

**L**INKING Asia and Europe by road, sea or rail has been a dream for explorers and engineers through generations.

Starting with Marco Polo, adventurers have trekked down from the west to China through deserts, snow-capped mountains, vast rivers and remote villages, to reach their destinations.

In the early twentieth century, the move to set up rail links between Asia and Europe took shape. There was the famous Paris to Pusan rail link, which took passengers and cargo from the Korean city to the French capital. This was very much a part of the Trans-Siberian rail link, which remains an active link between the former Soviet Union and China.

Elsewhere in the region, the Orient Express, that once linked Europe with Turkey, has been partially revived recently. In a way, the Orient Express is only a tourist attraction that has captured the old romantic flavour of a journey through parts of Europe.

It is against this background that an American, with extensive working links in Asia, has begun working on a proposal to link Europe with the farthest part of Asia, China.

But an Euro-Asian Railroad? Can this dream be materialised?

It is very much feasible, asserts Stan Matthew, and this is easily possible by linking the existing railway systems.

Stan Matthew, an American who now lives in India, sees tremendous possibilities of what the proposed link would do in changing the relationship between the West and the East. Such a link will have an impact on Asia in the fields of trade, commerce, tourism and even in relations among the nations in the region.

"The Euro-Asian Railroad will be the 'Railroad of Reconciliation,'" he says "and it will come as a dividend of the end of the Cold War".

This bold 10-year initiative, he adds, would link Euro-Rail and the existing railroad systems in the Commonwealth of Independent States, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, The People's Republic of China, Thailand, Malaysia and Vietnam.

Only two new railway lines will be needed to connect the existing systems, all the way from Hamburg, Germany to Shanghai, China, he says.

The existing railway systems of Europe come up to Tertz in Uzbekistan at the Afghanistan border. The new railroad construction will be needed through Afghanistan from Mazar-i-Sharif to Kabul to Khyber Pass, while the second construction will be required from Dibrugarh in Northern India to Myitkya to Ruili in North Myanmar, to Kunming in Southern China.

Junctions of the proposed Euro-Asian Railroad would link Tehran, Bombay, Madras, Calcutta, Dhaka, Rangoon, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Hanoi (Ho Chi Minh City) and Guangdong.

