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

Soon after Prime Minster

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

additional TV channels. Per-

haps on a subscription basis,

but at least there will be a

choice. And corporate entities

can now apply for satellite dish

licences to receive foreign TV

may even have two or three

difference.

Dhaka, Tuesday, July 2, 1991

A Decaying Life-line

Habits die hard. Mental habits die harder. For a safe journey people prefer to take the train — if there's rail connection, that is. It was there a regular shock to know from a minister informing the Jatiya Sangsad that 1,152 persons have been killed and 8,612 others injured in 3,391 railway accidents in the nineteen years of our independence. The figures in more comprehensible terms mean 61 cases of death, 451 of injury and 178 of accident occurring every year. Let us be done with the railway's safety myth then. If only one felt interested in the apathy, inefficiency and plain loot that have brought the railways to such a pass, one would have sighed with relief over the figures. There are reasons in the world for railway casualties to be enormous and it is a wonder that they are somewhat short of that.

The impressive, in fact revolutionary, Intercity timings — somewhat inhibited by the great Tongi tragedy — and the finest and best evocative names in the world of some of its trains hide a stagnating cesspool. One that has been of its being nobody's business for long 19 years, excepting of course the 51 thousand souls that thrive on it together with the blackmarketeers and other hangers on. We would not go sad over the growing railway casualties or over the fact that it has been losing us 150 crore Taka every year for some time — a paltry nothing compared to what our pet yet wayward elephants cost — the BJMC. the PDB and the behemoth named education that takes so much more yet gives us back so very little. We should indeed weep over the demise however slow and inconspicuous — of our railway system. The railway has been the first life-line of the gigantic economy of our great neighbouring country. It has been instrumental in taking India past the Rostow take-off point. Railways, by the same token, could be our second-best circulatory system of economic blood — after the riverine transport. The present state of our railway dying a slow but sure death mainly for want of nutrients in the shape of investment geared to growth — is sure to cause our national economy no end of inpediments and maladies.

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 stretching out to 2604 km in 1947. That was the British colonial record. Pakistan added some 162 km of new tracks, 7 every year. That's the Pakistani colonial record. And after our independence on December 16, 1972? Not an inch of new track added in 19 years. What does this record speak of? What kind and quantum of fruits of freedom does this betray? We have been eating up our inherited capital for long 19 years. Occasional replacements and insignificant addition to rolling stock do not at all change the picture of this giant of a thing standing still since 1947 dying and dying for close on to half a century.

Pushing up fares every now and then - 10 times in 19 years to be precise, or mounting pinpricks of a campaign against ticketless travelling are quite immaterial, or even irrelevant, measures when the task is accepted as making the railway recover back into a truly living organisation mightily contributing to the recovery of national economy as a whole.

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. It's that nation-sized loot that has been continuing unremittingly for long 45 years - gaining in momentum particularly after the birth of Bangladesh — that has balked at investing in the growth of the railway. Salaries eat up 98 per cent of whatever railway earns. And what does it earn with 77 per cent of its wagon space remaining unutilised round the year? And how can it earn with the wagons costing more of time and money than road transport - an unheard of thing anywhere in the world?

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. The will has been missing all the time. Once it is there — the means are a matter not at all hard to marshal.

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, particularly if it is an indication of official willingness to project the life and works of illustrious sons of the soil. The Shilpakala Academy, which published the book, deserves praise for an excellent job done. The book itself is first-rate, being adorned with 25 colour reproductions of Quamrul's finest works. A literary retrospective on Quamrul Hassan was long overdue, not only because he was one of the country's finest painters, but also - perhaps especially - because of the values he represented.

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 derogates man's sense of dignity, his right to freedom, ustice - life. Quamrul's depiction of former Pakistani ruler Yahya Khan as a war-crazed, bloodthirsty animal in his 1971 poster Annihilate These Demons still sends shivers down people's spines, a shiver produced by a combination of fear, awe and a determination to resist. In his final, rebellious flourish, Quamrul Hassan produced a sketch that expressed an entire nation's contempt for a regime that treated the country as little more than paternal property. Through his works, artist Quamrul has become an icon of national conscience in the same way poet Nazrul is.

