

The Daily Star WEEKEND MAGAZINE

PEOPLE AND PLACES

BARCELONA: The Sights and Sounds of Spain's Olympic City

Five hundred years ago Columbus set sail from the southern port of Seville, discovered the New World and made Spain the most powerful nation of the time. Following the defeat of the Spanish Armada, 100 years later, the country went into gradual decline. From the Napoleonic invasion at the turn of the 19th century to the civil war of the 1930's, Spain was in a state of virtual anarchy. The legacy of Franco during the third quarter of this century achieved little other than political isolation.



Now, Spain is staging a relaunch. 1992 is the year of Spain. Seville is hosting Expo '92, billed as the largest ever worldwide Exposition, and Madrid has been designated European City of Culture. But the biggest spotlight will be on Barcelona, where the Olympic games kick off in July.

I travelled to Barcelona, Spain's second city and the capital of Catalonia, to discover the rich complexity of a truly great city. A city in which the more I discovered, the more I found to discover.

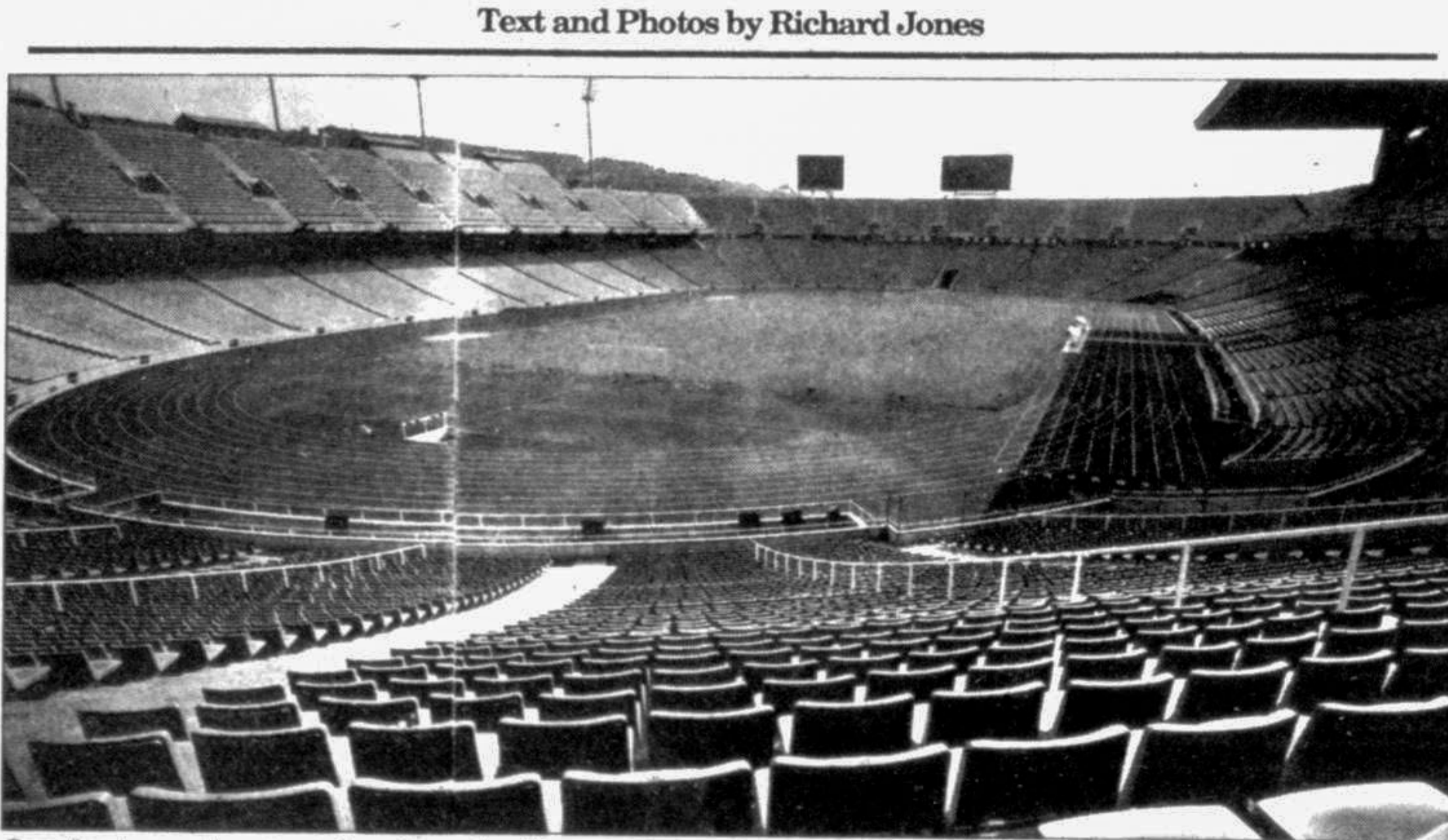
My hotel was on the Ramblas, the most famous street in Barcelona.