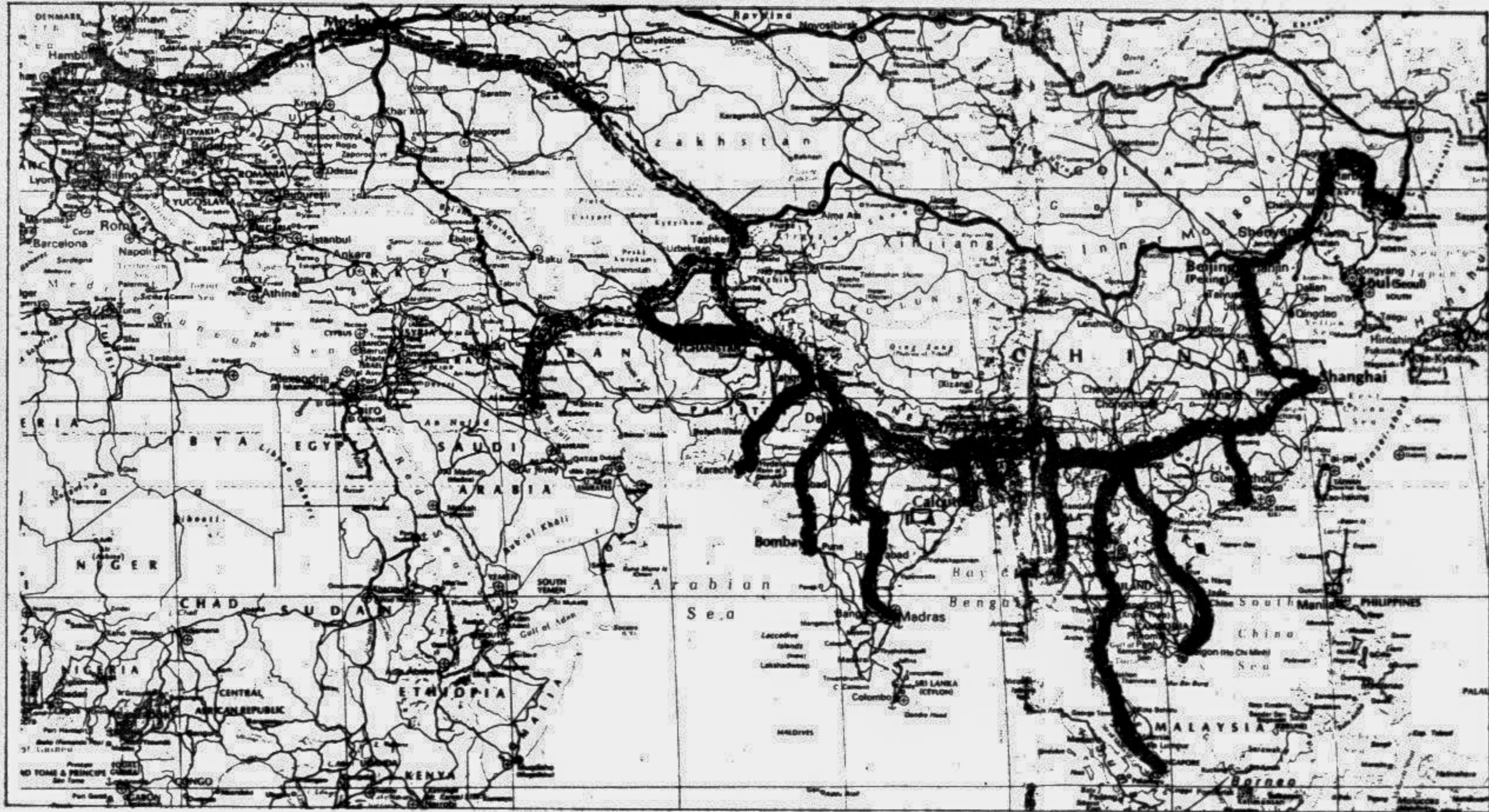
"The railroad would be a mighty artery of trade and

## Euro-Asian Railroad: A Unique Visualisation

"The Euro-Asian Railroad project will help protect Indo-Pak detente, and this is where Bangladesh can play a crucial role," says Stan Matthew, an American national who dreamt of and is actively pursuing his unique idea of linking countries and cities of the two continents by the single network of a grand railway. In an exclusive interview with S Y Bakht, senior Reporter of The Daily Star, he stressed, the proposed international railway link "is both feasible and prospective" for the nations concerned.



Stan Matthew



tourism between the ventricles of the Asian heart," he boldly points out.

Yet would the conflicts in some parts of the region allow such a project to be launched?

Matthew acknowledges the problem and identifies two possible areas where the proposed project can run into obstacles. But he is optimistic that a solution can be found with mutual benefits in mind.

"New railroad construction across Afghanistan will fuel the rebuilding effort of the war-torn country and will also help reconcile the Uzbek, Tajik, Hazaras, and the Pushtoons, whose weapons will be exchanged for work tools," he explains.

And it will also require the creation of a "truce corridor" among the insurgent Nagas and Kachins, with the Burmese, on the basis of "enlightened self-interest," he says.

He envisages that the "tribals on India's North East Frontier, specially the Nagas, will work on the railroad and expect a Thailand-style tourism, while, under the truce, the Kachin troops will withdraw to mountain fortifications and watch cautiously, while Kachin crews work with Burmese and Chinese on the North Myanmar Railroad Crossing".

The Euro-Asian Railroad project will also help promote Indo-Pak detente and this is where Bangladesh can play a

crucial role, he says.

