

# Taj Mahal of Brunei

**I**N THE oil-rich State of Brunei, a glistening edifice of white stone crowned with a golden dome—now nearing completion—may well be the largest and most beautiful mosque in southeast Asia as originally conceived by Brunei's chief of state.

The \$10-million state mosque, already dubbed the "Taj Mahal of Brunei," was scheduled to be formally opened on September 23, which is the 42nd birthday of the Sultan of Brunei, Sir Omar Ali Saifuddin.

The opening ceremonies will be attended by Muslim dignitaries from all over the world. In all, 350 official guests have been invited for the five-day celebrations. Hundreds of workmen who began working on the

structure three years ago are now busy putting the finishing touches to it.

Sir Omar first envisaged "Project Mosque" in June of 1952, and has kept his interest in the project all along. During the building of the mosque he asked for a daily report of its progress.

Into the building of the new mosque have gone materials from different parts of the world. The 43 window apertures, for example, are filled with beautiful stained glass, made by a famous British firm specializing in this kind of craft. The main hall of the mosque which can accommodate 2,000 worshippers is floored with marble from Italy.



The "Taj Mahal of Brunei" dominates the town of Brunei. The main tower of the mosque is 165 feet high and is surrounded by eight main (90 ft. high) minarets and 12 minor (50 ft.) ones. To get to the top of the tower, one may climb up a 23-step staircase or use an elevator.

**A**T ONE corner of the mosque is situated a large washing pool built of glittering white stone. The pool is to be beautifully floodlit at night.

Six houses are being built near the home of the Sultan to

accommodate guests to the opening ceremonies. The houses—named "Street of Istanas" by the inhabitants of Brunei Town—will be used later as residences for VIPs visiting the State of Brunei.

For the 10,000 Brunei people who live in the "Village on the Water," a bridge connecting the village and the new mosque has been built.

Also scheduled to take place during the celebrations is the circumcision ceremony of the Sultan's eldest son, Pengiran Muda Hassanel Bolkihah.

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### Mean What?

*A young junior at an exclusive Eastern prep school is still trying to decipher the following letter from his recent steady:*

*"Dear John: I hope you're not still angry. I want to explain I was really joking when I told you I didn't mean what I said about reconsidering my decision not to change my mind. Please believe I really mean this.*

*Love,*

*Grace."*

