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COVER: Chairman Mao shakes hands with Tun Razak on Malaysian leader's visit to China. Photo by AP-Hsinhua. Story begins on P.22.

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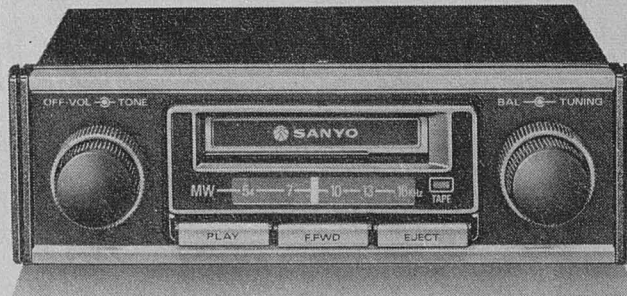


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PUBLISHER'S COLUMN

The Right Man

IT OFTEN TAKES bold political initiatives to break long-standing diplomatic logjams, and in recent Asian history few have been bolder than the one taken by Tun Abdul Razak to establish Malaysian ties with the People's Republic of China.

Establishing formal relations with a Cold War foe as feared as China was, at the least, a move fraught with political peril. No newcomer to the complexities of bigtime politics, the Malaysian Prime Minister was well aware of what was at stake. To his credit, he moved ahead when standing pat would have been so simple, and certainly less risky. What prompts a man to make such moves? It seems fair to say that Tun Razak was spurred by a vision — a vision of Southeast Asia being transformed into a "zone of peace and neutrality." To achieve such a vision, he well knew, would require the establishment of diplomatic relations with China, without whose friendly support such a scheme would stand little chance of succeeding.

Although personally modest and far from flamboyant, Tun Razak is the holder of grand visions for both the region and his nation. Untainted by corruption — a rarity among political leaders in Asia — and beholden to any narrow political cliques, he is the right man to undertake such efforts, and this is the right time for them. With national elections behind him, Tun Razak now can concentrate on turning his visions into reality.

— R.V.P.

BHUTAN: DRAGON KINGDOM

Coronation of Monarch, 18, Reveals Glimpse of Ancient Land

By DARRYL D'MONTE

WE were winding our way up a circuitous mountain road, warily eyeing the deep gorge that lay several thousand feet below. Mist swathed the dense forests on the mountainside across the enormous valley.

Suddenly, without warning, the three minibuses braked to a halt at a deep bend where a mountain stream cascaded past enormous boulders. There, in the midst of nowhere, was an apparition: a large bamboo pavilion where immaculately clad Indian waiters bore trays of drinks.

This was only the first of several incongruities in store for newsmen covering the grand coronation in Bhutan on June 2. The elaborate stream-side pavilion was what our solicitous Bhutanese hosts disarmingly termed "buffet lunch" on the road to the capital, Thimphu, from Phuntsholing, on the India-Bhutan border.

All along the 112-mile road, which is the country's only link with civilization, orchids in pretty wooden boxes every few hundred yards had been specially grown for the coronation guests; carefully planted flowers also bloomed prettily from crevices in roadside boulders and trunks of trees for the occasion. The only visible sign of ordinary Bhutanese, however, were the women sullenly chipping stones at a clearing, their hands badly calloused. Babies wailed piteously in their wicker baskets, protected from the misty drizzle by a tattered umbrella.

The Dragon Kingdom, or Druk Yul as Bhutan is known in mythology, has shielded its face from the curious gaze of outsiders for centuries. Its traditional ties with its immediate northern neighbor, Tibet, were snapped decades ago in favor of what was then British India. Today the Indian government wears the mantle of Bhutan's protector and carefully nurtures this relationship to retain the 18,000-square-mile kingdom as a vital buffer state between itself and China. All visitors to Bhutan have to obtain clearance from India's Ministry of External Affairs — and those without official support will virtually find the doors to the Dragon Kingdom barred.

All this contributed to the air of unreality that persisted throughout the three-day-long enthronement ceremonies.



Jigme Singhye Wangchuk after coronation

For that one glorious week in June, Bhutan enjoyed a brief burst of publicity in mass media throughout the world; diplomatically too, it announced its coming of age — in spite of the fact that its new King at 18 is the world's youngest monarch.