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. They may even find ways to combine their efforts with other, non-government bodies including private sector business houses, to be able to market top-grade literary products at a price the average man can afford. Publishers should also seek assistance from the foreign ministry to send publications on Bangladeshi literary and cultural figures and works to libraries around the world. Projection of the country's cultural achievements, past and present, to a wider, international audience is as important as giving the man-in-thestreet access to his own cultural heritage.

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

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 needs this x-factor — the intangible human quality which drives people to build the best seaport, run the best airline, train the best armed forces."

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. Airtropolis, they call it, Terminals 1 and 2 together. On one of my recent visits, from touchdown to getting into a taxicab, I cleared the Airtropolis in 15 minutes. If that's not being efficient, tell me what is.

The best armed forces? 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. In the end, that's what matters — the service, the efficiency, the dynamism, the quality.

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

A and military tug of war

over the Western Sahara is

coming to an end under the

auspices of the newest United

Exhausted by years of debil-

itating conflict, both sides have

turned to the UN to conduct a

referendum that will decide

whether the vast expanse of

French acronym MINURSO.

complete the operation.

The timetable towards a fi-

nal determination of the terri-

the current "transitional pe-

General Assembly approval of

strength in the territory and

monitor the confinement to

designated locations of both

Moroccan and Polisario forces.

The UN will also oversee the

release of prisoners, register

qualified voters, organise and

ensure a free referendum and,

Polisario have agreed to give

"sole and exclusive responsibil-

ity" for all aspects of the refer-

endum to the secretary-gen-

eral's special representative,

Both Morocco and the

finally, announce the results.

Nations peace operation.

Morocco.

Singapore: The Next Lap remain undiminished, yet life business, selling Singapore's will be little more relaxed. efficiency and tradition of In that phase, Singapore hard work, putting on a smilwants to entrench itself as an ing economic face, and trying

international hub city. The idea to remove the 'Ugly Singais simple and quite down-toporean' stigma that the island earth : since Singapore can't republic's remarkable ecoexist on its own, it must exist nomic success has given rise for others. Let others come and use Singapore as best as Of this effort, the recently they can. Let Singapore make its services and facilities fit the needs of others. Let its econ-

of doing business. 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. But, for all its political orthodoxy, Singapore's economic policies have remained

omy fall in with the others' way

of image is important to us," says George Yeo. Minster of Information and the Arts. 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

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. An additional intention is to link up with Singaporeans worldwide, make as best a use of their tal-

tional marketers and trading officers by the year 2000.

A Singapore School has been set up in Hong Kong, a recognition of the growing internationalization of Singaporeans. A Singapore Design Council has been formed to turn the republic into an international industrial design

beer cans, discarded cartons, cigarette stubs. The Singapore River has been cleaned up. You can actually fish in it or take S\$6 river cruises in the pale green water. The city's gorgeous and crowded shopping malls are a welcome reminder that consumerism is no longer frowned upon, that Singaporeans are no longer a boring, miserly bunch of savers. Miniskirts and form-hugging dresses are in vogue with a vengeance, and the streets of Singapore offer up an unending parade of fashion, where young, dolled-up women strut about in expensive, up-to-themoment designer outfits. Through the sedate, government-built housing estates, where most of 9-to-5 Singaporeans live, the nightly sound of karaoke is sweeping like a

programmes. Says Yeo: "Regulations are being eroded by technology. We have to adjust and adapt in order that our position can be 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. It's the same pragmatism that now makes Singaporeans take their own investments over the causeway to Johor in Malaysia, not always a politically comfortable neighbour. Singaporeans have poured over S\$1 billion so far in joint venture resort and leisure projects alone in Johor.

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.

Part of the effort is the Export Institute of Singapore, which has been set up to train a pool of some 600 international marketers and trading officers by the year 2000.

surprisingly practical and pli- ents as possible, involve them what works and what does not.

period of vigorous interna-

able. Its leaders have demon- in Singapore's international efstrated an uncanny sense of fort, and instil in Singaporeans, who are having increas-One has only to look at its ingly to work overseas, an inenormous economic success to ternational mind-set. Since find the proof that they have Singaporean brain-drain is a been right. What its leaders are fact and cannot be reversed, it seeking now is to sharpen is wiser to try and tap into this their economic focus even expatriate pool and not write it more, to be a better interna- off as a national loss. With tional business and service imagination, the loss can be turned into a national gain.

