

Business Briefs

Agriculture

China and India join on 'Green Revolution'

India and the People's Republic of China have begun exchanging scientific know-how for evolving high-yielding varieties of hybrid rice and cotton. While China is deemed to be the world leader in the hybrid rice technology, India enjoys a similar status in cotton.

Some Indian plant breeders have already visited China for collaboration, and a top Chinese expert in hybrid rice technology has visited India. It is believed that use of the Chinese hybrid rice technology could boost rice production in India by 10-15%.

Infrastructure

Austria proposes Vienna-Moscow highway

Austria is proposing a huge highway project linking Vienna and Moscow. The highway would pass through Hungary and Czechoslovakia, and enter the Soviet Union through Ukrainian territory.

The multibillion-dollar, several thousand kilometer project would be linked to two other big projects: the Vienna-Genoa Alps north-south highway and the Vienna-Ljubljana Balkan north-southwest highway.

Health

Black Americans suffer most, says survey

Selected highlights of the most recent annual health survey of the United States, published in April by the Department of Health and Human Services, indicates that the U.S. population—and particularly black Americans—are indeed experiencing a health holocaust. Buried behind the headlines about growing life expectancy (among white males only), are the following facts:

- Black males are dying at over six times the rate of the general population and eight times the rate for white males, from homicides and "legal intervention"—i.e., police action.

- The length of hospital stays has plummeted in the past two decades, by as much as one-third for the 45-to-64-year-old age bracket.

- Some 63.5% of black mothers in America in 1988 were unmarried, up from 37.4% in 1970. The national average is 25.7%. For white women, the figure is 17.7%. For Puerto Rican women, the figure is 53.3%.

- In the mid-1980s, the age-adjusted percent of persons under 65 years of age with no health insurance was 35% for Mexican-Americans and 21-23% for Puerto Ricans, non-Hispanic blacks, and Cubans, compared with 12-16% for non-Hispanic white and Asian persons.

Transportation

Maglev trains planned for U.S. Midwest

Proposals for high-speed trains that would link Minneapolis with Chicago, through Rochester, Minnesota and LaCrosse, Madison, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin, are now under study in the Midwest. Also on the drawing boards is a fast train from Rockford, Illinois to downtown Chicago with stops at O'Hare Airport and the Rockford Airport. A third proposal would link downtown Chicago and O'Hare Airport with Milwaukee and its airport.

The studies being carried out by Transportation Management Systems, Inc. of Great Falls, Virginia and Alfred Benesch and Co. of Chicago, compare three different kinds of technology: upgrading the current Amtrak diesel locomotives to 125 miles per hour (mph), the French-style TGV train capable of speeds of 185 mph, and magnetically levitated trains (maglev) which travel at 300 mph.

The first federal grant for research and development of a high-speed, magnetically levitated train system was presented to Port Authority Transit of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania at a press conference in Pittsburgh on April 26. The proposed system would be based on advanced German technol-

ogy. U.S. Transportation Secretary Samuel Skinner presented a check for \$660,000 from the Urban Mass Transit Administration at the press conference. The federal grant will help finance a final study of a demonstration maglev line linking downtown Pittsburgh to the airport and is seen as the first branch of a regional maglev system, including Ohio, West Virginia, and Maryland, as well as a Pittsburgh-Philadelphia line and other connections in Pennsylvania.

John Kapala, chief operating officer of Maglev, Inc., the "private-public" consortium doing the study, promised: "When the study is done, we're going to have plans, alignments, cost estimates, and revenue studies. We're going to put a business plan together on how it can be financed. We feel the project is going to be economically driven. It will probably need an initial boost from public sources, and then, hopefully, we can get the private sector to kick in and get the steamroller moving."

Monetary Affairs

IMF goes after French franc zone

The finance ministers of the 13 member states of the French Franc Zone in Africa are currently meeting in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso under strong pressures from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that member countries should be able to devalue their currencies to meet their financial obligations. More than 30 African countries are currently undergoing IMF "adjustment" plans.

The IMF demand is tantamount to dismantling the French Franc Zone and destroying the last rampart against further looting of this area by the international financial institutions. The French Franc Zone is the last remnant of the Gaullist era in this region. The zone provides a fixed parity for African currencies vis-à-vis the French franc. It also provides convertibility between other currencies and the French franc, and via the French franc, access to international currency markets, while other Third World countries can only get foreign currencies through exports.