"The super-charged political atmosphere between India and Pakistan necessitates third party resolutions and Bangladesh, as a founding member of SAARC, by espousing the Euro-Asian Railroad can greatly help in speeding up Indo-Pak detente," he adds.

To break the Indo-Pak impasse, he suggests, Bangladesh can also offer the Euro-Asian Railroad proposal as a revised route for the UN-ESCAP Railroad plan formalised in the late 60s, to link the coastal cities of Asia by rail.

"A comprehensive Indo-Pak detente will not only speed economic growth and a higher standard of living," he asserts "it will defuse the explosive religio-ethnic situations that threaten both nations."

In a recent letter to Benazir Bhutto, the chairperson of the Pakistan Parliament's Foreign Affairs committee, Matthew appeals to her as "a pro-SAARC Pakistani leader" to carefully examine this concept of the Euro-Asian Railroad.

"Your endorsement of the 'Railroad of reconciliation' idea and a call for a SAARC outreach beyond mountain barriers for trade and tourism will capture the Asian imaginations and divert the attention from the religious firebrands," he says in the letter, adding "let's keep SAARC on track". He suggests that economic relations and benefits among the Sub-continental countries can further be

enhanced, by using the rail links with East-West cargo transit in a new computerised SAARC customs union.

Cooperation among the countries of the region can be enhanced by placing 'top priority' on completing the Euro-Asian Railroad project with Pakistan assisting construction across Afghanistan, from Khyber Pass, and India helping in the construction across North Myanmar from Dibrugarh, he suggests.

"The last section, in China, would be most difficult," he says where Chinese engineers will be required to do "the impossible" and bridge 10 'V' gorges in Yunnan 1500-2000 feet deep, to extend the Chinese system westward from Kunming.

"But the Chinese engineers are major achievers," he adds optimistically.

Well, even if the grand project is initiated, would it not involve massive investments and where will the funds come from?

"It will be expensive," he readily acknowledges "but the logic of linking the existing railroad systems of Europe, CIS, South Asia, Southeast Asia and South China is overwhelming".

Matthew proposes the setting up of a "Railroad Consortium" to fund the construction of new rail tracks across Afghanistan, as, he points out, the country is war-

raged, and does not have much resources.

Countries along the rail link route, he suggests, can make budget allocations for a period of 10 years to modernise the existing trunk lines of each individual country.

He also points out to a recent Far Eastern Economic Review report, that identifying Asia's real demand for physical infrastructure will fuel lending in the 90s.

The report quotes Shiro Yokoi of Japan's Long-Term Credit Bank as estimating "a need to spend 2.5 trillion US dollars on renewing Asian infrastructure before the end of the decade".

The Review report also notes an OECD estimate "that there will be a need to transfer something like Four trillion US dollars of financial resources to the former Soviet block over 10 years".

Matthew suggests integration of the Euro-Asian Railroad project with these massive spendings in infrastructural projects in Asia and Europe.

What made him think about such a grand idea and what attracted him to Asia?

His interests in Asia, he says, grew when he specialised on this huge continent as part of his graduate degree in International Relations at the University of California, at Los Angeles.

Later, after completing his post-graduate studies, in Comparative Religion in 1953,

he began a 15 year research work on Integrated Philosophy. "I understand myself to be a Gandhian," he says.

He was involved in inner-city uplift work in Chicago, Miami and New Orleans for well over a decade. He ran Interfaith missions involving recruitment and skills training to the inner-city minority poor and rehabilitation of run-down neighbourhoods, with the help of local businesses, he explains.

In the '70s, he points out, he also became involved in some social projects in Latin America, and after completing the inner-city programme in Miami in 1985, he decided to join the Peace Corps.

"As I was nearing the age of 60," he says, "after I satisfied them about my health, they 'kicked me for posting in the Philippines, where I was one of only 10, out of a batch of 100, to volunteer for the upland tribal region in the mountains of Luzon".

