

Lenasia slums wait: Johannesburg Indians now turn to prayer

AS A COLD SUN RISES over the Golden City, the chanting of a muezzin still echoes through the quiet streets of Fordsburg and Newtown—the last two bastions of Johannesburg's Indians.

BY GUY DICKSON

who spent the past few weeks speaking to Johannesburg Indians about their future

Perched high on the towering minaret he calls his fellow Indians to prayer. And they will come — each day more of them will come.

In a city in which they feel they have been forgotten, their pleadings, their petitions and their attempts at compromise have all gone astray and now they will turn to prayer. Every day they flock in increasing hundreds to their community-built R200,000 mosque.

There will be another day to face. For the hawker, the tailor, the waiter and the businessman, it will probably be another day of desperate speculation — "Will my home be the next to be expropriated?" "Will my family be the next to start on the dreaded 22-mile trek to Lenasia?"

Almost every one of the nearly 20,000 Indians living in Fordsburg and Newtown and those still scattered in areas which have al-

ready been proclaimed White, have at some time or other visited Lenasia.

Loath to move

They are loath to leave their homes and flats — most of them comfortable and in many cases attached to their shops and businesses — and move to an area which, they feel, will be an almost total sium within a couple of years.

The Indian just cannot understand it all. He cannot understand why he should be moved as much as 22 miles from the city; he cannot understand why, after

contributing to the growth of Johannesburg for more than 70 years, he should be abandoned by the City Council and left "to the mercy" of the Peri-Urban board, who have not — up till now — done much for him.

He cannot understand why, if he does ultimately have to move to Lenasia, health services, transport, housing, recreation and so many other facilities should be so poor.

But most of all he compares his township with the five available to the Coloured people.

The Group Areas Act, passed in 1954, has come to be accepted — but the obvious unhappiness

of the Indian section of our population should be carefully examined.

The Indians were accepted as a permanent part of our population in 1961.

The Coloured people have five townships — all within the Johannesburg municipal boundary — Bosmont, Coronationville, Rivoli, Newclare and Western Coloured Township.

All these townships are about seven miles from Johannesburg and the Coloured people have an excellent transport system. Return transport to the city, by bus or by train, costs no more than 15 cents a day.

An Indian social welfare worker described the Coloureds' recreation facilities and amenities as "easily up to the standard of the Europeans." They have their own schools, training college, hospital, clinics, swimming pools, tennis courts, bowling greens, a huge stadium, several sports fields, lawn parks, a beautiful communal hall and libraries — all within easy distance of their homes.

Bosmont, which has been in existence for only about four years, compared with Lenasia's 11, has beautiful flats and City Council-built houses and is only a few minutes' walk from the recreational facilities.

Some Coloureds are also living in Fordsburg, Newtown and Pageview — the three areas which are predominantly Indian at the moment.

The last two fortresses of the Indians, Fordsburg and Newtown,

THE main street of Lenasia, the Indian township 22 miles from Johannesburg, is lined with fine homes. Yet a few yards away are slums in which families live in shocking conditions.

It is here that the Johannesburg Indian communities are to be moved, many of them from their comfortable homes in Fordsburg, Newtown and other areas.

Many have become resigned to the fact of having to travel 22 miles to their business and other facilities, such as the mosque.