THE whole affair was total fantasy. While there was a dazzling display of long-forgotten pageantry and ritual for the few hundred foreign guests and members of Bhutan's aristocracy, the common folk were merely dumb spectators, wearing the same ragged *khos* — kilt-like robes that they live and work in every day. It was entirely medieval: ceremonies and feasting on an incredibly decadent scale even as the people gaped in bewilderment.

What could possibly be more bizarre than sipping champagne under dragon-crested marquees from ten in the morning and watching Bhutan's famed masked dancers cavorting about on the stadium ground in Thimphu? Or gorging one's way through lavish banquets at the Tashichhodzong, the capital's magnificent red-and-white fortress-secretariat, where a

massive floodlit courtyard provided a spectacular backdrop for leering devil dancers?

The actual coronation ceremony of 18-year-old Jigme Singhye Wangchuk, which Bhutan had meticulously planned for a year, was brief. The venerable Je Khempo, the country's chief lama, placed a five-colored scarf on the shoulders of the young monarch as he reclined against 13 cushions on a heavily gilded wooden throne in the Tashichhodzong's throne room. Five of the brocaded cushions were said to represent fire, water, earth and wind; one appliqué with the mind thunderbolt (Dorji) symbolized kingly deeds; three stood for the worlds of gods, humans and demons; and four were "particularly soft and warm" for the King's comfort.

No one was allowed to witness this ceremony except the royal family and high-ranking dignitaries. The seating arrangements in fact reflected Bhutan's world political status: on the King's immediate right sat India's aging President, V.V. Giri, and his wife — the head of state of the country's closest ally. Next to them was placed President Mohammedullah of Bangladesh, the only other country with which Bhutan has diplomatic relations. Prince Dharendra represented Nepal in place of the King, his eldest brother (though Nepal would like to have ties with Bhutan, the Indian government has discouraged Bhutan from doing so because of displeasure with Nepal over its obtaining aid from China in addition to India).

The tiny Himalayan kingdom has been a member of the United Nations since 1971. This was manifested in the attendance of representatives of the five Security Council members from Delhi, seated in front of the throne. Notable among them was Ma Mu-ming, the Chinese chargé d'affaires whose presence was known to have incurred the displeasure of the Indian government. Daniel Moynihan, the U.S. ambassador, was there too.

The prelude to what can more appropriately be termed the "enthronement" (since the King was officially crowned in 1972) was far more exciting than the ceremony itself. A grand cavalcade, led by the King in a grey Mercedes, wound its

way along the Thimphuchu river across the valley from the Tashichhodzong.

The boom of 31 cannon rent the air and a score of mitred lamas intoned on long *dung chheys*, or alpine horns, from the roof of the dzong. In the cavalcade were gorgeously costumed dancers and lamas who chanted softly, paying tribute to the mythological heroes from the Dragon Kingdom's distant past.

We were totally entranced: it was like watching some eerie masque to the accompaniment of strange, unorchestrated music. It cast a spell on the commoners huddled together inside the courtyard of the Tashichhodzong. For one hour, the fortress was bewitched, taking one back to a remote Shangri-la, which Bhutan surely is.

When the ceremony was over, guests showered gifts on the boy-King. We were finally allowed in: he looked impassive — almost sullen, as if his youth had in this single hour been snatched away and the burdens of office were already crushing him. He looked truculent whenever we saw him during the three-day ceremonies. After all, what could he possibly discuss with India's octogenarian President or other dignitaries, he who till the other day was happiest playing goalkeeper in a spirited football match or riding bareback on a furious steed?

WHEN the late King, Jigme Dorji Wangchuk, died in July 1972 his body was kept, according to ancient Bhutanese custom, on the banks of the Thimphuchu. For 49 days the body was religiously offered food till the lamas decided it was propitious for his cremation. The 44-year-old King, an orthodox ruler in most respects, had been ailing for some time and died suddenly in Nairobi, Kenya, where he had gone for treatment.

The affairs of state are today probably conducted by the present Queen Mother, Kesang, who is in her early forties. Her present position of power was not won without considerable maneuvering. For perhaps 20 years, Kesang had been neglected by the late King, who favored an attractive Tibetan woman, Yangki Llamo. Though Yangki, now 34, was only a palace servant when she caught the eye of Jigme Dorji Wangchuk, he treated her as his consort, even appearing publicly with her, though not on state occasions. Kesang, who hails from the proud and powerful Dorji clan, suffered bitterly all these years.