This is where he got involved in the tribal integration projects and was also appointed to three other neighbouring tribes, he adds.

During the late '80s, he points out, under a USAID project he came to teach English at Yonok College in the Lampang province of Northern Thailand, where he also helped set the Southeast Asia Institute for Upland Development.

In 1989, when the Cold War

was coming to an end, he says, and just around the time when the then Thai Prime Minister, Chatichai Choonhavan announced to turn the Southeast Asian region from a "war zone to a trade zone", he also got involved in an advocacy group for interior infrastructure to support the "trade zone" idea.

"As a consultant with the Chiang Rai Chamber of Commerce I advocated building of road links between the Thai province and Kunming, Yunnan in China," he adds.

Around this period, he says, he became fascinated by the possibilities of the post-Cold War era benefits, primarily economic, and the importance of infrastructure development in that scenario.

"Originally, I thought about a 'string of pearls' highway from Dushanbe to Bombay."

Two of his articles on interior infrastructure development, primarily on highways, was also published in the Bangkok Post during that period, he adds.

After doing some initial research work, he says, he found that the rail-link idea was more feasible and much more beneficial.

"I am really grateful to my 'maker' for being around in this particular time-span from the Second World War through the Cold War detente and the fruits of detente," he adds "and that is what the Euro-Asian Railroad is all about—inter-

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cultural and commercial benefits." He travelled to India during the early part of last year, for a lecture series at the Punjab University.

"The centre discouraged my stay at Chandigarh and from there, ignoring a warning from the US State Department, I travelled through the land border via Amritsar to survey the Pak-Afghan border," he recalls. In Pakistan, he also floated the idea of the Euro-Asian Railroad.

He later visited New Delhi and floated the idea of the railroad project to officials in some embassies.

He is now working as a consultant on tribal development projects for the government of Orissa and is based in Gopalpur. He is also associated with the University of Calcutta's Centre for South and Southeast Asian Studies in 'trade advantage' research.

He is now in Dhaka, he says, to renew his visa for India. At 65, he just passed the official retirement age, and is now living on his Social Security benefits. "It's not a big amount back home, but it is a good amount of money to live in this part of the world."

But, will the idea be accepted by the countries concerned? Doesn't it sound a little too utopian or some sort of a grand vision?

"It may sound Utopian," he says, "but the logic is there for anyone to judge. Plus, there will be profound benefits for millions of Asians and Europeans, as I visualise, swift trains carrying tourists and containerised cargos."

Although the proposals have not been introduced in official channels, he says, it has been well-received by Afghan leaders in Peshawar and Delhi, the president of the Lahore Chamber of Commerce; commercial attaches in eight embassies based in Delhi; the Indian MP from Nagaland and geo-political researchers at the Punjab and Calcutta universities; and at the Bangladesh Institute of Strategic Studies.

Matthew recalls his meeting, during the visit to Pakistan, with Gul Muhammad Gulzai, the political strategist of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezbe-Islami Party of Afghanistan.

"Gulzai endorsed the idea and agreed to forward to Jalalabad the proposal for post-war railroad construction," he adds.

Prominent Pakistani industrialist and President of the Lahore Chamber of Commerce Salahuddin Ahmed Sahab, he says, "also showed keen interest in linking Afghan and Central Asian economies with Pakistan's."

The Lahore Chamber President, Matthew adds, "assured that he will convey to the policy-makers the chamber's strong interest in the funding and engineering of the Afghanistan railroad."