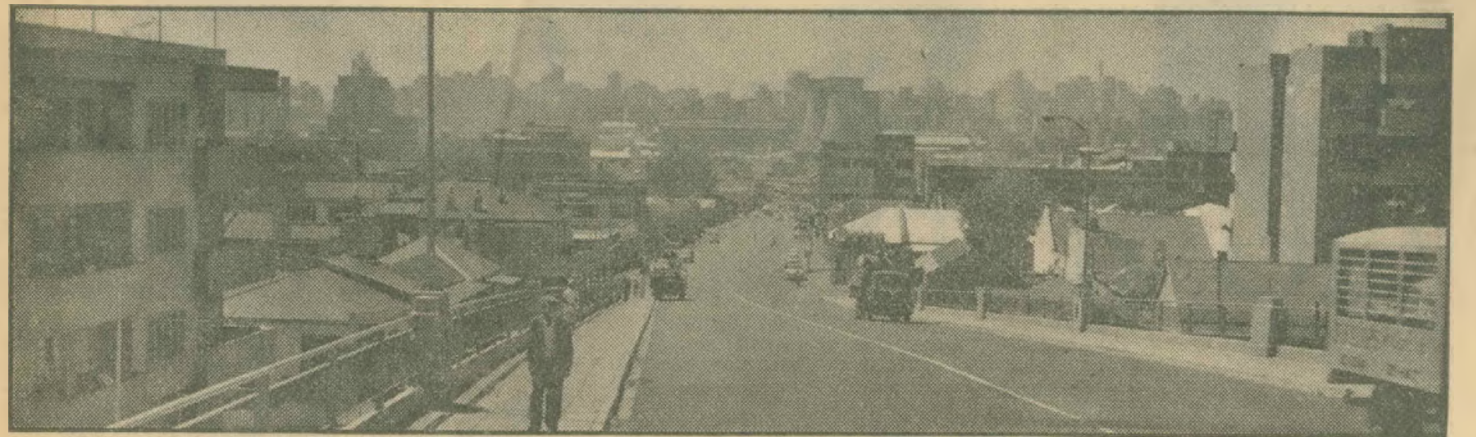
Their pleadings have come to nothing and most of the 20,000 Indians cannot understand why they have to go from areas where they have spent their lives to a desolate place where health, housing and recreation facilities are so poor.

Most of them are bitter, too, about the excellent facilities in the Coloured people's townships compared with Lenasia. Why are not similar facilities provided for them, they ask.

have several thousand Indian inhabitants scattered in Newlands, Pageview, Martindale, Turfontein, Overton, Bertrams, Jeppe and La Rochelle, but these areas have all been proclaimed White and the Indians' days there are numbered.

It is in Newtown and Fordsburg, however, that the Indians feel they have a true home. The two areas are central, they have far better houses (and flats) than Lenasia, transport is cheap, they have night clubs and bioscopes and instead of being able to see their families only at week-ends — as many working men who live in Lenasia must do — they are close to their families.