The next lap is going to be a The idea is to internationalize Singapore and the Singamarketing, seeking porean psyche. "The question

hub. A government-produced coffee-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 live down Singapore's concentration camp image. Attitudes, once rigid, are beginning to soften, in many respects. Singapore now is actually a little bit more livable than before: You do occasionally - and reassuringly - come across sidewalk litter - empty

craze and making the predictable family life a somewhat more exciting.

Foreign tourists are back in Singapore in force, moving from one sale to the next, aiming video cameras at the passing crowd, or downing twodollar nasi gorengs at the Satay Club near the Padang. Hotels, offering unbelievable discounts as recently as two years ago, have suddenly become too pricey. Fears that Singapore would slump from an overbuild of hotel rooms are practically

proper feel their government

Western Sahara Gears up for Crucial Referendum FTER a quarter of a century, the political

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 sun-blistered sand and rock will become an independent nation or integrate with 1973 Independence war begins The Security Council gave 1975 Spain cedes country to Morocco, Mauritania the exercise a powerful thrust towards that goal recently 1876 Arab Democratic Saharan Republic Declared when it unanimously adopted two resolutions in rapid-fire 1979 Mauritania withdraws order. One approves an overall referendum blueprint drafted 1980 UN asks for Moroccan withdrawl by Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar. The other 1984 Membership of OAU establishes the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western **1988** UN agreement foresees ceasefire, DRABAT Sahara, to be known by the independence referendum **1989** Talks between King Hassan and The newest, US\$200 mil-Marrakesh lion operation will consist of a Polisario front multinational presence of **1991** UN Security Council agrees MOROCCO 1,695 military personnel, comprising 550 observers and to supervise referendum and establish a UN military, an infantry battalion of 700. A police and civilian security contingent of some Algeria monitoring unit 300 civilian police and an administrative and electionmonitoring component of up La Youne to 1,000 other civilians will Smara WESTERN tory's status has begun with Mauritania Al Dakhla riod", which was established by the MINURSO budget on May MINURSO will verify the reduction of Moroccan troop 180 miles/300 km

Ambassador Johannes Manz of Switzerland.

The Morocco-Polisario accord was a diplomati: 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. There has been no fighting for the past year and a half.

the peace process will be the clear these pockets of rebels.

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.

The strategy of the walking wall was to ring vulnerable population centres with a barrier bulldozed out of the arid A dramatic development in land, then move in troops to

shares — of few companies —

directly to the public is the

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 inhabitated by nomads who live in tents and herd their goats and camels across the barren land in search of pasturage. The only known economic wealth is the territory's rich phosphate deposits and an abundance of fish off its Atlantic coast.

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 administration, 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 Morocco and Mauritania

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

"King Hassan has done well for us. He's built things, he's worked a lot," said Bouremaa 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 his-

Many who live in Morocco

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 gov-

ernment 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 Sahrawis conducted by the Spanish. The work of the UN's identification commission will agreed to divide the territory 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 Sahrawis from any new population," Moevi said.

> The difference between Sahrawis 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 - GEMINI NEWS refugees.

THE MORELLO is a UN correspondent for the Christian Science Monitor. ALLAN THOMPSON is a Canadian journalist with the Toronto Star, currently working with Gemini News Service.

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 equityratio 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 Bangla-

Be that as it it may, the decision of the present govern- Azizul Haque ment to sell multinational Chittagong.

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 vougue 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.

BARI affairs

Sir, Despite repeated enquires 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 norwester 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 Maghbazar, 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.Ps 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 outstandings 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.

How does the T&T Board justify this blatant discrimination between the Government and V.I.Ps on the one hand and the general public on the other?

A Qayyum Gulshan, Dhaka.

Justice and welfare

Sir, To re-establish social order and discipline in the society we have to revive our moral promises including the courage and tolerance to accept the right things and to reject the wrong ones.

A man who commits a social or moral crime should be treated as a criminal by every quarter irrespective of his social or political affiliation. Let the law-enforcing agen-

cies operate independently. Let justice defend justice and let democracy ensure people's

M. Zahidul Haque Bangladesh Agricultural Institute, Dhaka-1207.