

LIKE other metropolitan cities of the region central city areas of rapidly growing Dhaka are becoming less and less attractive to the poor with the passage of time. Even the prospect of access to land in the fringe areas of Dhaka city has become bleak for them as commercial housing companies price the land out of their reach into the hands of the super rich.

In the area — Goran — where Professor Nazrul Islam, Director of the Centre for Urban Studies, University of Dhaka did his case study price of land, nearly empty even in the late '50s as evident from an aerial photograph of 1958, rose by over 15 times to Tk 6 million per acre, and one of the largest real estate developers of the country had already entrenched itself in the study area.

Institutional loans for financial purchase of land is not available to the poorer section of the people, and only a few among the many real estate companies go for housing development itself. "It has been alleged that commercial housing companies are motivated primarily in making high profits and are occasionally involved in frauding through land transactions," Professor Islam

BOOK REVIEW

ON THE FRINGE

Dhaka Metropolitan Fringe Land and Housing Development, Nazrul Islam, Dhaka Study Series 10, Dhaka City Museum, Price Tk 70 (inland), US \$ 10 (abroad)

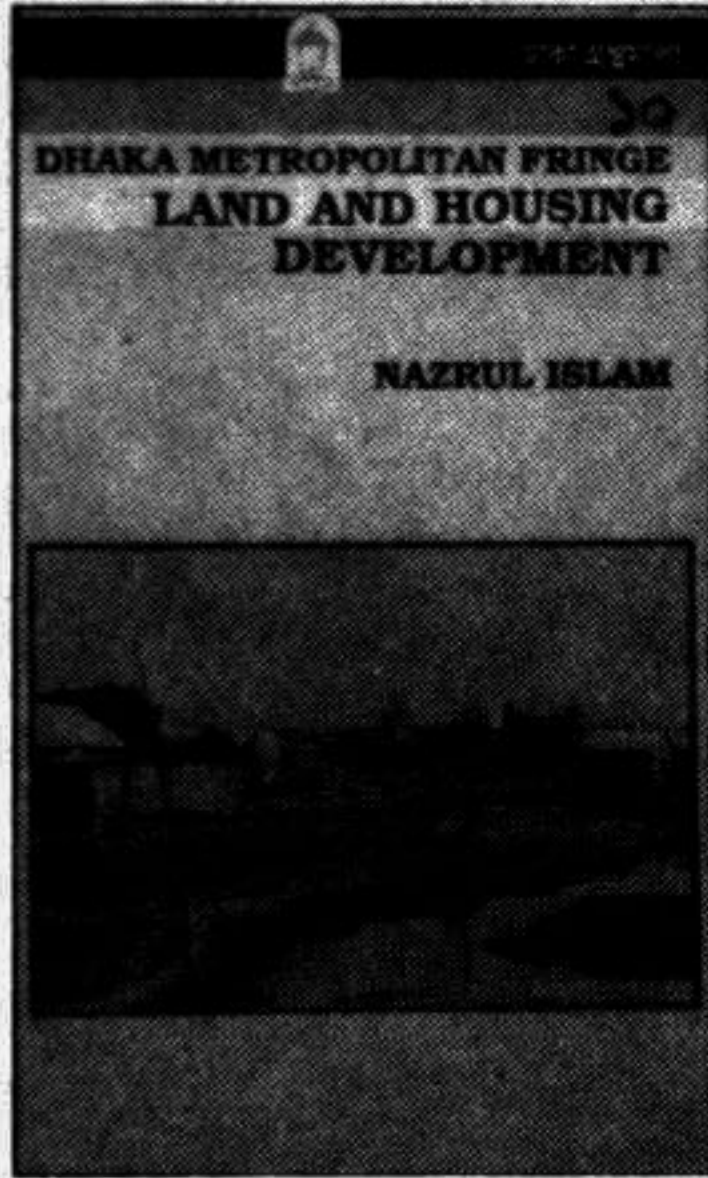
Reviewed by Shahrah-e-Hasan

says citing in his case study of seven land sellers that

"Oriental Housing" usually made only a small down payment and then prolonged subsequent instalments for years together. The company also used pressure tactics and even musclemen to force the original owners of land to sell their land to the company at the price it offered.

