

# Sino-Thai high-speed rail finally gets on track

Premier Li says new route will improve regional infrastructure, strengthen bilateral cooperation

By PAN MENGQI

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The construction of the long-awaited high-speed railway connecting Thailand and China started on Dec 21.

Premier Li Keqiang sent a letter of congratulation, saying the China-Thailand Railway is a flagship project of Belt and Road Initiative and will improve the level of regional infrastructure construction.

First proposed by President Xi Jinping in 2013, the Belt and Road Initiative is China's ambitious plan to develop a trade and infrastructure network across the ancient Silk Road routes.

Li said he hoped both sides can maintain close cooperation and finish the construction of the first phase with high quality, and push forward the second phase of the project and strive for an early realization of the interconnection of the China-Thailand Railway and the China-Laos Railway.

Thanin Somboon, Thai director-general of department of highways, said in a news release on Dec 19 that the construction of the first 3.5-kilometer section will be a great chance for Thai and Chinese engineers to learn from each other.

On Nov 24, Thai Transport Minister Arkhom Termpitayapaisith said the construction of the remaining

249 km would start gradually after being put out to tender next year, and the full railway is set for completion in 2021.

The first phase of the high-speed project, linking Bangkok and the northeastern province of Nakhon Ratchasima, is set to cost 179 billion baht (\$5.4 billion) and would become Thailand's first high-speed railway with a maximum speed of 250 km/h.

Under the deal, the Thai government will pay for the construction by issuing bonds or seeking loans from banks, said Arkhom, adding that China will design it and provide engineers, track systems and equipment.

According to the proposal, the railway is expected to bring about 2 million more Chinese tourists to Thailand every year and will make it easier for Thailand to export its products.

Xu Liping, director of Southeast Asian studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said the railway is a pilot project in ASEAN countries and it will stimulate alongside regions comprehensively.

The second phase of the project, which will link up with a China-Laos line that is currently under construction, is allowing travelers to make the trip between Bangkok and the Lao capital of Vientiane in just four hours, and even travel all the way

up to Kunming in China's Yunnan province.

The railway will make Thailand become a transportation hub in ASEAN countries, Xu said.

In the future, the railway will be extended southward to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and Singapore, as part of the pan-Asia railway network spanning from Kunming through Laos and connecting Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore.

Zhu Xijun, general manager of the Southeast Asia Company of China Railway Construction, said: "After the railway is put into use, people will enjoy a much more convenient transportation between China and Thailand."



Thailand's Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha (center) attends the ground-breaking ceremony for the Bangkok-Nong Khai High Speed Rail project in Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand, on Dec 21. ATHIT PERAWONGMETHA / REUTERS

# Shipbuilders from China ride wave

Country's rebounding sector tops world, exceeds S Korea in orders for first time in seven years

By REN XIAOJIN

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Orders for China's rebounding shipbuilding industry reached the top place in the world in the past 11 months, surpassing its counterpart South Korea, according to an international industrial analysis agency.

Data released by British shipbuilding and marine analysis agency Clarkson Research Services on Dec 8 show that from January to November, China's shipbuilding order volume totaled 7.13 million compensated gross tons (CGT) from 324 vessels, followed by South Korea which received 5.74 CGT.

It is the first time in the past seven years that China has exceeded South Korea in shipbuilding orders.

The data also show that China's shipbuilding industry secured 36.3 percent of the global market, 7 percentage points more than South Korea, which accounts for 29.4 percent of global orders.

Chinese shipyards have been performing well this year. In August, French group CMA CGM ordered nine 22,000 twenty-foot equivalent units container vessels from Shanghai Waigaoqiao Shipbuilding Co and Hudong-Zhonghua Shipbuilding Co.

In October, China State Shipbuilding Corp, China Investment Corp and Carnival Corp, the world's biggest cruise operator, signed an agreement to invest a total 25.5 billion yuan (\$3.85 billion) to build a super luxury cruise ship. It was also the first order of this kind that Chinese shipbuilding companies had ever received.

Dong Liwan, a shipbuilding industry researcher at Shanghai Maritime University, said with the orders for high-value-added ships continuing to go to Chinese shipyards, their South Korean competitors will definitely feel the pinch.

China's shipbuilding business is also moving from quantity to quality, as the industry is becoming more



A technician directs the hauling of a vessel at a shipyard in Chongqing, Southwest China. RAO GUOJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

intelligent and environmentally friendly.

"China's shipbuilding industry is realizing the transformation with its hardworking spirit to achieve technical breakthrough and innovation," said Sun Licheng, president of the

China Classification Society.

"While maintaining growth, it is realizing production mode transformation, structural adjustment and transformation, and upgrading, and reinforcing China's shipbuilding status in the world."

Sun said the goal is to become a strong shipbuilding country by 2020, and to accelerate the development of advanced intelligent manufacturing and industrial equipment capability.

At the recent All China Maritime Conference & Exhibition, China State Shipbuilding Corp delivered the world's first smart ship, *Great Intelligence*, with a loading capacity of 38,800 metric tons.

Meanwhile, COSCO Dalian shipyard has signed orders with Thordon Bearings, a marine industry solution provider, for its water lubricated propeller shaft bearings, which can use seawater as the lubrication medium instead of oil that could cause pollution.

Alex Li, managing director of CY Engineering Co, Thordon Bearings' partner in China, said the latest order is a significant sign showing Chinese shipbuilders' commitment to reducing industry-borne emissions and pollutants.