

Kra Canal project takes center stage

by Gail G. Kay

This October, many old associates and new acquaintances will gather in Bangkok, Thailand, to renew discussion of an ambitious canal-building project that promises to change the face of Asia. On Oct. 29-30, *Executive Intelligence Review* and the Fusion Energy Foundation (FEF) will host a conference on "The Kra Canal and the Industrialization of Thailand."

Participants will include representatives from the two organizations that collaborated in a 1973 feasibility study for building a sea-level canal across the Isthmus of Kra, the engineering firm of Tippets-Abbott-McCarthy-Stratton (TAMS) and Lawrence Livermore Laboratories. They will be joined by a unique gathering from India, Malaysia, Japan, and beyond.

This combination, teaming the skilled scientific manpower of India with the capital-industry machine of Japan and the labor force of the ASEAN countries, of which Thailand is a member, has been identified by *EIR* and FEF founder Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr. as potentially an unbeatable combination for turning the Indian Ocean-Pacific Basin region into the fastest growing industrial giant in the world.

The key to unlocking that potential, says LaRouche, is doubling or tripling the flow of ocean-borne freight between the two areas by the turn of the century, by breaking open the bottleneck of the Malacca Straits.

British worried

In a year's time, following LaRouche's July 1983 fact-finding tour to Japan, Thailand, and India, *EIR* and FEF have successfully campaigned to place the Kra Canal at the center of debate on Thailand's industrial future. That success has some people very worried, as shown in the sudden interest in the project this week by the London *Financial Times* and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC).

On Aug. 24, *Financial Times* correspondent Tristram Riley-Smith singled out as "an unexpected source" the pro-nuclear FEF's endorsement of the project and its proposal to use peaceful nuclear explosives (PNEs) to excavate the canal. Riley-Smith pointedly refers in his review of the project to the repeated efforts of the rulers of the British Empire "to smother the plan." The Kra Canal, he writes, threatens to

turn Thailand into "a potential rival of Singapore and Hong Kong."

Nonetheless, Riley-Smith admits, FEF promotion of the canal "has served to rekindle interest in a project which has captured the imagination of Thais for generations." BBC World Service echoed the *Financial Times* story in a news short the same day.

LaRouche's 'great projects'

Key to the success of the *EIR*-FEF campaign has been to identify the Kra Canal as the centerpiece of a package of regional infrastructure-building projects, which in turn fit into a grid of global "great projects" proposed by LaRouche in the course of his 1984 presidential campaign in the United States. The campaign was kicked off in Washington, D.C. in August 1983, with the announcement of LaRouche's "50-Year Perspective for Indian Ocean-Pacific Basin Development."

In October, 200 of Thailand's government, military, and corporate elite attended a Bangkok conference co-sponsored by *EIR*, FEF, and the Thai Ministry of Communications. In January 1984, LaRouche's Bangkok representatives toured six U.S. cities to discuss the project. Finally, in March 1984, LaRouche briefed the U.S. population on the project in a national half-hour television broadcast.

Two days later, the *EIR* and FEF outlined their cost estimates for the canal to an invitation-only meeting of 40 top Thai corporate executives, government officials, and military observers, including representatives of Asia's three largest shipping firms, and several Thai, American, and Japanese banks.

At that March seminar, Dr. Nimit Nontapunthawat, vice president and chief economist of the Bank of Bangkok, Thailand's largest, and manager of the bank's Economic and Marketing Research Center, reviewed the findings and urged the government of Thailand to go ahead with the Kra Canal. Dr. Nimit will address the upcoming October conference.

The *EIR*-FEF proposal draws on the 1973 feasibility study by TAMS and Lawrence Livermore and calls for a two-lane, sea-level canal without locks, through which up to 500,000 dead weight tons could pass at normal speeds. The excavation phase would be significantly accelerated, and costs significantly reduced, by using peaceful nuclear explosives. In addition, the *EIR*-FEF plan calls for integration of one or two deep-sea ports and associated industrial development zones at either end of the canal.

The late October conference will focus on the Kra Canal as the centerpiece of a national development program for Thailand, with panels on the canal itself, rapid expansion of nuclear-power generation in Thailand, and the integration of this nuclear capability through construction of nuclear-powered, agro-industrial centers, or nuplexes. A third and final panel will concentrate on a development plan for Thailand as a model for all of the ASEAN countries.