

# National News

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## Eurasian Land-Bridge welcomed by U.S. daily

For the first time, a U.S. daily paper has covered Lyndon and Helga LaRouche's proposal for a Eurasian Land-Bridge: On Jan. 15, John Popham wrote an enthusiastic commentary in the *Chattanooga Times*, with a 41,000 circulation in a city that is no stranger to the railroad. Popham pointed to the time when America "was covered with a network of railroads, the United States was on its way to becoming a continental nation of unbelievable power. . . . Now we are faced with the overwhelming proposal that we begin linking the East and West of our planet with an Asian railroad land-bridge that would traverse the vast regions of China."

"The brilliant German-born economist Helga Zepp-LaRouche in recent weeks has spoken to four Chinese cities about the Eurasian Land-Bridge and what it can mean to the world economy. And she noted the visit of the Chinese President Jiang Zemin in [Novosibirsk] Russia where he delivered a speech to scientists that called for a 'strategic revolution' for both nations via the Eurasian Bridge."

Popham continued, "China has many challenges to overcome, such as lack of infrastructure, an urgent need to develop water and land resources, its huge population. . . . The bridge will be the pioneer of economic development on a vast scale. . . . From Northeast Asia to Central Asia to Southeast Asia, natural resources exploitation and economic development mostly depend on the Eurasian Bridge."

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## Slave labor in Marianas subject of lawsuits

Three lawsuits were filed against U.S. clothing manufacturers, retailers, and garment contractors located in the U.S. Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands on Jan. 13, charging a "racketeering conspiracy" in the use of what amounts to indentured labor to produce garments labelled "Made in the U.S.A.," in violation of U.S. minimum wage and labor laws. Two class-action suits were filed in Federal courts in

Los Angeles and Saipan on behalf of some 50,000 workers from China, the Philippines, Bangladesh, and Thailand who have been forced to live and work in squalid and unsafe conditions, for 12 hours a day, up to seven days a week, often "off the clock" for no pay. The third lawsuit, filed in California state court by four human rights and labor organizations, charges retailers with misleading advertising and trafficking in "hot goods" manufactured in violation of U.S. labor laws. Defendants named include The Gap, Tommy Hilfiger, May Company, Sears, and Wal-Mart.

Earlier legislation introduced by Rep. George Miller (D-Calif.) to extend Federal labor and immigration standards to the Marianas was blocked by Majority Whip Tom DeLay (R-Tex.), who points to the Commonwealth as a model of what growth blossoms without Federal government regulation. *EIR* has been told by a Capitol Hill source, who has researched the Marianas' abuses for a long time, that, in addition to labor abuses, the Marianas hosts a huge sex industry, including abuse of minors. One of DeLay's former staffers, Bill Jarrell, is now a lobbyist for the Marianas.

The garment factory owners, *EIR*'s source said, are mostly Asian firms that contract out to U.S. retailers. Workers are lured to the factories from all over Asia by being told they are going to get U.S. jobs. But, workers pay \$3-8,000 for each "U.S. job," and whole villages raise money to send their youth to the Marianas. One of the ringleaders named by this source is Hong Kong businessman Willie Tan, who is very tight with Congressional Republican leaders.

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## Jeb Bush halts high-speed rail system in Florida

Stating that the funding for a 325-mile high-speed rail system was "not viable," Florida Gov. Jeb Bush has halted the \$6.3 billion project. The rail system was to have connected Tampa, Orlando, and Miami, traveling at 125-200 miles per hour, in an area where the vast majority of traffic is now on the roads. State transportation planners indicated some years ago, that 14-lane highways would be needed to accommodate the expected growth over the next 20 years, if trains were not built.

The consortium that had been awarded the rail contract included France's Alstom, Canada's Bombardier Inc., and Fluor Corp. Florida has already spent \$22 million on the project, and had pledged \$70 million per year for 40 years to repay tax-exempt bonds that were to have been issued. The state also sought \$2 billion of Federal loans for the project. Bush said that in discussions with Florida Representatives, there were indications that support from Washington for the loan was "questionable at best," so he decided to halt state funding.

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## Black farmers win civil rights suit

On Jan. 5, the Clinton administration brought to a successful end a civil rights effort on behalf of the nation's black farmers. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman announced a settlement out of court, of a 1997 class-action lawsuit by thousands of black farmers, who sought \$2.5 billion in compensation for decades of discrimination in lending and other practices by the Department of Agriculture (USDA). The settlement will give 3-5,000 farmers approximately \$50,000 each, and cancel their debts to the USDA.

In an interview with the weekly LaRouche movement paper *New Federalist*, Heather Gray, a spokeswoman for the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund, which represents some of the plaintiffs, credited Glickman and President Clinton with having "opened the doors" for this settlement. She pointed out that it was not until Clinton made Mike Espy head of the USDA that black farmers were allowed in the USDA office. Sam Taylor, Executive Director of the Black Farmers and Agriculturalists Association, representing other plaintiffs, told *New Federalist* that this is the largest civil rights settlement in history. He also said that his group would fight to free the USDA from whatever control the food and commodities cartels have over it.

Black farmers are losing their land today at a rate three times that of white farmers (which is severe already). In 1910, some 16 million acres were owned by black farmers. That has dwindled to 2.3 million. In 1950, there were 559,980 black farmers; in 1992, there were 18,816.