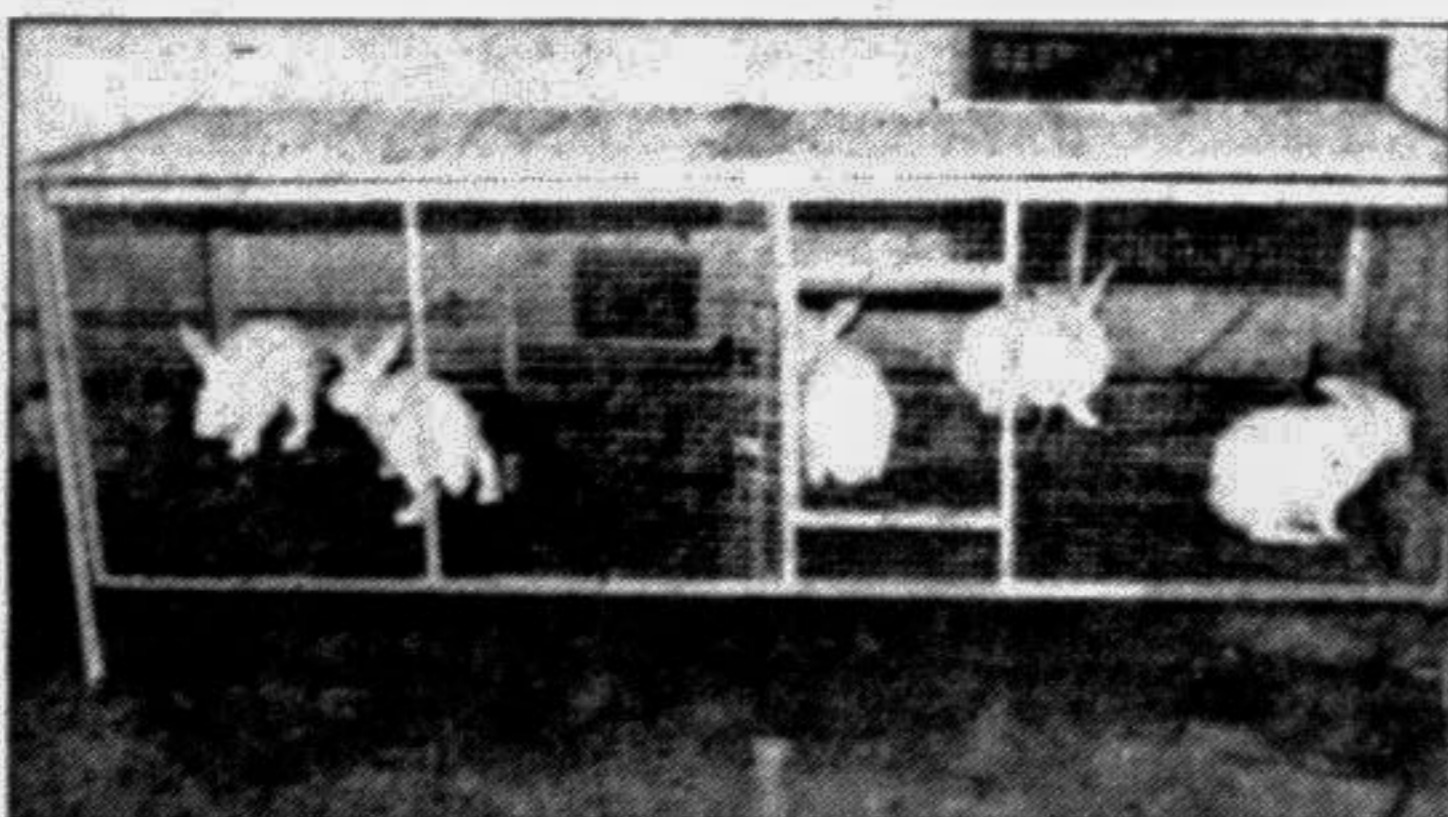
Recognising the importance of Amritsar to trade and tourism, he points out, the City's Mayor Om Prakash Soni has volunteered to secure the municipal council endorsement for the Euro-Asian Railroad is all about—inter-

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### Rabbit: A Source of Income and Protein

## Something Unusual Must Take More Time to Become a Habit

by Masud Arif



A rabbit farm at Ghatail thana health complex.