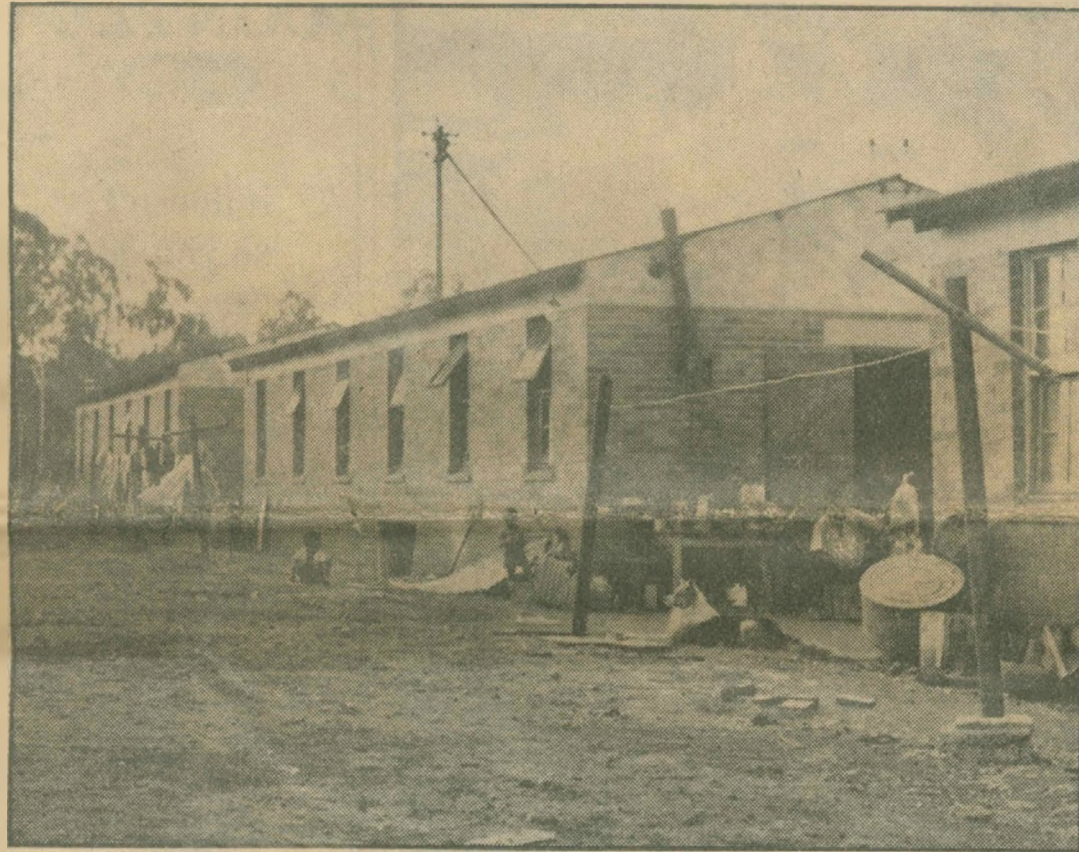
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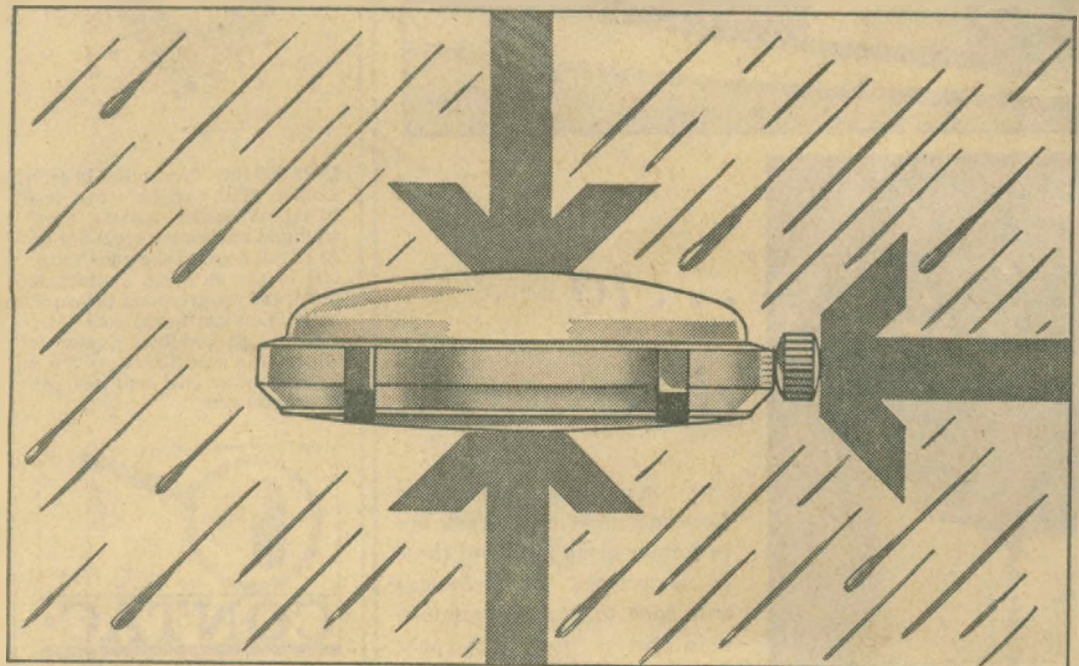
This bridge overlooks Fordsburg and Newtown of which nearly all the population is Indian. Soon the Indians will have to move.



This attractive home of an Indian family in Gillies Street, Fordsburg, could be expropriated at any time.



These former army buildings are "transit homes" in which many Indian families live in Lenasia. There are no ceilings or bathrooms and the people use communal taps and toilets.



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Indians will have to travel 22 miles from Lenasia to this cinema in Fordsburg, including an hotel and a hall this building is a centre of Fordsburg's social life, which rivals that of Hillbrow on a Saturday night. In Lenasia there are almost no social facilities.

