

A Decaying Life-line

Habits die hard. Mental habits die harder. For a safe journey people prefer to take the train...

The impressive, in fact revolutionary, Intercity timings — somewhat inhibited by the great Tongi tragedy — and the finest and best evocative names...

We could boast of having the railway very early — back in 1862. After that it grew at the rate 30 km of new tracks per annum for 85 years...

Pushing up fares every now and then — 10 times in 19 years to be precise, or mounting pin-pricks of a campaign against ticketless travelling...

One way of shirking this onerous patriotic job is to look for culprits among the railwaymen. It is not for the petty thievery that the railway is in its dying throes...

There is good answer to all that ails the railway. If the government will only want to will that it live, it will live and grow and contribute.

Tribute to Quamrul

The recent publication of Professor Borhanuddin Khan Jahangir's tribute to the late artist Quamrul Hassan is an event of some significance...

Quamrul Hassan is more than a name, much more than a mere artist. In life as in death, Quamrul symbolises the spirit that drives and inspires us to rebel against everything that degrades man's sense of dignity...

Hopefully, we can now look forward to more initiatives by official bodies such as Shilpakala Academy to publish such high quality works on celebrated artists, poets, authors of this country.

SINGAPORE, an Asian economic tiger, is looking for the x-factor that will keep it ahead of the pack.

Last April, addressing the Singapore International Chamber of Commerce, Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong sounded a little daring when he said: "Adam Smith attributed economic growth to the 'animal spirit' of entrepreneurs."

Singapore already has one of the best seaports in the world — the busiest, it claims. It certainly has the most modern airline, its fleet constantly renewed. Perhaps the best airport, too. Aitropolis, they call it. Terminals 1 and 2 together.

On one of my recent visits, from touchdown to getting into a taxi, I cleared the Aitropolis in 15 minutes. If that's not being efficient, tell me what is.

The best armed forces? I don't know. I don't care. Some of the best roads anywhere are in Singapore, some of the best greens, certainly some of the best shopping malls, and decidedly some of the best services.

Having achieved all that, Singapore is now looking ahead at the next phase, the next leap in the competition to stay ahead, the next lap in its economic development, when says the Government, its striving for excellence will

Singapore: The Next Lap

remain undiminished, yet life will be little more relaxed.

In that phase, Singapore wants to entrench itself as an international hub city. The idea is simple and quite down-to-earth: since Singapore can't exist on its own, it must exist for others. Let others come and use Singapore as best as they can.

Of course, there are certain things Singapore will never be. For example, it will never be a haven for laundered money. And there will always be a degree of control on how you conduct your business in Singapore.

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surprisingly practical and pliable. Its leaders have demonstrated an uncanny sense of what works and what does not. One has only to look at its enormous economic success to find the proof that they have been right.

The next lap is going to be a period of vigorous international marketing, seeking

business, selling Singapore's efficiency and tradition of hard work, putting on a smiling economic face, and trying to remove the "Ugly Singaporean" stigma that the island republic's remarkable economic success has given rise to.

Of this effort, the recently

OPEN EYE: BY VEDETTE

established Singapore International Foundation is a part. The Foundation has been set up with the express desire to improve the country's image abroad, to sell Singapore as an international city.

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As a government-produced office-table book, "Singapore: The Next Lap," is being distributed all over the world. The "animal spirit" that the younger Lee talked about is becoming manifest in the obvious effort to live down Singapore's concentration camp image.

The idea is to internationalize Singapore and the Singaporean psyche. The question

of image is important to us," says George Yeo, Minister of Information and the Arts. "We should not adopt double standards. We should be good citizens of the world."

Also part of the effort is the Export Institute of Singapore, which has been set up to train a pool of some 600 interna-

beer cans, discarded cartons, cigarette stubs. The Singapore River has been cleaned up. You can actually fish in it or take \$66 river cruises in the pale green water.

Through the sedate, government-built housing estates, where most of 9-to-5 Singaporeans live, the nightly sound of karaoke is sweeping like a

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Western Sahara Gears up for Crucial Referendum

Ted Morello and Allan Thompson write respectively from United Nations and Laayoune (Western Sahara)

For years a debilitating struggle has been waged for control of the former Spanish territory of Western Sahara. The two main protagonists, Morocco and the Polisario Front have agreed to abide by the results of a referendum to be undertaken and supervised by, the United Nations.