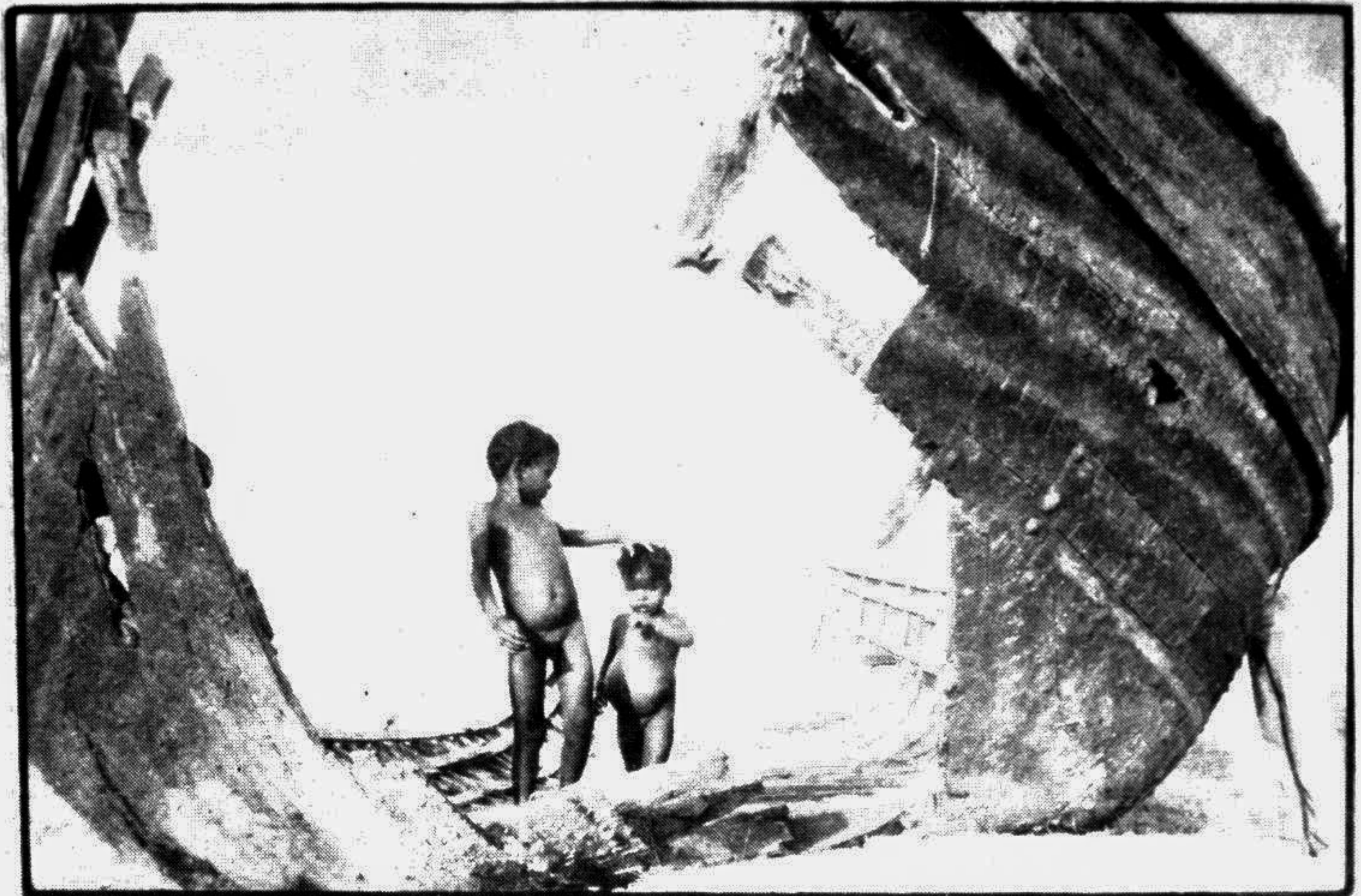
Consequently more and more people are forced into slums where there would be an open kutcha latrine, common kitchen, no gas and water would have to be purchased.