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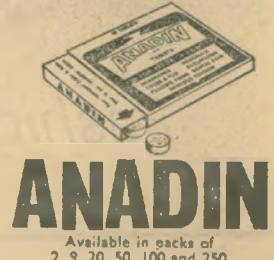
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THEIR HOUSES AND FLATS WILL ALL HAVE TO GO

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However, these two areas — though not yet proclaimed White — are termed Control Areas, which means basically that anything can happen to them at any time.

Important to the Indian too, is his worship. The mosque in Fordsburg is considered the best in the Southern Hemisphere. According to Moslem custom, a place of worship may not be torn down and moved. It will remain even if worshippers have to travel 22 miles every day to it. The Indians are considering what they are going to do when they move to Lenasia. They fear a knock at their door may mean an official with an expropriation notice.

Expropriation has become the breakfast table topic of even the most illiterate Indian.

Lenasia was started in 1955 — with the building of a high school. Soon afterwards 50 families moved into the first houses. In the same year the Indian high school at Booyens was closed down and all its pupils had to travel the 44 miles daily if they wished to further their education.

Struggle failed

There was at that time one other Indian high school, but this was closed in 1963 after a struggle by the Indian community failed to keep it in operation. Education not being compulsory, many parents are now not allowing their children — and especially their daughters — to attend the two high schools at Lenasia, as they feel the distance and dangers are too great.

The closing down of the high schools in Johannesburg was an obvious move to induce more families to settle in Lenasia and to a certain extent it has worked. But there are parents not prepared to move.

As one enters Lenasia one is faced with a main road flanked with beautiful houses — the houses of the rich. These are the township houses and were built by the Indian occupants themselves.

But the entrance to Lenasia is

from this...

Orient and Balmie house in central Johannesburg and a luxury house of an Indian family in Mint Road, Fordsburg. These and other homes will be expropriated and the occupants will have to move to Lenasia. But even for the wealthier Indians who can afford to build their own homes in the township, there are the disadvantages of poor recreational facilities (a small hall with holes in the floor), inadequate sporting facilities (a couple of school tennis courts and a soccer field without grass), and a danger of disease because of poor sanitary conditions. A hospital has been promised for the area, but so far there is none.

misleading. The people in these houses have no worries. The poorer Indian thinks: "These rich people (fewer than five per cent.) are not worried — why should they be? — they have beautiful homes, cars and businesses — they are selling our community to the public."

One need only look beyond these houses to see the filth and degradation of the slum areas of "Happy Valley" and Tomsville to get the true impression of Lenasia.

Juvenile delinquency is becoming serious, sanitation is bordering on unhealthiness, the people are miserable and are unable to better their lot.

Recreation facilities include one small hall (with holes in the floor), a couple of school tennis courts and a barren stretch of ground which, with a fair amount of imagination, could be used as a soccer field. A privately owned bioscope is being built.

An old Indian woman broke down in tears as she showed her

toilet to a party of visitors. The toilet (one of those that is connected to the water-borne sewerage system) had been out of order for several weeks.

Little money

"I have complained almost every day to the offices of the Community Development Board, but nothing has been done. I don't know what to do. We have little money and there is nothing here for us. We were much happier before we were moved out of Kliptown," she sobbed.

A doctor who lives in Lenasia said he has seen the bad sanitary conditions among the houses, transit camps (old military barracks) and slums. He had not yet installed water-borne sewerage (it costs about R180).

He said up till now there had been no serious outbreak of diseases from the poor sanitary conditions. "But I am certain that a lot of the common illnesses with which I have dealt at the clinic are caused by them."

But what have the Indians done to try to better their conditions at Lenasia? The most reliable answer to the question can be obtained from the files of the Johannesburg Indian Social Welfare Association.

50 cents

The Indian must pay 50 cents for a return fare to Johannesburg. This would obviously hit the pockets of many Whites let alone the poorer Indians.

In 1963, when the Indians were paying only 36 cents for a daily return fare, the welfare association wrote to the regional representative of the Department of Indian Affairs, asking that the South African Railways be asked to reduce the fares, as many of the Indians were finding them above their economic means.

The answer received read: "The question of the high train fares which the people, especially the workers, have to pay, and still is, a matter of great concern to this department..."

am, however, pleased to state that this matter is now receiving urgent attention at the highest level and a considerable concession is expected in the near future...