The INFS distributing a pair of rabbits to a village women's committee member.

Within this period, the rabbits have produced more than 30 offspring in three phases, though most of them died in the first phases.

Azad distributed some young ones to the villagers for more raising. He has planned to distribute more to the villagers for its promotion.

"In future I will sale them in the market", Azad mentioned. Area people have become interested in rabbit farming after seeing Azad's farm, some thana employees and villagers remarked.

Shatsanga Asram employees in Pakuria, two miles from the thana complex, are also farming rabbits there.

The INFS former Director Professor Shah Md Keramat Ali who is also a physician and Shukania Shaha, animal resource scientist of the institut addressed the village people pointing out different views or rabbit farming.

They discussed about how a rabbit farm could easily be made in the house premises at a low cost. Professor Keramat also discussed the version about rabbit in the Holy Quran.

The INFS has already successfully established more than 10 small-size rabbit farms in different parts of the country. They are in Mantiganj, Ghatail in Tangail, Sripur in Gazipur district, Chandina in Comilla, Jhenidah and Rangpur. Each of these small size farms presently contain about 30 rabbits in an average which was initiated with only two or three pairs ten months before.

Besides, five or eight young rabbits have already been distributed among the people from these farms during this

period for further raising.

The Grameen Bank is also supporting and working with the INFS in promoting rabbit farm across the country.

Besides, the INFS has arranged several motivation

campaigns in different areas and also conducted training for the village co-operative women and other concerned for rapid growing of rabbit farming in the country.

Wildlife experts observed that the country's climate is in favour of rapid growth of rab-

bits. The people should be encouraged in raising rabbit as it is endowed with high reproductive system, the experts felt.

It is not only income generating but nutritious, the experts said. They mentioned

## The Backyard Mini Meat Factory

by Hans Rolloos

FIFTEEN years ago I was travelling in an old minibus with my friends Mamur Suriaatma-dja and Deasy Tuwo in West-Java in Indonesia. Riding through a beautiful landscape of green rice fields and surrounded by dormant volcanoes we were discussing a newspaper report that said that seventy per cent of the Indonesian population, especially people living in rural areas, is undernourished. The main deficiency, the newspaper said, is lack of protein. Most people eat sufficient staple food in the form of rice of cassava, but rarely have meat on their plate. Meat, fish and eggs are luxury items which only a few people can afford. Passing through villages, where sharecropping farmers were harvesting their meager crop was wondered what could be done to solve this problem. Undernourishment seriously affects people, especially if they lack protein in their diet.

It means that adults have less mental energy and resistance against diseases. At a young age children are affected by a distorted development of their brain functions. In the past various international organisations such as UNICEF

and WHO, and local government departments had initiated a number of nutrition programmes in Indonesia. However, these programmes had not been very effective as they mainly dealt with the free distribution of food items such



A proud Javanese rabbit breeder.

that the rabbit is used for rich source of protein in other parts of the world. A female matured rabbit can produce more than 40 offspring a year and takes less than a quarter of food energy than a cattle to produce one kilogram of meat.

Besides, a full grown rabbit needs only 130 grams grass and vegetable rejects to live.

Experts, however, stressed that more steps should be taken to accustom the mass with a rabbit-habit.

as milk powder and sorghum. Once the distribution stopped the people went back to their former status of malnutrition.

Would there be a possibility of enabling poor people to produce their own source of protein? My friend Mamur Suriaatmadja suggested the promotion of high breed chickens. Deasy Tuwo did not like the idea. What about chicken feed, she gave as comment, do you think that people have enough money to buy feed from the feed mills? And then, what about diseases, chickens are sensitive animals? No, I am in favour of goats. Mamur and could not support her. Goats need a lot of grass and when they roam around freely they are able to destroy any green plant or young tree, they meet. Also they yearly offspring of goats is limited. Only one or two young per year. It was clear what we needed was: a low-

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