Prof Islam, who did a stint of teaching at the Asian Institute



of Technology, Bangkok and served as consultant to several UN agencies and the World Bank, suggests government protection against the invasion by commercial developers. The city planning authority, RAJUK, should move fast to prepare advanced zonal plans for the fringe areas and ensure their implementation to avoid haphazard and unregulated growth. "It is absolutely high time that a well thought out comprehensive urban land management policy be adopted keeping the vast multitude of the urban poor in central focus," appeals Professor Islam.

The book tenth in the Dhaka Study Series of the Dhaka City Museum, is well produced and illustrated. Readers would also appreciate the inner cover where unauthorised structures near a nawab's palace is seen being demolished. But the readers would best appreciate if Prof Nazrul Islam, who was the Convener of the Task Force on Social Implications of Urbanisation, set up by the government of Bangladesh updates his highly informative book with the latest data and resultant conclusions.



Life-38. Nafis Ahmed Nadvi.

1991: The Year of the Sheep

Nasrin Sobhan

ON February 15, 1991 Chinese people all over the world ushered in the New Year, the year of the Sheep. Legend has it that when Buddha was leaving the earth he summoned animal Kingdom to say goodbye to them. Only twelve appeared, so as a reward he named a year after each of them. Hence the Years of the Dog, Dragon, Rooster, Ox, Sheep, Horse, Rabbit, Rat, Monkey, Tiger, Snake and Boar. Each of these signs comes round every twelve years in sequential combination with one of the five elements of fire, metal,

different years are supposed to have their own characteristics. According to their elements and their animal signs they signal different types of events and trends. Most of us viewed with pleasure the Year of the Dragon in 1989, with its flamboyance, its achievements and its dynamism. With rather less pleasure and more dismay we experienced the ups and downs, the political changes and the tensions of the year of

the Metal Horse in 1990, which was in fact predicted to be a year of conflict and unrest. Certainly the events in the Gulf have done nothing to disabuse us of this belief.

What does the Year of the Sheep hold in store? Those Chinese who believe in such things say that this year will be relatively quiet and not a time for earth-shaking events. It will be a time for relaxing and recovering from the depre-

ditions of the Horse, and for gathering one's energies for the years to come. It will be a time for staying home and nurturing relationships and for quiet pursuits.

On the international scene the Year of the Sheep will herald a welcome change after the violence of the Year of the Horse. It will be a time for peace initiatives and peace-making, which augurs well for an end to the tragic war in the Gulf.

For those people who are interested in making money it should be a lucky time, because the Sheep is the eighth sign, and to the Chinese 8 is the symbol for prosperity and good luck.

These days few Chinese will admit to a belief in astrology or in fact anything that smacks of superstition. However, it is a fact that in Hong Kong for example, people will still pay a fortune to buy car number-plates with a lucky combination of numbers, and still consult astrologers on auspicious dates before embarking on an important project.

In this age of technology people are beginning to discard old beliefs and customs; but these same old customs and traditions are a charming manifestation of one aspect of an ancient and impressive culture. If they are harmless and enjoyable why not preserve them!

For those people who are fortunate enough to be born in the Year of the Sheep (1931, 1943, 1955, 1967, 1979, 1991, etc.) they are good natured, kind-hearted and generous. The Sheep are believed to be extremely lucky if they are men.



1943, 1955, 1967, 1979, 1991
Elegant and creative, you are timid and prefer anonymity. You are most compatible with Boars and Rabbits but never the Ox.

water, earth, and wood.