It has previously been described as "the most beautiful street in the world." Beautiful was not the adjective that first sprang to my mind. Marvellous, detached, unfathomable and enigmatic, maybe, but not beautiful. The Ramblas is a paradise of possibilities, a realm of the unexpected. During a five minute stroll I was bombarded by a band of Peruvian buskers, a sword swallower, a fire eater, a male Flamenco dancer, complete with hormone-induced breasts and an Ivory Statue of Liberty.

never leave.

Barcelona's lack of logic — its individuality — is captivating. It is as far north as Chicago but the winters are warm with azure skies and palm lined plazas. Its architecture is bewildering. Roman, Gothic and Art Nouveau jostle for the limelight in endless variation. The most famous son of Barcelona must be the architect Antonio Gaudi (although Pablo Picasso and Joan Miro are not far behind), whose legacy is stamped all over the city. The finest example of his visionary genius is the stupendous Sagrada Familia, the church of the Holy Family. It is the most famous building in Barcelona — probably in Spain — with its 18 fairy story style towers, representing the 12 apostles, the four evangelists, the Virgin and Christ. The church was unfinished at the time of Gaudi's untimely death under a motor car in 1926, and it remains unfinished today. There is a controversy whether it will be finished at all — completion is tentatively scheduled for the middle of next century! Though incomplete, the Sagrada Familia is awesome. No viewer is unaffected and no photograph can do it justice.

Park Guell, named after the family of industrialists who commissioned Gaudi with a



Barcelona's superb main stadium located at Montjuic Park, will be the focal point of the summer Olympics to be staged from July 25 to August 9.

has a roof in the shape of a dragon's backbone, covered in roof tiles which resemble scales. A hundred metres up the road is La Pederera, an apartment block that has pillars shaped like carved tree trunks and wildly sculptured metal balconies. Both buildings were designed by Gaudi.

Architecture is important to the Catalans. It was a campaign issue when mayor Pasquel ran for re-election. The Olympics has given Barcelona a new excuse to revitalise itself. The Japanese architect, Arata Isozaki, who designed the Sant Jordi sports palace next to the Olympic stadium was overwhelmed by the reception he received at the unveiling of the US\$83 million arena. Three hundred thousand people turned up!

Just off the eastern side of the Ramblas lies the Gothic Quarter where Barcelona's great period of affluence during the 15 century resulted in a wealth of period buildings.

It still retains much of its old flavour with a rabbit warren of narrow streets. Shops cater for everyday life. General stores lie next to expensive "arty" bookshops, Catalan cake shops and boutiques selling the latest, and not in frequently, bizarre fashions.

After a few days exploring the city, I stumbled across Placa Real, on the edge of the Gothic quarter. This is a delightful square, complete with fountains, palm trees and several bars hidden in the arched exterior. The square is home to the yobs during the day and the meeting place of resident artists at night. The cafe in the corner doesn't fill up until eleven o'clock — after the evening meal. Here I met Pedro, a wild, long-haired, Andalusian gypsy turned street painter. Max, a half-German, half-Dutch drummer and

number of works, lies in the north of the city. Originally planned as a luxury housing development, it finally became a wired and wonderful fantasy park. Gaudi's pink house, which lies in the corner, has chimneys that look like partly coagulated toothpaste. This fascinating sight attracts three generations of families on weekends.

