

Report from Bangkok by Sophie Pachisawat Tanapura

The Kra Canal keeps moving forward

And a group of Japanese industrialists appears determined to become involved.

Signs of approval of the Kra Canal project have been reportedly given by Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda of Thailand. No official discussion of the project has yet taken place at the cabinet level, but there reigns an atmosphere favoring the implementation of the project.

Prem is known for being cautious and noncommittal. His showing any sign of approval for a project as controversial as the Kra Canal indicates a generally favorable inclination on the government level toward the infrastructure project. It is believed that the Royal Thai Navy will back the project.

Prem's hometown happens to be Songkhla, the port/university town in the south, most discussed as the suitable site for expansion into an Asia-port, should route 5A be chosen for the canal's construction.

Songkhla Asia-port will be able to serve 12 nations in the region and have the potential of attracting up to 10% of all cargo traffic. When compared to Rotterdam, the largest port in Europe, which generates almost 50% of the gross national product of the Netherlands, Songkhla is in a superior geographic position. It is situated in the center of over 1.2 billion people, who are collectively generating an export-import account of approximately \$200 billion.

In the meantime, the reassembled parliamentary commission on the Kra Canal has met several times since the last general elections to draw up recommendations. These recommendations will be submitted to the govern-

ment. The parliamentary commission is chaired by a member of the Rassa-dorn Party, a small but influential party with a base in the Thai military. Dr. Uwe Henke v. Parpart, director of research at the Fusion Energy Foundation (FEF), has been invited to give an updated report on the economic and financial feasibility of the project on Dec. 3.

Last year, under the previous Prem government, Pakdee Tanapura, chief representative of the Fusion Energy Foundation in Bangkok, was called upon by the Thai parliament to provide information on the scope of the Kra Canal project and its potential impact on the Thai economy. Three years of persistent campaigning around this great project by the Bangkok offices of the FEF and *EIR* have opened the doors to a new era of optimism in Thailand and the countries of the Pacific and Indian Ocean basins.

Reverberations from the Bangkok conference on the Kra Canal organized by the Chulalongkorn University's Social Research Institute and its engineering department Nov. 7-9 were both nationwide and international.

Following the conference, a Kra Canal Commission was created in the office of the university chancellor, Dr. Boonrod Binson. Dr. Boonrod is an executive member of the Chow Foundation founded by K.Y. Chow, the Thai-Chinese oil businessman who attempted to push through the Kra Canal in the early 1970s. Chow financed a preliminary feasibility study which was carried out by TAMS Corp. of New York. Dr. Boonrod was one of

the Thai technical advisers of the TAMS study.

Dr. Boonrod is pulling together a committee of sages to act as an executive body whose main task would be to promote the project within Thailand. Many prominent people are being asked to join and among them, the FEF's Dr. Uwe Henke v. Parpart.

Japan has been increasingly forced by the world economic collapse and America's "Jap-bashing" protectionist attitude to turn inward. Over the past couple of years, a group of Japanese zaibatsu (industrialists) under the name of Japan Project-Industry Council or JAPIC initiated the idea of riding out the world economic crisis by launching more than 20 domestic infrastructure projects such as the Kensai International Airport, in an attempt to keep Japanese construction companies afloat and working.

However, since Japan is dependent on other countries as markets for finished products as well as for raw materials, the focus on domestic development can only work temporarily. It would not ensure Japan a way out of the world economic depression in the long run.

With the Kra Canal project moving convincingly forward, the Global Infrastructure Fund group of industries (the GIF club around Dr. Masaki Nakijima of the Mitsubishi Research Institute) has gained in esteem in the eyes of the Nakasone government. The Thai great infrastructure project is giving hope to Japan, the land of the rising sun, once again, that perhaps she still has a leading role to play in the development of the Third World. The GIF club is being encouraged to pursue the study of 15 super infrastructure projects in Asia, Latin America, and Africa, and the Kra Canal in Thailand ranks high on its list.