

Ali 'Holy War'

Has Officials in Retreat

By H. D. S. Greenway

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KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia, June 28—In multicolored mosques, in Muslim schools, in the homes of the faithful when the recorded voice of the muzim calls from the minaret, thousands of Muslims throughout Malaysia face Mecca and pray for the success of Muhammad Ali, the heavyweight boxing champion of the world.

Ali is also the favorite of non-Muslims in this racially divided country. Hindi school girls with Ali badges follow the champion asking him for autographs, and Chinese shop clerks sneak away from work to catch a glimpse of him before the big fight. But it is the Muslim Malays who have taken Ali, the Muslim convert from Christianity, to heart. Some even come up and kiss his hand.

"Every Muslim will pray to Allah for his success," says Tun Datu Haji Mustapha, the chief minister of the state of Sabah and one of Malaysia's leading political personalities. "May he come out of the ring triumphant as the champion and the standard bearer of Islam...."

A leading "bomoh" or sorcerer has been instructed to keep the rain away from Merdeka Stadium on the morning of the fight. Bo-

mohs are not taken lightly in Malaysia and their track record for keeping dry important events is impressive. There was an unfortunate slip-up last March when an international golf tournament and a field hockey tournament were washed here the same day. Rival bomohs were hired and the rain kept shifting back and forth over both events.

But Kuala Lumpur has never had a sporting event of such magnitude as the Ali-Bugner fight and all bomohs can be expected to cooperate. Large-conscious city officials have asked the girlie bars and strip joints to cooperate as well and to flesh up their shows during the week of the fight so as not to give Malaysia a bad image abroad.

The city's school children have been given a holiday on the day of the fight and government workers have been given a half day off. The less expensive tickets have not sold well, however, as many Malaysians are hoping the fight will be broadcast on local television.

Both Ali and British challenger Joe Bugner have dined with the prime minister and today both had a private audience with the king. His Majesty, Abdul Halim Muadzam Shah, has a block of seats roped off at ringside. "The king is a nice man, a humble man," Ali said. "He said he heard that Bugner was a good fighter. I told him I could beat him."



Ambitious politicians who would like to have their names linked with Ali have accompanied the champion to mosques in the city and have invited him to confer with Islamic leaders and attend conversion ceremonies. Only the more conservative "kathis" or holy men grumble over the fact that the American Black Muslim sect is not recognized here as a legitimate Muslim sect in the strictest sense.

Ali's showmanship and good-natured clowning have endeared him to Malaysian crowds, but some of his statements in the name of Islam have caused police and security men to bite their nails.

When Ali speaks of the bout as being a "holy war" and says that "Allah protects me with his divine shield," he makes it sound as if the Honor of Islam is at stake. American reporters in town for the fight put it down to the old Ali Razzamatanz and laugh. But the large-circulation local papers dare not print a word

papers that the government would not be displeased if the coverage of Ali was cut down a bit.

Ali's training routine has been to run on a horse racing track before dawn and to work out in a gym shortly after noon. Bugner runs in the evening and works out at 9:30 in the morning. Bugner has eased his training considerably but Ali is still going full blast. He boxed 15 rounds without a break with his sparring partners yesterday and said he would box 10 rounds tomorrow and Monday.

of it and the police fear that unsophisticated Muslims might get too carried away emotionally.

The terrible race riots of 1969 between Muslim Malays and the Chinese, in which nearly 300 people were killed, are remembered all too well.

No one in Ali's camp appeared to have been aware that the Louisville Lip might unwittingly incite a riot. When tipped off about the racial tensions and the events of 1969, Ali's trainer and confidant, Angelo Dundee, made a note to tell Ali: "Cut the holy war deep, they already had one here."

Police leaves have been canceled and one senior security officer said that "if Ali should lose there is a strong possibility of rioting in the streets. Some of our people here are very simple and they take their religion seriously. To them nobody talks about a holy war unless they mean it and Muslims might become too upset if he should lose."

There are about 4.8 million Muslims and 3.6 million Chinese out of a total population of about 10 million in Malaysia. Government policy is now to promote the traditionally backward Malays at the expense of the Chinese. And even within the Malay establishment itself Ali walks like the classical American innocent abroad among the intrigues and rivalries of an Oriental court.

Political rivals of Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman—politicians of the extreme pro-Muslim Malay stripe—have sought to use Ali without his knowledge, and recently the prime minister's office told local news-