

Beijing attended by ministers of railway transportation from seven countries concerned. At the meeting, Minutes of Talks on Developing International Railway Passenger and Freight Transportation were signed, that paved the way for transportation by the New Euro-Asian Continental Bridge. On Sept. 8, 1995, railway experts from the seven countries concerned signed an agreement on opening the Alatau Pass-Druzhba (Friendship) international passage.

- In 1995, the first and second phase of the world's greatest ecological systems engineering—three northern shelter forest belts—were brought to completion. These forest belts prevent 10% of moving deserts and 40% of loess erosion, which created favorable conditions for the railway artery that passes through northwestern China.

- In 1995, the laying of the Chinese section of Euro-Asian telecommunications cable was completed.

- In July 1995, the State Scientific and Technological Commission, the State Planning Commission, and the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation formally approved in a document, Rizhao of Shandong Province and Lianyungang of Jiangsu Province as the eastern terminus of the New Euro-Asian Continental Bridge.

- In January 1996, the Xi'an-Baoji Expressway was opened to traffic, and the first phase of electrifying the Houma-Yueshan Railway was completed, which was a key construction project in the Eighth Five-Year Plan (1985-1990). The railway has started trial operations.

In recent years, the CPC Central Committee and the State Council have adopted a series of strategic measures to promote developing and opening the New Euro-Asian Continental Bridge. In the international arena, they proposed that a modern Silk Road be jointly constructed and exchanges between Europe and Asia be expanded. They received positive responses from the countries concerned. Domestically, the Fifth Plenary Session of the Fourteenth CPC Central Committee ranked the Euro-Asian Continental Bridge economic zones as one of five economic zones for key construction and development, following the inclusion of [the statement] "zones around the Chinese section of the New Euro-Asian Continental Bridge will develop sustainedly" in "China Program of Priority Projects on Agenda 21." In May 1996, the two State Commissions and the Ministry aforementioned will jointly sponsor an International Symposium on Economic Development of Zones around the New Euro-Asian Continental Bridge.

That large-scale development and opening up of the zones around the Euro-Asian Continental Bridge have been placed on the agenda of our times, is of strategic significance in transforming the situation, in which the vast central plain and western and northern China are relatively lagging behind in development and opening, in promoting sustained and coordinated development of southern and northern China, eastern and central and western China, narrowing gaps in economic development between different regions, enhancing solidarity between nationalities and in maintaining long-

term peace and stability. . . .

As the world is approaching toward the twenty-first century, developing relations between Asia and Europe are necessitated by world peace and economic development. In October 1994, Singaporean Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong proposed convening a meeting for Asian and European heads of state to discuss cooperation between Asia and Europe, and received positive responses. After serious preparations for a year, the first Asia-Europe Meeting was just convened in Bangkok, Thailand, March 1-2, 1996, which was attended by leaders from seven Asian countries, China, Japan, R.O.K., 15 European Union countries and the European Council. Chinese Premier Li Peng attended the grand meeting and delivered an important speech at the meeting. The meeting will serve as an important bridge for promoting cooperation between Asia and Europe, usher in a new epoch of Euro-Asia cooperation, greatly promote economic and prosperity between Asia and Europe, and provide a historical opportunity for developing the New Euro-Asian Continental Bridge. With more than a decade's efforts made, the Chinese section of the New Euro-Asian Continental Bridge has entered a new stage as whole, and developing the zones around the Euro-Asian Continental Bridge is getting in gear. . . .

I am firmly convinced that with long-term efforts made before and beyond 2000, the New Euro-Asian Continental Bridge will become an international economic and trade corridor, that will have the glory the Silk Road enjoyed in ancient times.

Maglev for the future

The authors of A Study on the Strategic Significance of the New Euro-Asian Continental Bridge, advocate the use of the most advanced technologies to build the New Euro-Asian Continental Bridge economy, including magnetic levitation (maglev). Here is the relevant passage:

The modernization and rapidity of transport means will give an unestimable impetus to the continental-bridge transportation. The rapid progress in science and technology promotes the modernization and rapidity of all the transport means, including the railway, automobiles, airplanes, and ships. Particularly, the success in the trial operation of the magnetic suspension train which travels at a speed of over 500 km per hour, will usher in a new era for railway transportation. It will exert an unmeasurable promotion on the continental-bridge transportation which takes railway as its chief means. . . .