

■ Will the problem be solved by this method?

SMUGGLING IN CAIRO

Smuggling is also a headache to the Egyptian authorities. In an effort to stop the illegal flow of luxury goods into the country, the government appropriated 600,000 Egyptian pounds (or about ₪5,200,000) to import the goods itself and drive black-marketeters out of business.

Along Cairo streets, smuggled items are openly sold at exorbitant prices. Exported toothpaste, for instance, sells at the Philippine equivalent of ₪5.00 for an economy-size tube. Toilet soap, drip-dry shirts and fancy cuff-links bear impossibly high price tags. Still, many Egyptians buy them because no luxury item can be bought in as a result of a ban imposed by President Nasser.

The government has discovered that most of the goods came from Libya, Lebanon and Goza, a custom-free zone for Palestinian traders. Contraband from other countries are shipped in as

personal effects of incoming travelers.

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Anti-smuggling efforts produced no results. When special police squads chased the vendors off Cairo's sidewalks, the latter carried their illicit business elsewhere. Checkpoints at the airports, railroad stations, ports and the Goza highway halted contraband traffic in these places, all right. But the smugglers lost no time in setting up a new supply route by camel caravans, across the western desert from Libya, and through the Nubian desert from Sudan.

Accepting defeat, the government threw up its hands in virtual despair and said, in effect, "If we can't fight 'em let's join 'em." Advocates of the new government policy believe that by importing luxury goods itself, it can share in the profits involved and force the smugglers out of business.

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Among the items that can be legally brought in are cameras, watches, women's underwear, toys, neckties, cigarette-lighters, fishing and camping equipment, tape recorders, French perfumes. Because of the chronic lack of hard currency, Egypt hopes to be able to pay for these with Egyptian products — mainly textiles and handicrafts. Two delegations are leaving for Europe to negotiate the deals.

The government is confident that once his new move is implemented, the problem of smuggling will be licked. But in the meanwhile, Egypt's smugglers are making the most of what little time they have left. Trading on banned commodities continues at a brisk pace along Cairo's Azhar and other side streets.

Economic crisis or no, luxury-loving Egyptians feel they have a right to enjoy only the best things that the piastre can buy.

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Travel notes: Hongkong authorities handle the international airport with such efficiency that incoming visitors are cleared in a matter of minutes. The flow of pedestrian traffic is laid out so that you have to be awful stupid to get lost. The airport premises has a scrubbed look and makes every Filipino visitor ashamed of the Manila International Airport. . . .

I had a talk with a friendly ricksha man at the HK ferry landing, and found that he makes as much as a taxi driver. HK\$20 for a day's work. Although social reformers have depicted him as a poor, downtrodden creature, the ricksha man is completely happy and adjusted to his chosen vocation. I asked if he wasn't bothered by the fact that he was doing the work of a beast of burden. He turned to me with a wide, superior grin: "Nosir, nosir — everytime man rides, I think he is cargo, like pig. . . ." — *By Reuben R. Canoy in The Philippine Herald, May 7, 1966.*