Thereby hangs a plot. Shortly before the enthronement, the Bhutanese leaked the news of an attempted coup in which Yangki, aided and abetted by other Tibetan refugees in Bhutan (who number



Musicians intone on dung chheys, or alpine horns, during the enthronement ceremony

around 4,000), was alleged to have planned to murder the King, burn down the Tashichhodzong and in the ensuing confusion install one of Yangki's sons, aged around 12, as King. (Her four children, two boys and two girls, were fathered by the late King.)

The story was concocted to disgrace Yangki, who had to flee the country even as her so-called accomplices were arrested. The Queen Mother, an imperious-looking woman, obviously wanted to settle old scores, which she did with Machiavellian cunning. The burly Bhutanese Home Minister, Tamji Jagar, told us that he was considering asking the Indian government to extradite Yangki, who fled with her children to Naini Tal, a hill station in Uttar Pradesh. (This situation

could create complications since the Indian government is very sensitive to the plight of Tibetan refugees inside its northern borders.)

The ugly rumors of the plot lent a sinister touch to the colorful ceremonies, but only marginally. The feasting and the celebrations went on, the Bhutanese sparing no effort in seeing that their guests were treated royally. In fact, the hospitality of our hosts was positively embarrassing: hundreds of young schoolboys had been trained months in advance to wait hand and foot on the visitors. "Please forgive us for our mistakes, we are new to this," Dasho Tobgyal, Secretary to the Development Ministry, who is one of Bhutan's four doctors, kept telling the "gentlemen of the press" who were in

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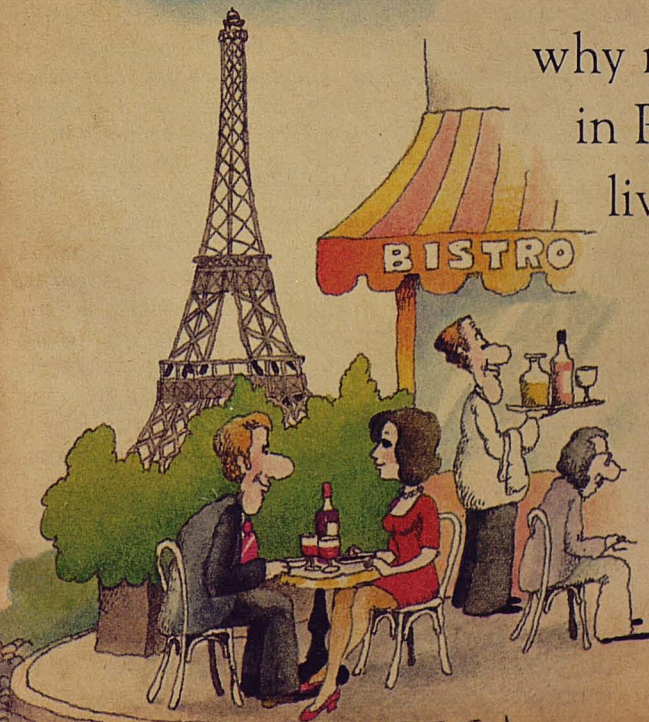


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The 20-year-old Minister of Development, Princess Dechhen (right), with her two younger sisters, talking to aide at stadium

his tender charge.

Coronations aren't all that frequent nowadays and Bhutan's certainly lived up to traditions. An immense amount of drink was imported duty-free at the cost of US\$11,900. Champagne bubbled throughout the day, from ten in the morning at the stadium ceremonies till late into the night as the interminable Tashichhodzong banquets wore on. Indeed, we staggered through the proceedings in dazed wonder — only part of which, I hasten to add, was the result of inebriation. Incidentally, it was during a bout of archery, Bhutan's traditional sport, at the stadium one afternoon that the British High Commissioner in Delhi, Sir Michael Walker, tried his hand at the bow — and accidentally shot a hapless bystander in the ankle. Fortunately he wasn't much hurt and the King, himself no mean archer, brushed aside the incident, claiming: "These things happen all the time."