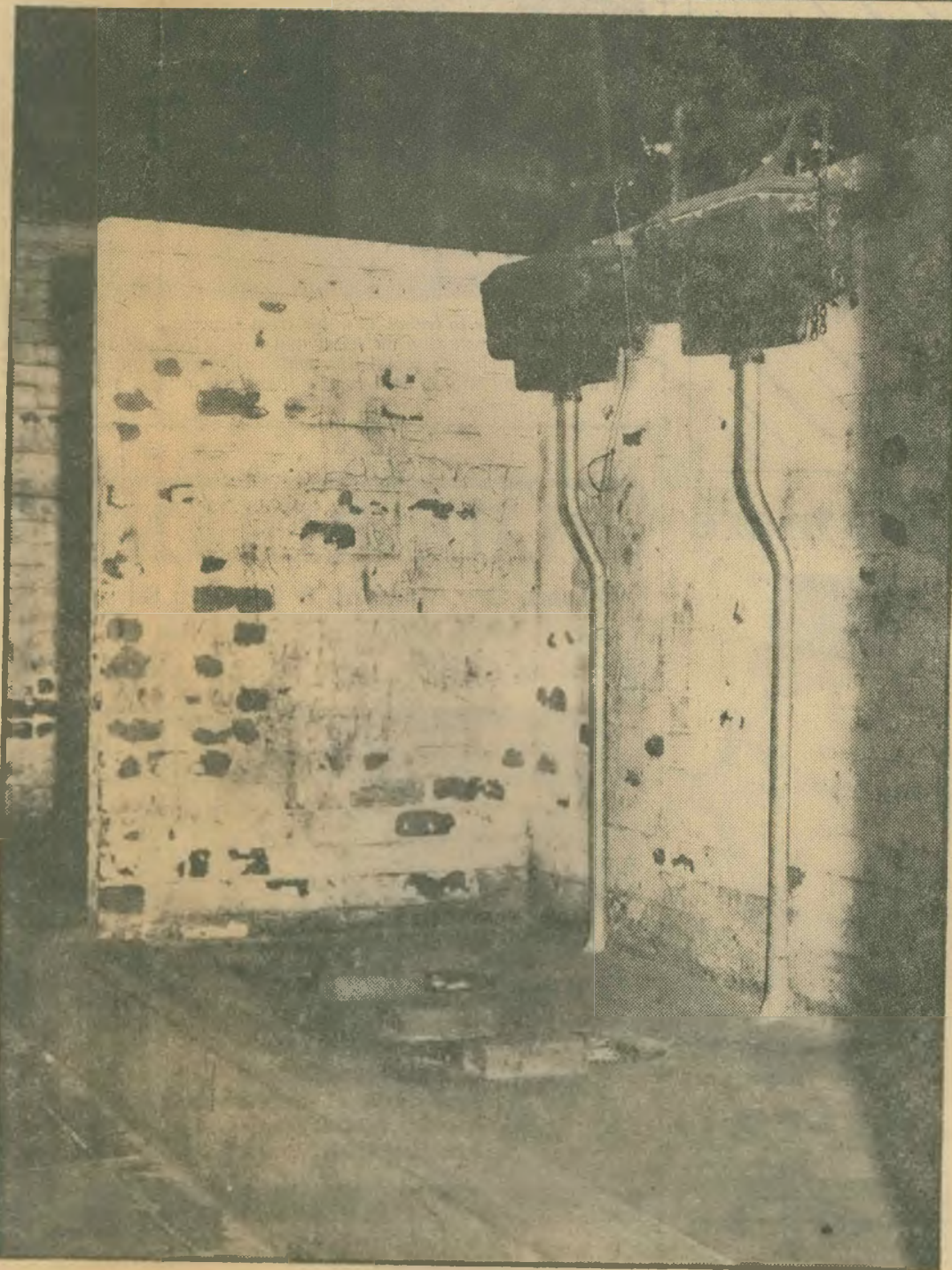
The fares have now risen from 36 cents to 50 cents.