Along the Placa de Gracia lies Casa Batllo, a house that



Ramblas is the city's most famous street, vibrant with life and entertainment.

that turned out to be human. Each spectacle attracted a small circle of onlookers, gradually wandering from one to the next. At the top of the Ramblas groups of old men gather to discuss, in loud rasping voices, anything from the state of the political scene to Barcelona's most recent football star signing. Just behind is Placa de Catalunya. Legend has it that if you drink the water from the fountains you will



Fire in the Blood: Impromptu fireworks displays are not uncommon in the Gothic Quarter.



Those headed for the Olympics must not miss out on the charming Gothic Quarter with its pulsating night life.

Text and Photos by Richard Jones

Carrre, and English philosopher. All were at the same table. The casting director for David Lynch's *Twin Peaks*



At Orators Corner which is evocative of London's Hyde Park, citizens discuss everything from politics to the Pope.

would have little trouble here." I thought. At around one o'clock glasses were drained as people began to make their

way to the discos. Karma, the disco at the opposite corner of the square was bouncing with marchasos — irrepressible party goers. I was led from Karma at three am to the seedier Barri Xines, traditionally the low-life hangout with pimps, prostitutes and peroxide blonde transvestites going about their business. Half way along a dark lane I was led through what appeared to be a hole in the wall. I emerged in a bright Aladdin's cave night club. It was now four in the morning and still heaving with vitality. The locals taking heed of Horace's injunction to "enjoy the day and leave as little as possible to the future." I left the still throbbing disco at five

thirty (never able to find it again). Many of the revellers would leave the disco, have breakfast and go straight to work. A question which I kept asking myself was, "when do the Spaniards sleep?"

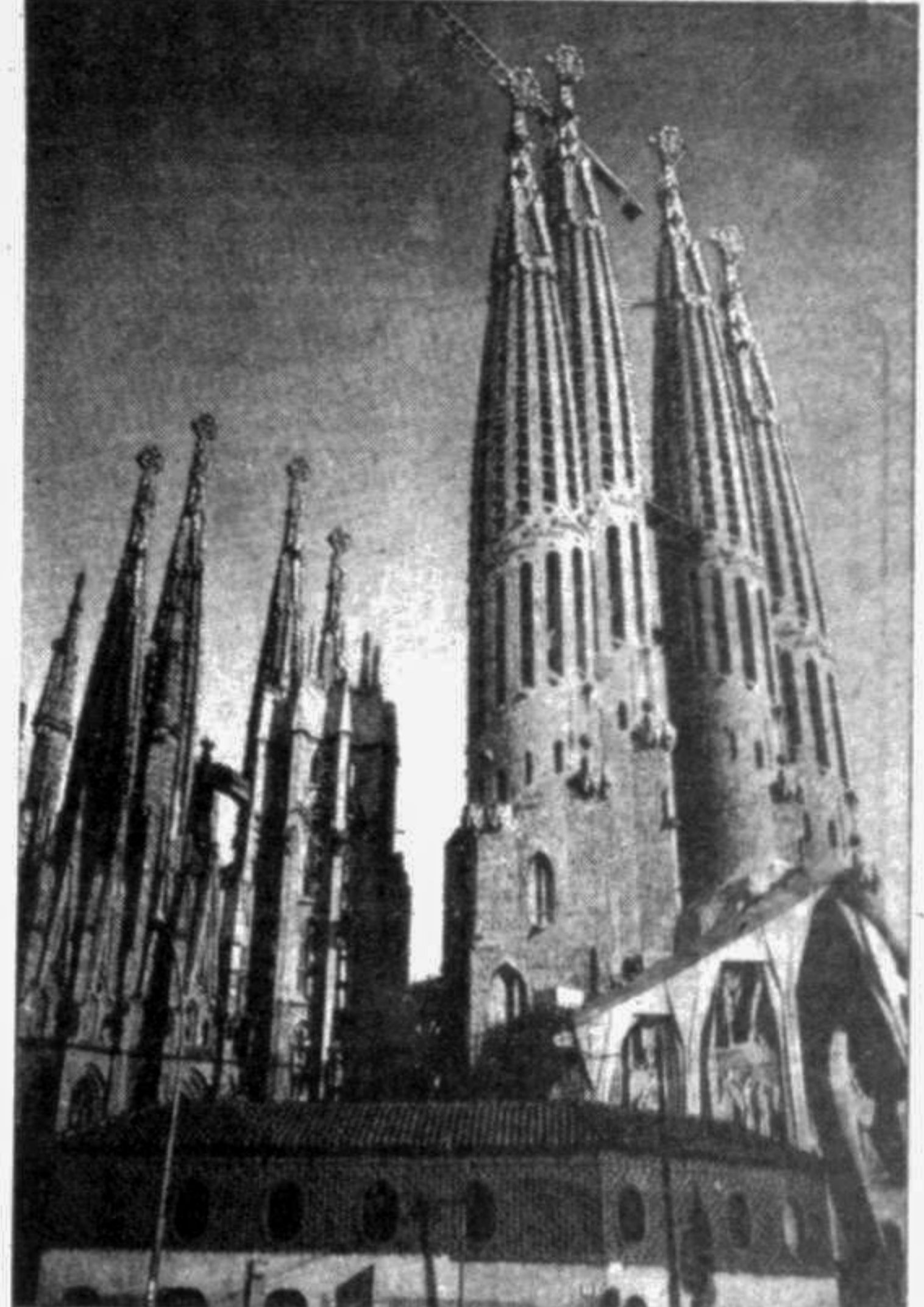
The newspaper stalls on the Ramblas were still open and doing a brisk trade as I made my way back to my hotel. I was due to leave later that day. There was still much to dis-



