

THE tradition goes back to 1790, a year after the destruction of the prison-fortress which symbolised the arbitrariness of the royal power. A grandiose "Fete of the Federation", which remains in the annals of history, had been organised in Champs de Mars in Paris and, for three days and three nights, there was dancing on the site of the Bastille.

In the following years, the celebration was less dazzling. Other events held the attention. Speeches were made, civic songs were sung, and a national achievement was acclaimed: the flight of a balloon in 1798.

## The 14th July, the Celebration of Liberty

Under the "Directoire", the 14th July became the "Fete of the Concorde". In 1800, the Bastille was forgotten to glorify Napoleon Bonaparte. In 1802, the latter offered the Parisians a parade of Mamelukes, those former slaves who had become militiamen and gone over to Napoleon's side in Egypt. Besides, Napoleon fond that the 14th July smacked far too much of the Republic and so he suppressed it.

The tradition took up again in 1880 when the 14th July was officially declared as the

**Every year, on 14th July, France commemorates the storming of the Bastille, with parades, dancing and fireworks, but the way of celebrating the 14th July has changed over the centuries.**

"National Feastday". France was just recovering from the 1870 disaster in Sedan. An engraving from the period sums up the spirit of the time: a Marianne (symbol of the French Republic), wearing a Phrygian bonnet, holds a flag in one hand and a sword in the other. (The Phrygian bonnet or "red bonnet" is a symbol of liberty

as it is based on the bonnet of the emancipated slaves of Ancient Rome). The 14th July 1880, declared "National Feastday", thus began with a parade of the troops at Longchamp in front of an enormous crowd. The Parisians had been invited to celebrate. Blue, white and red bunting bedecked the avenues and schools feted the day. Priests, threatened with being fined, had to ring the bells, and fireworks followed on one another. On that 14th July 1880, Taine wrote, "One witnessed a real marriage between France and the Republic". But some people were missing. The districts of nobles kept their shutters closed

in order not to see the "republican orgy".

**"It was as beautiful as thunder"**

As the bells had to be rung, the priests tolled the knell. The Catholic press recommended fasting. Killjoys asked for assurance against the noisy celebrations which prevented them from sleeping. A poet declaimed his hatred: "It was during the horror of a 14th July..." But, over the years, its opponents gave way.

Between 1880 and 1914, it was the golden age of the 14th July, with the firing of guns, sumptuous parades by soldiers, but also by firemen, gymnasts,

school children and brass bands. It was no longer a celebration of liberty, it was one of compensation for the 1870 war, which had been imposed by Bismarck's Prussia.

In Paris, people from Alsace and Lorraine, who, owing to the 1870 defeat, had temporarily been made into Germans because their territory had been annexed, came to pay their respects to the statue representing the city of Strasbourg, veiled in black, in Place de la Concorde. Government leaders invited mayors to a banquet. There were 4,000 of them gathered around the table, which was the new "altar to the motherland", for a lavish republican feast in 1888.

Never had the French indulged in so much celebrating. Van Gogh with his "Townhall in Auvers-sur-Oise" and Monet with his "Rue Montorgueil",

but also Dufy and Marquet have depicted this patriotic debauchery in their paintings.

With the coming of the 1914-18 war, the guns grumbled and the festivities came to an end. But, to celebrate the Victory, France paid tribute to her armies on 14th July 1919. French and allied banners and flags mixed together fluttered up flagpoles. Shattered German guns lay piled up beneath the spurs of a bronze Galish cock. The troops marched beneath the Arc de Triomphe following the victorious generals boot to boot on their white horses. For Barres, "it was as beautiful as thunder".

After such blazing images, the following 14th July were to appear lackluster. Not until the Popular Front, in 1936, did the celebrations live up again. The Communist party, which had, until then, boycotted the "bourgeois village fete", cheerfully joined in.

In July 1940, France was on her knees. In London, De

Gaulle "gathered together the fragments of the sword". In Vichy, Petain abolished the Republic, but did not dare to interfere with the 14th July. He made it into a day of reckoning. In occupied Paris, the ceremony was limited to the laying of a wreath beneath the Arc de Triomphe. Despite a ban, patriots defied the Germans by meeting at Etoile and at Bastille. In 1941, the latter shot one of them.

In 1946, the festivities started up again in order to celebrate the crushing of Nazism. After that, they gradually changed. The army still parades on the Champs Elysees on 14th July, but television is omnipresent and, if it multiplies the number of spectators by the million, it turns the fete into a show. Dances are still held in the streets, just like in the past, but, above all, it is the magnificent fireworks, real works of art today, which symbolise the great celebration of liberty.

### Magic and Nostalgia

## My First and Last Visits to Paris — 30 Years Apart

by S. M. Ali

ONE always remembers one's first visit to Paris. There is so much magic in it even in its recollection. One also remembers the last visit to the French capital. It is full of nostalgia, somewhat sad, because another visit seems so uncertain.

