

India -- The Poorest Nation in Asia

By FR. WILLIAM J. RICHARDSON

New Delhi, India—India is desperately poor — undoubtedly the poorest nation in Asia—and there is no bright future shining through.

There have been predictions recently that India will be self-sufficient in food by 1971, but an Indian social specialist I interviewed put the date at a more cautious 1975.

Miracle rice and wheat strains which multiplied harvests last year gave rise to such optimism. However, disastrous floods this spring and summer have all but wiped out the crops in large areas and have necessitated the use of troops to evacuate tens of thousands of refugees.

I am frankly skeptical if India can ever become self-sufficient in food. The monsoon rains are very unpredictable — not enough and you have drought such as in Bihar state last year, too much and you have floods.

Another factor is India's internal transportation system. Last year, while Bihar was starving as a result of the drought and free nations were rushing grain to India, much of the food could not be moved inland for lack of sufficient railroad cars. When the monsoons came, huge supplies of the gift grain were destroyed as they lay on uncovered rail sidings awaiting shipment.

Last fall's crop in India was a bumper, as it was in China, because the rains were just right. Much of this crop,

This is the last of seven articles on the Southeast Asian countries of Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, the Philippines, Taiwan and the subcontinent of India, written by Father Richardson, editor of Maryknoll Publications.

however, was lost because it was discovered too late that the country lacks sufficient storage bins for surplus grain.

India is about to begin her fourth Five-Year plan. The first plan was underestimated with the result that it was fantastically successful. The second Five-Year plan was slightly less successful and the third was a disaster. The fourth Five-Year plan had to be delayed because of the enormous spending for armaments during the Pakistan war over Kashmir. Poor as they are, Indians are adamant in their fight for this disputed area.

Indians — long the champions of Red China in the United Nations — are now scared to death of their giant neighbor. Illogical as it appears to Asian specialists, India fears another Chinese invasion. One well-educated Indian told me in solemn tones: "We have two mortal enemies (China and Pakistan) on our borders." And so, India continues to spend badly needed foreign exchange for guns, tanks and soldiers.

Despite the desperate need for development, the Indian government does little or nothing to encourage foreign investment. One representative of an American drug firm told me that his company had asked for 7½ per cent royalty in return for

limit births. Currently, debate is going on concerning the legality of abortion.

Pope Paul's recent encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, made no ripple in India whatsoever, aside from a mildly worded explanation from the Jesuit director of the Indian Social Institute in Delhi.

One has only to look at the government advertisements to realize just how desperate the people are. A man is offered 18 rupies (\$2.50) for

submitting to sterilization. A woman gets 12 rupies (\$1.75), and three rupies is paid to the procurer of such patients. If the patient is only fitted with a contraceptive loop, the procurer is paid one rupee.

"The Indian government has no anti-Christian policy," I was told by Indian priests of both the Indian Social Institute, which cooperates with the National Planning Bureau, and the Catholic Bishops Conference of India.

Ecumenism Gets Boost At Olympic Games

Mexico City — (RNS) — More than 100 Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Buddhist priests, Protestant ministers, rabbis and Moslem leaders led 40,000 people in prayers for peace at the Olympic Stadium here.

A special prayer printed in the various languages of the participating countries was distributed.

Participating in the service were several of Mexico's leading churchmen. These included Catholic Archbishop Miguel Miranda of Mexico City, Methodist Bishop Alexander Munoz, and Rabbi Meir Masliah Melamed.

Interdenominational cooperation in providing church services and facilities for Olympic participants has advanced the cause of ecumenism in this country beyond the most optimistic expectation of religious leaders.

Sparked by Archbishop Miranda, religious leaders several months ago organized an ecumenical commission for religious services during the Olympics. Its purpose was to provide religious facilities for over 1,600 athletes of the 125 countries and the many other visitors.

There are more than 100 churches and religious organizations in this city, but the commission, headed by Father Ignacio Diaz de Leon, M.S.P.S., set about raising about \$40,000 to build a new ecumenical chapel, a simple building with no religious ornaments of any kind and a polyethylene provisional tent roof. The chapel

will become a Catholic parish church after the game.

At this chapel—on the outskirts of the Olympic Village, where the athletes are housed —religious services of various

denominations are being conducted consecutively and in various languages, on weekdays as well as Sundays.

Archbishop Miranda blessed the chapel on Oct. 9.

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AROUND THE WORLD

Priests Look For Church Democracy

Bochum, West Germany — (RNS) — A move to promote "a democratization of the German Catholic Church's hierarchic structures" is under way among young priests of West Germany.

Among points discussed at a recent meeting was the possibility that the priests might join one of West Germany's trade unions to safeguard their rights.

Father Hans-Guenter Saul, a spokesman for some 30 delegates, said an "essential reason" for their organizing was the "conflict situation in which many clergymen find themselves in their pastoral work after the birth control encyclical."

Other reasons given: the need for a humane solution of the mixed marriage problem; determination of rights of the clergy in the election of new bishops; public accounting of the Church's finances; reform of priests' training; and more freedom for the clergy, including freedom of "their form and way of life."

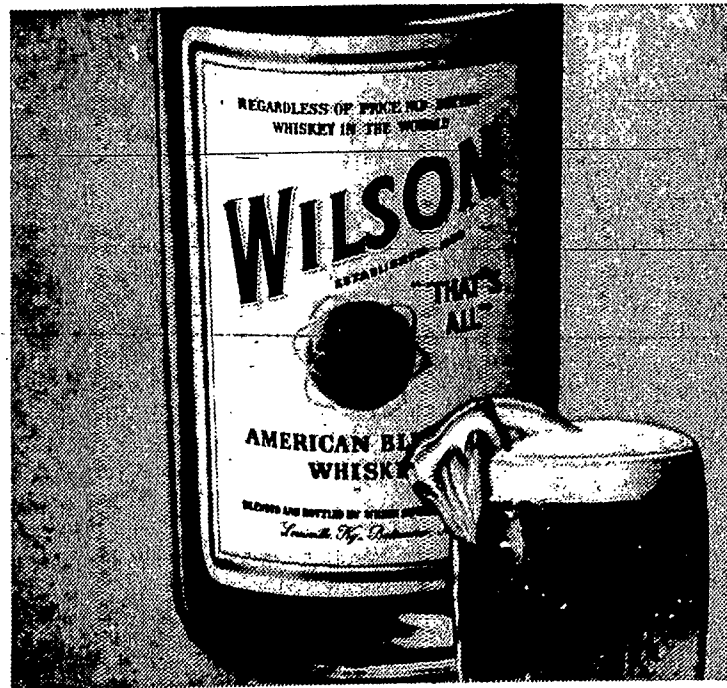
Muscovites Ignore Czech Move

London — (RNS) — The Rev. Walter Bottoms, editor of the Baptist Times, said here on return from a visit to the Soviet Union that "the average Russian doesn't seem to be thinking anything about the occupation of Czechoslovakia at all."

He told readers of the Times that the citizens of the Soviet accept the official explanation.

"To the Russian in Moscow or Leningrad, Prague was a long way off and what happened there was unimportant. To be in Russia at such a time was like being in another world."

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