

Transoceanic Highway Brings Asia Much Closer to Brazil

Contributed by Ana Paula Marra
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Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, speaking in Puerto Maldonado, Peru, yesterday, for the laying of the cornerstone of the highway that will link Brazil to the Pacific Ocean, said the project would turn a dream into reality and write a new chapter in the history of the continent's peoples.

The Transoceanic Highway leaves Brazil in the state of Acre, crosses some 1,100 kilometers (684 miles) in Peru and reaches its final destination in Peruvian ports on the Pacific coast.

"We are moving out of the preaching into the practice. This is idea of physical integration becoming concrete reality. We must remember that people have died for this dream, the dream of Latin American integration," said Lula.

The highway will stretch for a total of over 2,600 kilometers. The stretch that work begins on extends for slightly more than 1,000 km. and will cost US\$ 700 million. Contractors from Brazil, Bolivia and Peru will build the highway.

With the Pacific coast connection Brazil should experience a surge in business with Asia, not to mention closer commercial ties with its continental neighbors to the west.

The Rodovia Interoceânica is one of the priorities in the South American Regional Infrastructure Integration Initiative (IIRSA) which was created in 2000.

Also part of the IIRSA is the Consensus Implementation Agenda (Agenda de Implementação Consensuada), which was drawn up last December at the III South American Presidential Summit. It contains no less than 335 projects, with an estimated total cost of US\$ 48 billion.

"This is strategic planning for integration. We identified bottlenecks in communications, energy and transportation. And after four years of discussion, we have a sharply focused and selective list of projects," explains Ariel Peres, of the Ministry of Planning, who is also the Brazilian coordinator for IIRSA.

Further discussions on South American integration will take place at the South American Community of Nations summit scheduled for September 29 and 30 in Brasilia.

The organization was also formed last December at the III South American Presidential Summit. "Physical integration of infrastructure is one of the three pillars of the Community, along with economic integration and strengthening democratic values," explained Peres.

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