Technology

Japan plans 26 new 'Science Cities'

Japan is planning to build another 26 new cities based on the "Tsukuba model," with \$60 billion in investments slated for this decade. Funds will be solicited from private investors through various state incentives such as tax rebates and cheap credits, as well as free consulting services and a 30% state share in the funding of pioneer high-tech projects. The 26 new city projects will be spread out across Japan.

Tsukuba Science City, established 60 kilometers from Tokyo in 1965, absorbed investments of \$60 billion during the first 15 years of construction, and now has a population of 200,000. A second project, Kansai Science City, has been launched off Osaka, and is expected to require \$23 billion through completion.

Biological Holocaust

Unparalleled mass death threatens Africa

Officials of the World Health Organization have appealed for international help to combat the spread of epidemics in Africa. According to the WHO, 6 million Africans are infected with, and 700,000 are sick from, AIDS. By the year 2000, this number could grow to over 20 million, and AIDS is now spreading from East and Central to West and North Africa. "Whole villages are eradicated already," said the delegate of Sudan to a meeting of African health ministers.

Meanwhile, 4 million African children are dying every year from preventable or treatable diseases and infections, and 750,000 are dying each year from malaria. There are 90 million people sick with malaria. A cholera epidemic is spreading in southern Africa, from Angola and Zambia to Mozambique. The worst situation is in Mozambique and Mali, where 30% of all children are dying before reaching five years of age. About 150,000 women are dying every year in childbirth.

Yet, the health systems of African nations continue to be targeted for cuts by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

Meanwhile, mass starvation is threatening the Horn of Africa. The situation is so dramatic, that Kenya has called for an international conference in order to combat this development threatening their three northern neighbors, Sudan, Ethiopia, and Somalia. According to Kenya's President Daniel Arap Moi, non-governmental organizations, donor countries, and other aid organizations should come together and search for a solution. Half of the 50 million people living in this area are children.

Development

Polish leader calls for 'Marshall Plan'

Bronislaw Geremek, one of Polish Solidarnosc founder Lech Walesa's earliest collaborators, has attacked the "free market" orientation of Western nations' toward his country, and called for a new "Marshall Plan" for the nations of the East, including credits to enable them to export to the economically ailing Soviet Union.

Writing on the 200th anniversary of the first Polish constitution in 1791, he stated, "The challenge posed by the changes in Central Europe has not fully been countered by the West with a complex strategy like the American Marshall Plan for Western Europe in the postwar years. . . . Such an option has been offered by the Dienstbier Plan which envisaged Western credits for exports of the former Comecon states into the Soviet Union. This was a help for the U.S.S.R. as well as for the countries of Eastern Europe for whom the insolvency of the Soviet partner poses a dramatic threat at this time."

Free market deregulation of Eastern European economies will create chaos and destabilization, warns Geremek.

The \$15-20 billion Dienstbier Plan, named after Czechoslovak Foreign Minister Jiri Dienstbier, was first presented to the European Community summit in Dublin last year, but has found little support in the West.

● **EASTERN AIRLINE** retirees, 14,000 in all, may lose all their medical benefits. Eastern Airlines has asked U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Burton Lifland to relieve it of its obligation to pay \$400 per retiree per month for medical benefits, since it ceased revenue-making operations in January.

● **NUCLEAR ENERGY** could have prevented war in the Gulf, wrote French expert Edouard Parker in the April 30 *Le Figaro*. He asked, "How many people have died as a result of the lack of nuclear energy?" When Italy, Sweden, and Austria were deciding to shut down their nuclear programs, "who dared to compare the nuclear risk (nearly zero in the West) with the real cost in terms of human lives of giving up this energy source, with the ensuing oil shocks, indebtedness, unemployment, misery in the Third World, and now war?"

● **INDIA** and the Philippines signed an agreement for the peaceful uses of atomic energy during the visit of Indian President R. Venkataraman to Manila, which began May 5.

● **PAKISTAN** will not give up its nuclear research program, even if it has to suffer hardships through loss of foreign aid. "They desire that we forego or bargain on our peaceful nuclear program, which we shall never do," declared Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif at a rally in the northwestern town of Bannu.

● **BRITAIN'S** efforts to "reform" its National Health Service "in the image of Adam Smith" are backfiring, and may cause the Tories election problems, writes Ian Aitken in the April 29 *Guardian*. The "illusion" of how wonderful the privatization of the hospitals would be was "comprehensively blown away last week when Guy's Hospital, one of London's most famous teaching hospitals, said it was so deeply in debt that it would be axing 600 jobs and ditching no fewer than 25 medical specialties."