The query of a hospital for the Indians received a reply from the same department, reading: "... at this stage I can only say that good progress is being made in this respect..." The Transvaal Provincial Administration's answer to the same question, read:

Years elapsed

"It has been decided 'in principle' to build a hospital..." Several years have elapsed and there are still no signs of improvements in these spheres, and indeed in all spheres which

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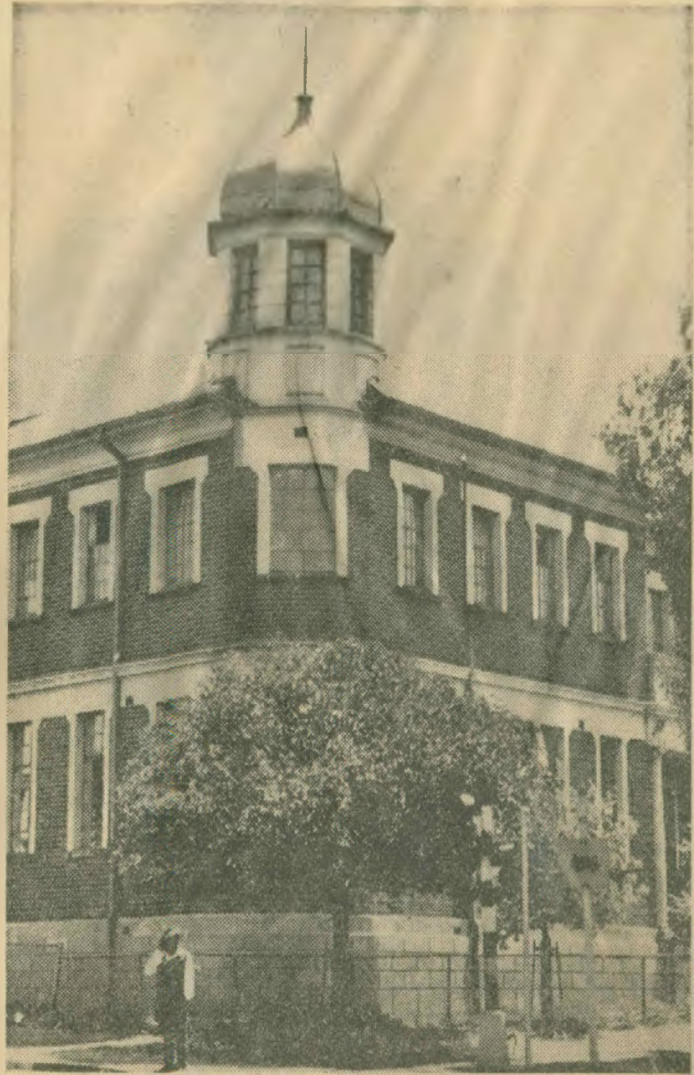
The communal toilets in Lenasia's slum area. They are in former army huts and there is no privacy. Many Indians will have to give up comfortable homes for such poor facilities.