Western Sahara



Ambassador Johannes Manz of Switzerland. The Morocco-Polisario accord was a diplomatic triumph for Perez de Cuellar. Even before he became secretary-general, he had a personal hand in the lengthy and stubborn negotiations that eventually brought the warring sides together.

virtual abandonment of the "walking wall", an ingenious military device once reportedly manned by as many as 100,000 Moroccan troops. The idea was to squeeze the guerrillas out of the Western Sahara and keep them out.

Once the enclosed area was sanitised, the walls were expanded outward concentrically and eventually were merged into a single line.

In its final configuration, the wall consisted of a 2,400 km sand-and-rock barrier, stone bunkers, artillery emplacements and pillboxes. The outer approaches were under constant surveillance by sophisticated electronic detection devices which, as a Moroccan captain claimed, "could spot a jackal at 10 kilometres."

The territory in dispute is bounded by Morocco to the north, Algeria to the northeast, Mauritania to the south and the Atlantic Ocean to the west. It has a few widely scattered population centres, but is primarily inhabited by nomads who live in tents and herd their goats and camels across the barren land in search of pasturage.

The Polisario Front considers itself the heir to anticolonial resistance movements that date back to 1884, when the Spanish moved into the territory. The last major armed challenge to Madrid's occupation came in 1957-58, when the Army of Liberation waged an unsuccessful uprising.

The UN came into the picture in 1965 when the General Assembly adopted its first decolonisation resolution. The following year, the Assembly for the first time called for self-determination to be exercised through a referendum.

When the Polisario was founded in 1973 to wage war against the occupation admin-

istration, the target was Spain. Following an equivocal World Court ruling on the dispute, Spain announced plans for a referendum to decide the territory's future.

However, Morocco's King Hassan II, asserting that the Western Sahara was an integral part of Morocco, sent 350,000 civilians into the territory on a "Green March" aimed at solidifying the claim.

The day after Spain formally ended its presence on Feb. 26, 1976, the rebel Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) was proclaimed with Polisario support.

Morocco and Mauritania agreed to divide the territory between them. But in 1979, Mauritania signed a peace treaty with the Polisario Front renouncing its claim.

In centres like Laayoune and Smara, where Morocco has spent millions on roads, schools, hospitals and housing, the upcoming referendum is considered to be something of a fait accompli.

"There is no difference between the people of the north and south," said Saleh Zemrag, the Moroccan-born governor of Laayoune. "There is not one tribe that doesn't have an extension on the other side. The common denominator which unites us is the king, 'Zemrag said."

"King Hassan has done well for us. He's built things, he's worked a lot," said Bouremma Aktouan, a Sahrawi who runs a fabric and housewares shop in Laayoune's main market street. "There is no difference between Moroccans and Saharawis, those who say differently don't know their history."

gone. Bugs street is no longer missed. Good shopping and good eating are making all the difference.

Soon after Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong took office, film censorship began to be loosened. Film nudity is no longer excised automatically, though X-rated films are taboo. Within a year, Singaporeans may even have two or three additional TV channels.

Says Yeo: "Regulations are being eroded by technology. We have to adjust and adapt in order that our position can be held."

Incredible, a Singaporean leader saying this. But it's part of the same 'friendlier Singapore' exercise and is not at all in conflict with country's long tradition of economic pragmatism. It is this pragmatism that has brought Singapore over the years billions of dollars of foreign investments.

The trouble with many other countries is that they never can separate their economics from their politics. The two seem to be permanently locked in an eternal battle of self-destruction. No escape seems possible.

proper feel their government has spent too much on the Sahara while other areas suffer. "The king has done an excellent job of buying votes," one foreign diplomat in Rabat said cynically.

But Yahdih Bouchaab, a government press officer, and other officials say that Morocco has simply filled the void left by the Spanish. "This is a zone where we had absolutely nothing. We didn't build luxuries or extras, but we started with nothing so we built what we needed," Bouchaab said.

There can be little doubt, however, that the largesse showered on centres like Laayoune, with its five-star hotel, convention centre and one of the largest regional hospitals in Morocco, will be one of the most important factors in the upcoming vote.

Under the UN plan, a voters' list will be prepared, based on the 1974 census of Saharawis conducted by the Spanish. The work of the UN's identification commission will be one of the most difficult tasks in preparing for the referendum. "It is not so easy to decide who is who," says Hang Roger Moevi, director of the UN information office in Rabat.