THE banquets, each of which was attended by the same 2,000 people, presented a major logistical problem. All the food had to be laboriously carried to Thimphu by road from Bagdogra, the nearest airport to Phuntsholing, where it had been flown from Calcutta. Oberois, the large Indian hotel chain, was in sole charge of the catering, for which it submitted a bill of US\$59,500. "This was a prestige job," I

was assured by an Oberoi vice president, a Mr. Lamba. "We considered it a challenge in these trying circumstances." There was virtually anything and everything on the laden tables: lobster, asparagus, caviar; Bhutanese wild game including venison, rare blue mountain goat and 3,000 delicious trout that had been caught in the Thimphuchu and kept alive for the occasion. Some of the meat had to be kept on the hoof, the rest in freezers specially carted up to the capital. Feasting on this gargantuan scale was harshly jarring in a country whose people still exist in desperate penury.

The three-day coronation was officially estimated to have cost US\$3.5 million. However Indian officials believe that the final bill was probably twice as much — or half Bhutan's annual planned outlay. The Bhutanese claim that 90 per cent of this expenditure was in creating permanent assets: guest houses, roads, electricity and so on, which will stand them in good stead if and when the doors are flung open to tourists. However, that depends on the Indian government, whose permission will have to be sought for foreigners to cross the "inner line" that rings India's politically sensitive northeastern border areas. There is no question that Bhutan spent far more than it could afford on its lavish coronation.

The ordinary Bhutanese were hardly impressed. It wasn't easy to gauge popu-

lar reaction while staying in Thimphu or during the few trips that were organized outside it. The poor speak only *dzongkha*, the traditional language, or Nepali (allowing for some 50,000 immigrant laborers, Nepalis form up to 40 per cent of the total population and will soon become the majority community). The middle class, if that is the correct description for the few hundreds who hold administrative jobs in Thimphu or the more coveted posts in Bhutan's missions in Delhi or at the United Nations in New York, are fearsomely loyal and won't speak. Royalty, of course, was supremely evasive though one could still catch an off-the-cuff remark by Lhendup Dorji, the 38-year-old one-time acting prime minister who has just returned to his country after ten long years of exile in London and Kathmandu, the Nepali capital.

But the stony faces of the people said enough. Even during the Tashichhodzong ceremonies, we saw them laboriously carrying loads, the women prematurely aged, carrying their children on their backs. The "average" Bhutanese we saw in Paro valley has a small farmstead and a patch of land on which he grows a little rice. It is a dreary existence: in the absence of any modern agricultural methods, the family is tied to its subsistence farming and the young aren't able to leave the land in search of jobs. This is

why Nepali labor has been steadily trickling into the country.

A sure sign of the primitiveness of the land is the strong hold of religion even today. Bhutanese are mainly Mahayana Buddhists and the 6,000-odd lamas wield considerable power, though much of it was whittled down by Bhutan's last nominated prime minister, Jigme Dorji (brother to the present Queen Mother), who was gunned down by assassins ten years ago. "Young boys join monasteries when they are only five or six," Fritz Maurer, a 31-year-old Swiss dairy expert, told me. "If they leave of their own accord, they have to pay a fine of up to 500 rupees." One of the most disturbing sights is these young lads doing odd chores in the monasteries situated in every dzong; their brilliant ochre robes fail to dispel the despondency evident on their faces. We often saw them scampering down the steep wooden stairs of monasteries shrouded in semidarkness, looking enviously at outsiders.

"We want to consolidate what we have already got," the 18-year-old monarch told us when we finally met him at an informal tea party near the royal cottage on the Thimphuchu, where he spends part of the day. Jigme Singhye Wangchuk had been educated at North Point in Darjeeling and Heatherdown prep school, near Ascot; his studies were terminated when his father died. He revealed that he didn't want to develop his country so quickly as to destroy its character altogether. Its



Kesang, the Queen Mother (center), has maneuvered herself into a powerful position

mineral deposits, he thought, could be exploited and tourism would be started "on a limited scale" next year. (Nevertheless the country's chief foreign exchange earner is still the sale of postage stamps, about US\$71,400 a year; with characteristic quaintness, Bhutan was the first to issue 3-dimensional stamps and record-playing ones.)