Flamenco dancer (also top left) entertains for free.

cover. I walked past my hotel to the fountains of Placa de Catalunya and began to drink the cool water hoping the legend to be true.

By arrangement with the Executive, HK.



The Sagrada Familia, Barcelona's most famous landmark.

The Journey of Mr B

by Azfar Hussain

MAN is a mystery, not a masterpiece. Realised Mr B. And this realisation began to bite him like an invisible, lonely ant wiggling round his neck which always desired a kiss from a young woman he had seen in the Ekushey Book Fair. Mr B who is so much in love with sleep could not manage to get his eyelids together even for a fraction of second. The night was unusually long, bitingly dark and tellingly teasing.

Mr B has certain habits and traits one must know of. For instance, he does not use water after that inevitable excremental discharge, but uses a scrap of milk-white tissue paper. That is the western way. He believes that reading Shakespeare would educate a man and improve his English. Yes, Mr B reads Shakespeare; and quotes from them in profusion in an attempt to revive himself rhythmically in the midst of young ladies he comes across now and then. Poetry, and particularly Shakespearean is simply matchless. Mr B exclaimed raising his eyebrows heavenward when he was talking to a lady who came to take his autograph the other day. Mr B never misses to watch cricket tournaments with the fever shooting up like unbridled inflation in Bangladesh. For watching cricket, he believes, is a mark of life led western-style. On thousand and one nights, Mr B had surreal rounds of somnambulation, and he dream-talked with figures like Erasmus, Machiavelli, Michelangelo, Marx, Freud and Einstein. He read numerous books and added to his studies, his irresistible dream-talks heightened his insight and sharpened his understanding. This is, in fact, what Mr B claims here and there. Now and then he realizes things and truths of infinite variety. The moment of Joycean epiphany dawns upon him not once in a blue moon but much too frequently like his crowded phantasmizing of

bouncing bosoms of women. Forty three, Mr B has short hair greying resistibly and falling helplessly, broadening his forehead that shows wrinkles of bizarre geometrical shapes, capturing now and then blobs of sweat. Despite the mood and momentum western-style, Mr B has certain occasion to seize to become nationalistic in tone and tune and text. In February and March and also in December, he tries to eat and defecate, talk and hear, visibly Bengali-style and also changes his dress, exemplifying his 'unmistakable' inclination for Purjabis, payzamos and shawls. He also tries to speak polished Bangla, emulating turns of expressions from Vidyasagar and Bankim Chatterjee. In a word, February and March and December make him undergo a stylistic change that bristles with signs of patriotism and nationalism.