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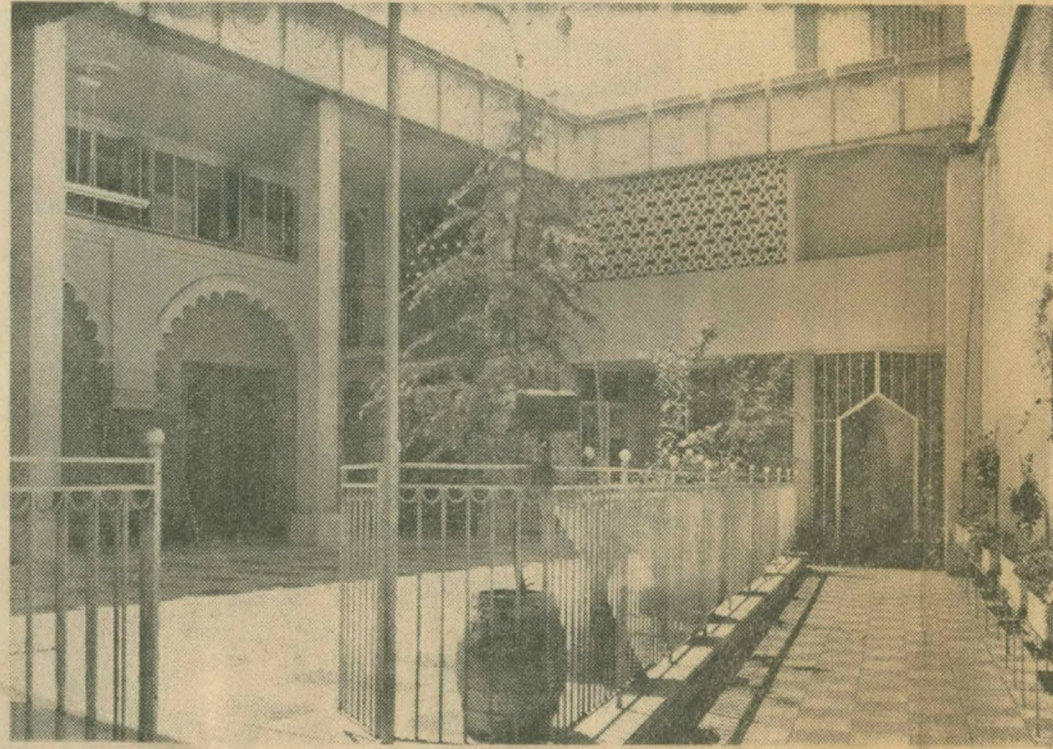
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Plenty for Coloureds... Lenasia is forgotten



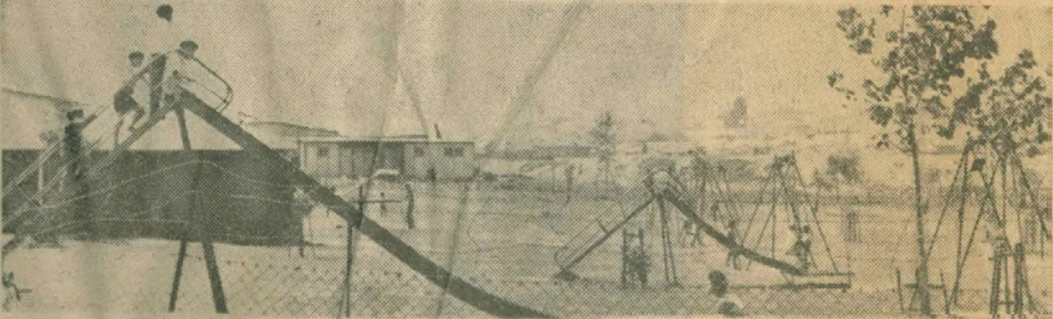
The Bree Street Indian Primary School, Newtown, which the Indian community built at a cost of R70,000. It has an enrolment of 900 children who will possibly have to attend school in a prefabricated building when they are moved with their parents to Lenasia.



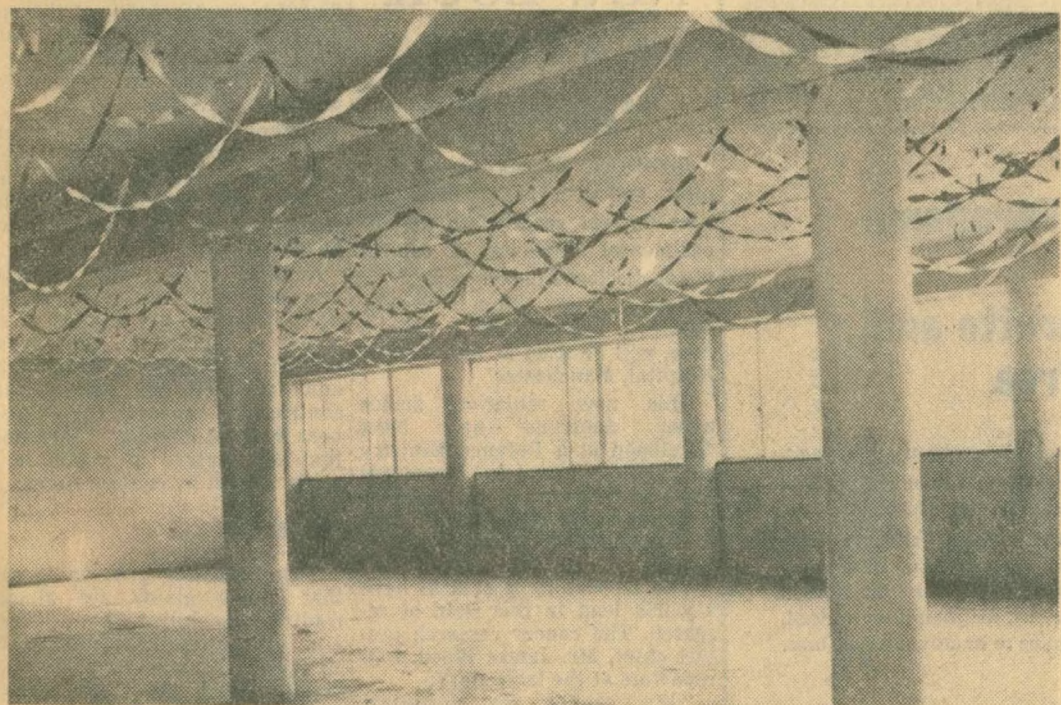
Newton mosque, built at a cost of more than R200,000. According to Moslem custom, a mosque cannot be destroyed and Indians will travel the 22 miles from Lenasia to worship there.