"Our relations with India are satisfactory — at the moment," said the young ruler, somewhat pointedly. He was referring to a treaty signed in 1949 under which Bhutan ostensibly has complete say in running its domestic affairs while its foreign relations are "guided by the advice" of the Indian government. In fact the treaty was copied word for word

from the previous one signed with the British and thus serves to perpetuate the protectorate status of the Druk Kingdom.

It can't possibly be otherwise since India provides 90 per cent of the funds for Bhutan's five-year plans and has built all its roads and tiny airstrips and helipads. All the expertise for its vital hydroelectric and other projects is also Indian. And as a final reminder, there is IMTRAT, the Indian military "training" team, which is supposed to only have a token strength but which is reported to consist of up to 15,000 soldiers. They certainly seem omnipresent as one travels outside Thimphu.

But Bhutan obviously wants to loosen India's suffocating embrace. If the cor-



The young King tries his hand at bow; to the left, in traditional kho, is Sir Michael Walker, whose arrow struck a bystander

onation ceremony itself was to herald its emergence into the 20th century, its invitation to the Chinese chargé d'affaires in Delhi was even more revealing as an assertion, however feeble, of its sovereignty. Bhutan has traditionally had far closer ties with Tibet than with India. And China considers Bhutan one of the five fingers of its Tibetan palm. Significantly, the Chinese loudly proclaimed their friendship with Bhutan after the coronation and hinted that they were prepared to offer aid.

Such a prospect is obviously appealing to Jigme Singhye Wangchuk, who, despite his tender years, is sober enough to assess the dividends reaped by Nepal which, nine years ago, sought Chinese aid in addition to aid from India. The converse prospect — that of being swallowed up entirely by India — must be frightening to him, especially after recent events in neighboring Sikkim, whose Chogyal, or ruler, has virtually been made a titular head with India's active assistance.

THE Bhutanese are thus caught in geopolitical currents while suffering the birth pangs of modern nationhood. They are a simple, direct people, best symbolized by the King himself, who

impulsively hugged a photographer when asked to pose. The more sophisticated royal member, however, is the King's lovely sister, Princess Dechhen, who at 20 is in charge of the Development Ministry. She and her elder sister Sonam, 21, who looks after Finance (government is a family affair), have been educated at a British public school. For all their charm and simplicity, however, the Bhutanese aristocracy also possesses a penchant for Borgia-like intrigue, as the story of the assassination plot showed only too clearly.

The land itself is extraordinarily beautiful, especially the Paro valley, which is dominated by an old dzong (these granite fortresses are strongly reminiscent of samurai Japan). Fast-flowing rivers, brimming with trout, flow through each valley; many newsmen, fatigued by the ardors of coronation ceremonies, repaired to these streams and landed fish in no time at all. To any outsider, Bhutan presents a totally unspoiled look: no tourists, no newspapers or radio, no ugly modern buildings. The Bhutanese have been careful to construct new buildings — notably the Tashichhodzong, which is also a new secretariat — in traditional style.

How long the situation will last, no one can tell. Certainly if tourists come, things won't be the same. One of the jarring culture shocks we received in Thimphu was at the Swiss Bakery, a trendy coffee shop started by a young Swiss who has now settled there. It caters to mod young Bhutanese who sip coffee and listen to 15-year-old pop (including a song from "West Side Story"). We even saw a young girl sitting alone at a table smoking a cigarette, trying her best to get picked up. It was depressing.

What will happen if Bhutanese, educated in the three newly established public schools in the country and at university in India and abroad, aren't satisfied either with orthodox values or with the Dragon Kingdom's uncertain future? The monarchy might not be able to contain their demands — especially the aspirations of the Nepali immigrants.

The Dragon Kingdom, stirring out of its centuries-old slumber, is today poised precariously at the brink of modernization. Whether King Jigme Singhye Wangchuk can steer it steadfastly toward his oft-proclaimed goal of self-reliance, or whether the buffer state will be absorbed by a giant neighbor, are questions to which answers are not yet available. ■



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PEOPLE WITHOUT A

Portuguese in Malacca Seek Self

By ARNOLD ABRAMS

IN the legendary pirate port of Malacca, which now is not a port and has no pirates, there exists a small community of simple souls who still measure time by the changing tide, and who like to strum guitars under star-filled skies while singing softly of love and life and the way things were.

