

# Cambodian reconstruction is now on the agenda

by Linda de Hoyos

On Oct. 23, the warring factions of Cambodia will arrive in Paris for a peace conference and signing of a treaty to end their 12-year conflict. The conference, which had been scheduled for November possibly, has been moved up in time, as the newly formed Supreme National Council of Cambodia, chaired by Prince Norodom Sihanouk, has completed negotiations for the 70% disarmament of the Phnom Penh army and the resistance coalition comprised of Prince Sihanouk's ANS, the Khmer Rouge, and Son Sann's Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF), and for the holding of national elections. On Sept. 28, Prince Sihanouk addressed the U.N. General Assembly as the Cambodian head of state.

A settlement in Cambodia brings to an end in fact 21 years of ceaseless internal warfare, since the U.S. government instigated a coup against Sihanouk in 1970. The reconstruction of the country is now on the agenda.

On the eve of the final negotiating conference at Pattaya, Thailand, early in September, the Japanese government announced that once the treaty is signed, Japan will hold a conference on the reconstruction of Cambodia.

## Cambodia's infrastructure

Limited to servicing an agricultural economy even in the best of times, Cambodia's infrastructure has been decimated, first by the U.S. carpet-bombing of the country (1970-73); then by the Khmer Rouge's murderous rule (1975-79); and then by 12 more years of civil war. Despite its favorable climate and water resources, Cambodia is not currently food self-sufficient.

Further exposing urgent infrastructural requirements, the Mekong River in September spilled over its banks throughout its lower reaches in Cambodia. According to Phnom Penh Prime Minister Hun Sen, the floods have destroyed 243,000 hectares of rice, 100,000 homes, and affected 615,000 people. Cambodia, he said, requires 15,000 metric tons of rice seed for re-planting, or it will face starvation next year.

The centerpiece of a reconstruction plan for Cambodia is the Mekong River Development Project. The Mekong plan

has been under consideration since 1954, and envisions the construction of a Mekong Cascade of seven dams on the river, as it travels through Laos and Cambodia. Estimated to cost only \$21 billion, the Cascade would not only harness the river, but would also provide hydroelectric power to be shared by Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

The Mekong Committee, formed in 1957 under the auspices of the United Nations, will be meeting in early November. The catchment area of the Mekong, the world's 12th longest river, is 600,000 square kilometers, covering almost all of Laos and Cambodia, one-third of Thailand, and one-fifth of Vietnam.

"We have firmly advocated feasibility and pre-feasibility studies to ensure these [the Mekong Cascade] are 'clean' projects," Mekong Committee executive director Chuck Lankester told the Thai press, in expectation of an environmentalist onslaught against the dams.

Japanese diplomatic sources say Japan is prepared to help finance the Mekong project. In addition, Mekong River cooperation was a part of a 100-minute discussion between Chinese Premier Li Peng and Thai Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun in late September, and China has for the first time indicated that it is willing to cooperate with Thailand in developing the upper reaches of the river.