Above are flats built by the Community Development Board at Bosmont, a Coloured township, and below is a park provided for the area by the Johannesburg City Council. Bosmont has existed for four years. In the Indian township of Lenasia begun 11 years ago, most dwellings are of a poorer standard, and there are few places where children can play.



THE DIFFERENCE—



At the top is the Coronationville Hall in Coronationville Coloured township. This is contrasted with the Jasmine Hall for Indian people (above) in the Administrative Building in Lenasia. It is in poor condition and has holes in its floor.

Promises were not kept

(Cont. from preceding page)

would make Lenasia the "bright and modern township" that — in some circles — it is thought to be.

The residents still have no hospital of their own, although they have built for themselves an annex to the Johannesburg General Hospital — 22 miles from Lenasia. They have no swimming pools, parks, flats, stadiums, bowling greens — after 11 years.

The history of the Indians and of Lenasia is a sad one.

There is a crude brick factory at work in the township and as fast as the squat, shabby little houses can be turned out, so will the homes in Fordsburg and Newtown be expropriated and families moved to Lenasia.

The Indians' businesses, their shops and their homes will suffer as Lenasia's slum areas grow and as more of them give up the fight.

Already their shouts have turned to whimpers — and they seem quite alone in their whimpers.

Art thefts in Italy: State acts

From Our Correspondent

ROME, Tuesday. THE Italian Government has threatened to transfer to State museums exhibits of high artistic or historical interest now housed in privately owned museums, unless the directors of these museums take adequate steps to prevent their treasures being stolen or damaged.

In a letter to all museums owned by private individuals, municipalities, foundations and other non-State bodies, the Italian Fine Arts Department says its superintendent will check safety measures and suggest improvements such as the installation of burglar alarms or the employment of additional guards.

The department's order has followed a wave of thefts and vandalism in galleries and museums throughout Italy.

In January, 1965, vandals defaced 25 priceless paintings in the famous Uffizi Gallery in Florence. An alarm system was later installed in this State-owned gallery. Two more Renaissance paintings were defaced in the museum of Milan's Sforza Castle last November. Earlier, in another Milan gallery someone slashed Raphael's "Betrothal of the Virgin."

Art thefts from churches, private homes and smaller galleries have spread at such an alarming rate that the Italian Government has appealed, through Interpol, for an international drive against the thieves. It has been established that art crimes are carefully organized by masterminds in various countries where there is a huge demand, at record prices, for art objects.

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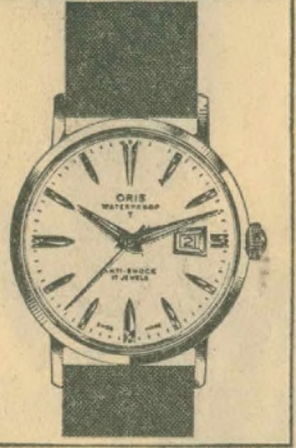


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