This community is called the Portuguese Settlement, and things once were very good for its members. Their ancestors first arrived in Malacca in 1511 and, in the course of a century-long occupation, made the port a mighty fortress as well as a major trading center.

The past still hangs heavy over Malacca, a sleep little city with narrow streets and majestic memories, situated on the southwest coast of Malaysia; but the passage of time and political shifts have turned against its present-day Portuguese inhabitants. They now are people without a country.

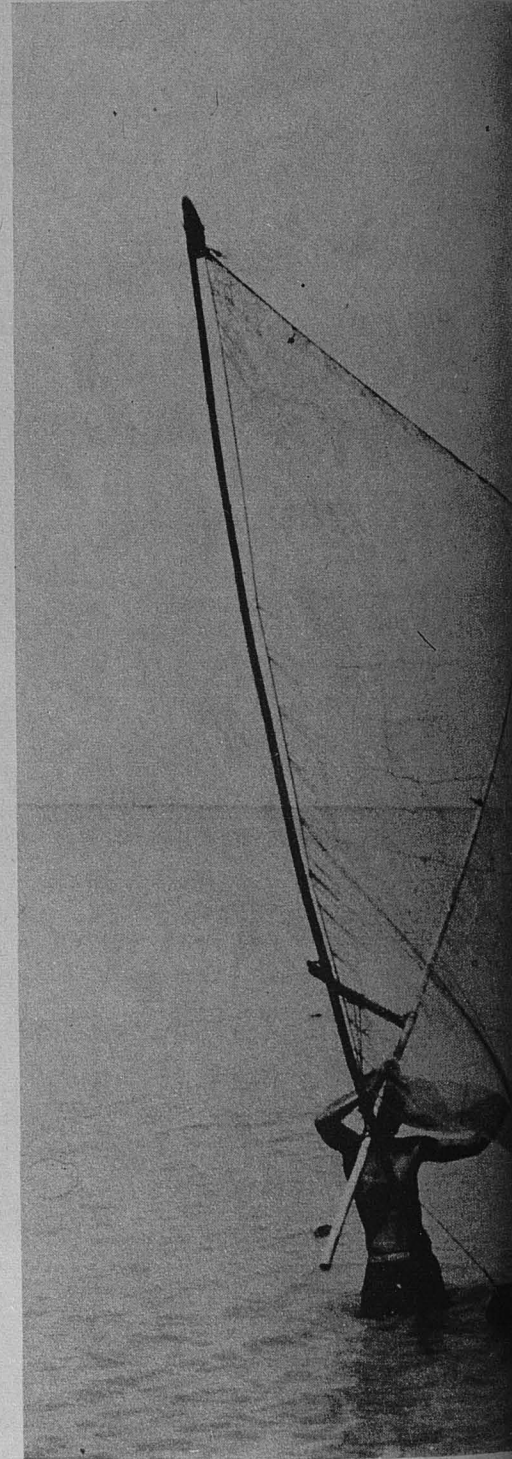
There are about 1,200 of them, poor but proud people who feel profoundly alienated from Malaysian society, but who would be regarded as outright foreigners in Portugal. "We are nowhere," says Patrick DeSilva, a young leader of this lost community. "We are people with a glorious past, a shaky present and an uncertain future."

The Portuguese in Malacca bear little resemblance to their forebears, those brave and brawling *conquistadores* who boldly sailed through the Malacca Straits, descended upon the tiny port and built an overseas empire in Asia before being driven out by the Dutch in 1641.

These Eurasian descendants of those buccaneers are, for the most part, humble fishermen with limited ability and low aspirations. They lead backward, narrow lives, many earning less than US\$1 per day plying waters that have been poisoned by pollution and emptied by over-fishing.

They inhabit a bunch of small homes on a seaside tract set up by British administrators in 1933. They have little contact with the Malaysian society surrounding them, and neighbors refer to them derogatorily as "grago," which are small prawn the Portuguese net in muddy offshore waters.

Malacca's Portuguese are caught in an economic and social bind that is largely of their own making: they are clannish



Poor but proud, Portuguese fishermen in Malacca

Christians, with a ghetto mentality, in a Muslim state; they cling to old customs and prefer to speak Christao, an archaic form of pidgin Portuguese, while government authorities stress national unity and the Malay language; they are ill-educated and unskilled in a place where the un-