In my case, more than three decades separate my first visit from the last one, with some 12 to 15 trips to the French capital sandwiched in-between. Besides the difference in time — Paris changed much less than, say, London during these three decades — there were other variations where I was concerned.

There was the difference between eating sandwiches and gulping cheap wine, for all the meals within the meagre budget of the first visit by a young reporter and then enjoying four-course continental meals, refusing even a drop of wine for imaginary health reasons, some 30 years later.

It was also the difference between walking aimlessly all over Paris, especially along the Left Bank, peeping into the galleries and nodding the head knowledgeable at the modern art, and attending meetings after meetings at the UNESCO headquarters, some 30 years later, and returning to the hotel room, just too exhausted to venture out for a meal. So, you eat an apple, make yourself a cup of tea and read the day's edition of the *International Herald Tribune* all over again.

Then, my first visit to Paris was during the Bastille Day. So, we spent the evening, the night and early hours of the morning eating, drinking and dancing with that extravagant zest for life that I have never seen anywhere else in the world. None of my later visits coincided with such an auspicious occasion. But the magic of celebrating July 14 during my first visit somehow remains locked in my heart. And it will always be there, part of my love and affection for France.

This love and affection for France still remain because of people I got to know there, not necessarily only the French people, but those who lived there and, over the years, had become part of the scene. They were real

people, with their hopes and dreams, with their love and hate relationship with Paris.

They were real people, and I would rather not change their names in this piece.

During the first visit, it was my friend and cousin, Kaiser Rasheed, then the Third Secretary in the Pakistan Embassy, who took care of me, which meant offering me several meals in fashionable restaurants — this he has done for me in other cities, like London and Hongkong — and sometimes at his four-room luxurious apartment where a white Russian lady worked as his house-keeper. How many young men of our country then felt tempted, by watching Kaiser's life style, to join the foreign service of Pakistan, I would not know. But, then, the fact that the official salary earned by Kaiser did not meet his basic expenses even for a half a month was hardly a closely-guarded secret. Kaiser could laugh about it, and so did we — then his fiancée, Lydia (RIP) and myself — while we would consume yet another expensive meal in a fashionable restaurant in the suburb of Paris.

"I wonder what will you do next? Say, when you become an Ambassador?" I once asked my cousin.

Some 30 years later in 1987, I put the same question — "What will you do next?" — to my UNESCO colleague, Breda Pavlic, a Yugoslav national, who was the first one to warn me that in a matter of years, her country would break up.

Kaiser had laughed at the thought of becoming an Ambassador and living on what he regarded as a paltry salary earned by a head of a mission of Pakistan. Luckily, he never became one.

Three decades later, Breda's eyes were misty when we talked about her country. By the time, Yugoslavia had split, Breda had moved to Canada, far away from the strife-torn Eastern Europe, and I had left UNESCO, heading for Dhaka, taking with me memories — confused but happy ones — of my first and last visits to Paris.

### Space : The Kourou Base

Continued from page 8

next to its big sister which is to replace it on the launching pad.

### A New Space Adventure

As it grows bigger, the Kourou base becomes a little more European day by day. It has, moreover, been officially renamed as "European Space Port". Kourou is being Europeanised by having France's thirteen partners in the space adventure, involved in the works now.

However, for the time being, the largest share of the work still falls to France. This is due to financial and historical reasons. Indeed, France makes the biggest financial contribution (45%) to the space programme. She was the first country in Europe to set out to conquer space. Ariane was the brainchild of the French National Space Studies Centre (CNES) and the far-off department of Guiana is French territory.

With the "Europe of Space", the time has come when the former "Guianese Space Centre", at which one of the first chapters of the new history of the sky was written, will stop being solely French, in order to become the theatre of a prodigious technological adventure which now continues beneath the blue star-spangled banner of Europe.

## The Aqua Service team joins me in felicitating the friendly people of France on the celebration of their National Day

Frederic David  
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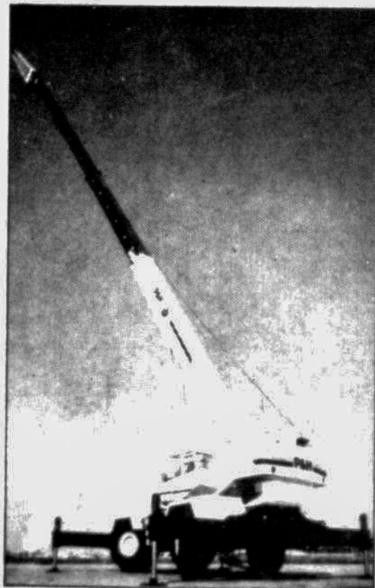
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