"One of the first phases of the UN operation is to distinguish authentic Saharawis from any new population," Moevi said.

The difference between Saharawis and Moroccans — the latter swearing there is none — is one of the central issues in the conflict. Both sides claim that history proves their case.

For the past few years, Perez de Cuellar has held a continuing round of talks with the parties to the dispute, including Algeria, which has provided strike bases for the guerrillas and a safe haven for thousands of Western Sahara refugees.

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To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Multinational company shares

Sir, I congratulate Mr. Abdul Karim for his letter under the above caption published in your paper on June 22. Stock Market (Shares, Debentures, Bonds etc.) is now-a-days a unique phenomenon in the economic activities of a state. It is more or less handled and controlled in a country like ours by the Controller of Capital Issues (CCI), the Registrar, Joint Stock Companies and sometimes the Central Bank. But, unfortunately in our country, the government officers who are entrusted with the above tasks are usually new in such jobs. When after 2/3 years they gain experience in the field and can contribute that to the betterment of the state, they are transferred to other new posts. As a result, the field remains deprived of their

knowledge and experience. It is rightly referred by Mr. Karim that few multinationals having registered offices in Karachi floated the equity shares in Karachi. The equity ratio of such multinationals at present ranges between 70% and 80% in favour of foreign investors. After liberation, such multinational shares could have smoothly been made available to the public in Bangladesh, but due to the faulty decision of the past government that could not be made available as such. Mr. Karim has rightly mentioned that the CCI failed to provide the public with such shares by reducing, at the time of Right Issues, the present percentage of shareholdings, both foreign and Government of Bangladesh.

shares — of few companies — directly to the public is the correct decision and the present government deserves congratulations for it. It is learnt that there is pressure from certain vested quarters to revise the decision and not to sell such shares to the public. The shares belong to the government and the government wants to broad base the shareholding position of such companies by selling such shares directly to the public. What is the harm in it, in so far as the growth of stock market in the country is concerned? Let the shares be sold directly to the public through the Stock Exchange or the government itself with the secretarial help, if necessary, of the companies concerned. Such practice of selling shares directly to the public by a shareholder which is an institution, was in vogue in the neighbouring countries. Like money let the shares roll and move freely so that stock market may be reactivated. Thus people and government both will be benefited. Multinational shares deserve to be sold directly to the public for the greater interest of the country.

Be that as it may, the decision of the present government to sell multinational

BARI affairs

Sir, Despite repeated enquiries into the mismanagement, alleged corruption and nepotism in the country's largest agricultural research institute, somehow or other no action is being taken against the concerned elements. There are special President's audit, Ministry of Agriculture's enquiry team, and many others in last few months at the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute and all the allegations were reported to be corroborated. It is the expectation of the people and seven hundred scientists of the institute that the present government would fulfil its vow by taking stern and quick action against corrupt elements.

Reaz Hasan Chowdhury Scientific Officer, BARI

CI sheet standard

Sir, At least we are proud to observe that some of our news photographers including those of BTV have been praised in respect of focusing our damages and miseries caused by the cyclone of 29-30 April, 1991. The CI sheet rooftops, dwelling houses made of CI sheets, CI sheet structures etc. were depicted in greater detail

so as to prove the intensity of the cyclone. Bangladesh Standards Institution continues to publish the specifications of CI sheets in dailies regularly but neither the government nor the Engineers Institution has specified the gauge of CI sheet to be used in cyclone or nor-wester prone areas.

The government may fix the gauge of CI sheet as 22G for cyclone prone areas and 24G for other areas. There is no fun to photograph the twisted and deformed CI sheets of dwellings after every cyclone and beg for help.

Sadik Alee Maghbaz, Dhaka.

Unjust discrimination

Sir, It is universal assumption that in a civilised society a law is applicable equally to all, but our T&T Board seems to have two different ways of applying the same law — one for the Government and V.I.P.s and the other for the general public. Under the rules framed by the T&T Board, a telephone is liable to be disconnected unless the bills are paid within a prescribed period and this rule is invariably applied to all private telephone subscribers. In the case of Government Departments and other public

institutions, however, this rule is rarely applied and huge outstanding are allowed to accumulate month after month and often year after year. According to a recent news item, a sum of as much as Tk 1.37 crore was allowed to remain outstanding against a large number of former MPs.