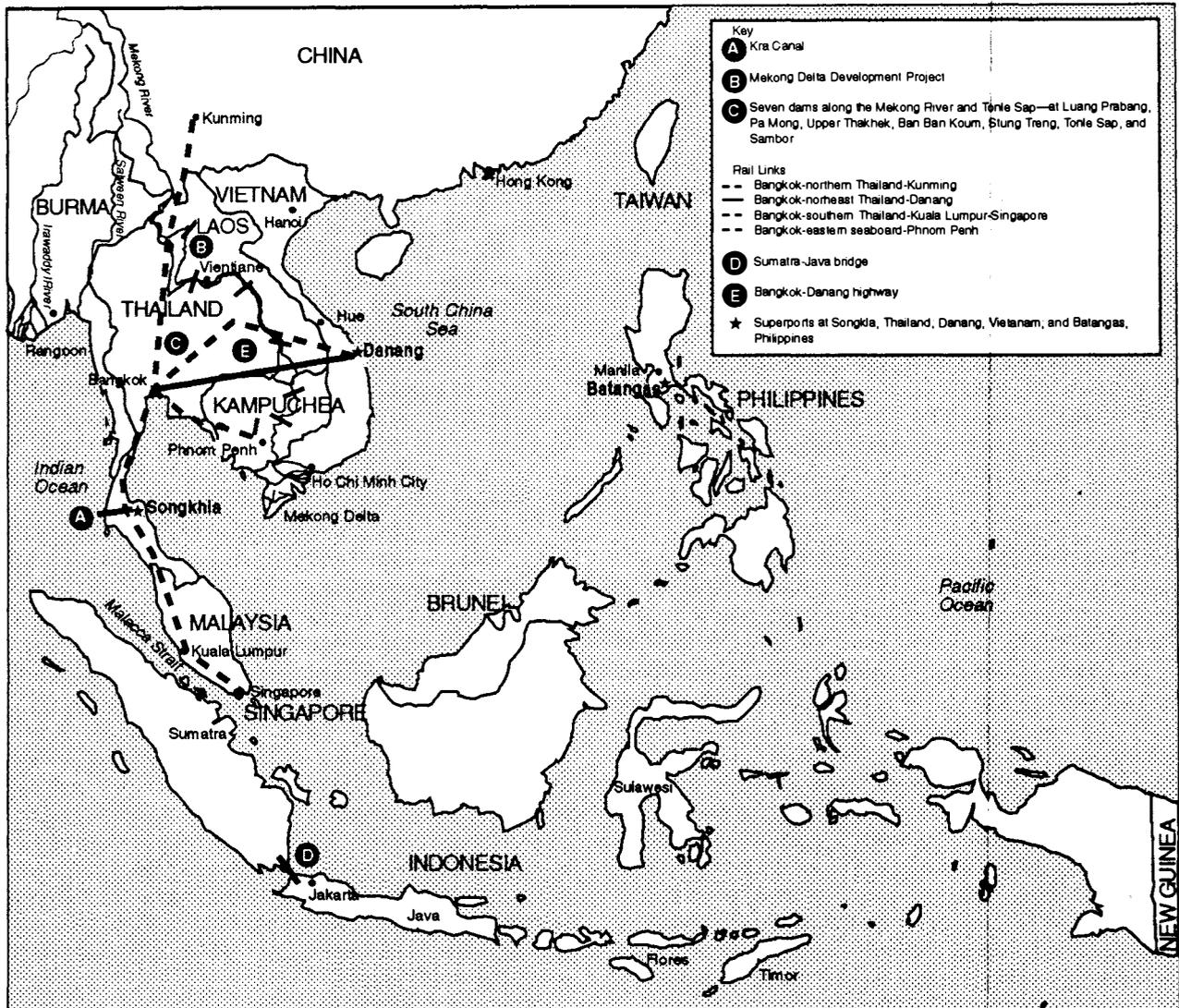
## Southeast Asian integration

The Cambodian settlement also opens the possibility for the economic vitalization of Vietnam and Laos, and the integration of all three Indochinese countries into ASEAN, the political-economic coalition of non-communist countries of Southeast Asia. It thereby opens up tremendous possibilities for regional cooperation that could take full advantage of Southeast Asia's rich resources.

A number of projects are already on the drawing boards, with an emphasis on transport, to open up the region to full utilization (see map). These include:

- A superhighway linking Bangkok, Thailand, to the Vietnamese port of Danang.
- Rail links from Bangkok to northern Thailand to Da-

## Development projects for Southeast Asia



nang; from Bangkok to Kunming in China; from Bangkok through southern Thailand to Malaysia and Singapore; and from Bangkok along the eastern coast into Cambodia.

- The Kra Canal through the Isthmus of Kra in Thailand. In combination with the creation of superports in Danang, Vietnam; Songkhla, Thailand; and Batangas, Philippines, this would speed the flow of resources and commodities through a region whose economic growth is objectively at a take-off point.

- A bridge linking Java and Sumatra in Indonesia.

It is unlikely, however, that any of these projects will find aid from the United States and the consortia that it dominates.

The World Bank, it was announced Sept. 11, has postponed a decision for a loan for the Pak Mun Dam in Thailand. The basis for the decision is a recent study by the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID), which says that the U.S. should not support the dam because the environmental impact studies were "out-of-date, flawed, and inadequate." A group of 150 protesters against the dam, who demonstrated outside the World Bank office in Bangkok Sept. 10 against the relocation of villagers the dam would cause, received substantial publicity. The Thai government, however, has indicated that it is determined to go ahead with the project, which would provide desperately needed hydropower.