But this time March was difficult for him. Towards the beginning of the month, Mr B started planning his movements and visit. He felt that his nationalistic 'self' should split open like a water melon showing its huge red. He started reading the History of Bangladesh and wept, imitating the weeping Jesus as depicted in the Bible. Yes, tears broken into small blobs rolled down his cheeks and he rushed to the big mirror to catch a glimpse of his own face. He was looking like a broken lover! His servant, L, standing hitherto stiff and perpendicular, ventured into speech and scattered his syllables somewhat diffidently. "Why are you weeping, Sir?" Mr B, without any pause, broke the brewing silence and said, "cause the history of Bangladesh is so painful; it is

replete with deaths and damages. Remember the black night of the 25th?" L innocently exclaimed, "For that you had to read history?" Mr B eased into rage, forcing sparkles in his eyes, and said, "Shut up, you idiot! In Bangladesh one has to plan tears, and incidents are to be evoked from the frozen, black alphabet called writing. Don't you know what Milan Kundera, that Czech novelist, said: 'The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting. I am simply struggling to remember.' The servant, in reply, only gave a vacant look that inspired Mr B who thought that what he did passed off as something very natural.

After weeping, Mr B left his residence in his thoughtful loneliness and started strolling down the road he often takes and stopped by a mosque. He felt he should say prayers and find out if he can weep as naturally and spontaneously as the growth of a leaf or the birth of a poem of which Keats spoke. It was a success; he not only wept inside the mosque, but cried aloud tearing the sacred silence into shreds visible enough right in front of the eyes of the Imam himself. Some thought that Mr B was a pious man reaching a cathartic moment in his realisation. After prayers, a gentleman asked Mr B, "Why were you crying, Sir?" Mr B replied, "Because evils are defeating goodness in Bangladesh, because people are getting anarchic, giving in to meaningless excitement and dishonouring the honoured. Should we not save the country from such vices?" The gentleman also gave a vacant look as Mr B's servant did.

After prayers and cries and little talks, Mr B left the mosque and started walking in a rhythm that indicated complacency and tropical lethargy. While walking, Mr B found a whore passing by. He made it a point that after catharsis at the mosque, he would not indulge in impure phantasmizing; yet, he had to look at least askance at the women with her lips reddened and face overly powdered, and once again Mr B managed to weep in the grey light of the evening. The woman did not pay attention to him and went away, while Mr B felt hurt at such carelessness and exclaimed that weeping does not always work. He thought that he should rather pick up the art of groaning.

On coming back home Mr B stormed into his room with his hairs standing perpendicularly. He stood in front of a mirror and got disturbed seeing a strand of hair visibly protruding out of the pore of his nose. In fact, he got doubly disturbed as he had to face such an unattractive obstacle to his proposed programme of groaning. However, he managed to ignore that trifle and embarked on 'groaning'. At the very first attempt, he got onto a runaway pitch, shooting screams more audibly than he could possibly anticipate. The roar was so catching (Mr B did whatever he could to get the roar going) that the girl staying next door literally startled and broke a wonderful flower-vase which she was holding in her white, feathery hand and which, subsequently, slipped away, matching the rhythm of the startle. On the other hand, a professor who happens to be Mr B's revered neighbour woke up suddenly from his meditation in which he was profoundly immersed. It needs

mentioning here that the professor has developed an unusual habit of meditating, not being seated cross-legged but through standing silently and motionlessly on one leg only. The roar was so loud that he not only startled but also fell down on the floor and his moon-like glistening bald experienced a rather unexpected bleeding injury. Yes, in response to Mr B's groan on loud lamentation, his curious neighbours rushed to the spot, heaving heavy sighs and all of them asked in concert, "What has happened, Mr B?" "O, Bangladesh is going astray," immediately replied Mr B. His neighbours now asked, "What can we do then?" Mr B, with sparkles in his eyes, replied, "Start with weeping and end in groaning." Some of the neighbours present felt instinctively convinced and raised a chorus of groaning in a telling concert with the practised lamentation of Mr B.

Meanwhile the professor who got an injury in the bald raised the sympathy of his nephew who is a strong, stout young man of 24. On having observed the plight of the professor, his revolutionary self-stirred up with a bite inside. With eyes blood shot, with sleeves rolled up, with lips curled up into scornful shreds and at a somewhat futuristic speed available either in the poetry of Marinette or in German space poetry, he embarked on an expedition to Mr B's house. No sooner had Mr B caught a glimpse of this young man than he began to shake like reeds and produce groaning sounds somewhat different from the kind he practised and projected. The young men shouted, "Mr B, you have caused an injury to my uncle." Mr B bewilderingly said, "But how?" The young man replied, "It is your damn groaning sound! What has happened? Has someone died?" Mr B, looking nervously apologetic, now told the young man, "O, I am sorry, young man. I am not