1946 for example, which was a year of the Dog, had fire as its element. The next time the Dog came round in 1958 the governing element was earth. Having done one cycle with each of the five elements, the year of the Dog will come round again with the governing element of Fire only after sixty years.

Both the animals and the elements governing the year of one's birth are said to have a direct influence on temperament and character. Thus, a person born in the year of the Fire Ox (1937) will be forceful and proud, with a strong temper and a tendency to like power and importance. His aggressive personality can turn him towards the pursuit of a career of a militaristic nature, and in certain situations can even propel him into war.

The Dragon person born in 1940 when the ruling element was metal will be honest, active and hard-working and highly intelligent, but he will also be inflexible, stubborn and sometimes intolerant.

People born in 1944, the Year of the Wood Monkey, will be clever, glib, charming, innovative and curious. They will be good at everything they do.

As for those people who are fortunate enough to be born in the year of the Sheep (1931, 1943, 1955, 1967, 1979, 1991 etc.) they are good-natured, kind-hearted and generous. The Sheep are believed to be extremely lucky if they are men. Everything in life will come easily to them; they will inherit money, be showered with gifts, and will always have friends to look out for their interests.

On the other hand it is believed that girls born during this period will be a liability to their husbands because they are usually pleasure-loving and spendthrift in their ways. However, since they are at the same time good-looking, elegant, artistic and have instinctive good taste they are difficult to resist.

It seems girls must avoid certain years: parents are normally unhappy to have a daughter born in the Year of the Horse as such girls are headstrong and impulsive, and it is commonly believed, they will therefore have stormy married lives.

In a similar fashion, the

The Riddle of \$500m Silver Under the Arabian Sea

Silver bullion and three million silver Saudi rials, with a combined value of up to \$ 500 million, secreted in the hold of an American ship sunk off the coast of Oman 46 years ago, are to be brought to the surface later this year.

Speculation on the background to the salvage operation, which is estimated will cost 20 million dollars, has been circulating in private circles in at least three capitals for about a year.

Various names, including that of the Omani monarch Sultan Qaboos bin Said, have been suggested as to who is sponsoring the retrieval of ma-

rine treasure that promises to rank alongside that of the famous Nanking Cargo and the search for the Titanic.

The story has all the elements of a blockbuster film, the romance of a desert King's coinage, the drama of war, the excitement of bringing to the light of day treasure from the depths of the ocean, and the intrigues of international diplomacy.

And it is this last aspect which has given rise in recent weeks to the belief that talks between Oman, in whose territorial waters the treasures lie, and the United States, have centered on who should reap

the major benefit from the silver's recovery.

The saga started with the sinking of the steamship John Barry, named in honour of the first American naval officer to capture a British warship during the 1776 War of Independence, by the German submarine Jepsen on August 28, 1944.

In the words of a confidential US naval report of the time, the doomed ship "zigzagged" its way through the waters of the Arabian Sea in an attempt to enemy action.

In the holds of the John Barry lay 2,000 tonnes of silver ingots, destined for India under the American Government's lend-lease programme.

The precious metal would act as a stabilising force for the war-embattled rupee, together with three million silver rials coins, minted in Philadelphia for Saudi Arabia's King Ibn Saud.

The first torpedo struck the ship at 6 pm, with two more successfully fired by the Jepsen during the next 30 minutes. The vessel broke in two and rapidly sank. While the 31-man crew had time to take to the lifeboats and were rescued by a Dutch merchantman and taken to Aden, there was no time, again in the words of a classified American naval report, "for confidential papers and codes" to be saved.

The captain of the John Barry was, however, able to report that while the ship's papers and codes "went down with her", the vessel "was not boarded by the enemy" before it sank beneath the waves.

—GEMINI NEWS
John Beasant has lived in Fiji, Vanuatu, Zimbabwe and the Maldives and is currently working as a journalist based in Oman.

A Boy From Another War

by Farzana Haque

Like the naked child that ran on picture covers, Depicting the Vietnam Tragedy, Of napalmed villages, streets, lives, He shrieks and runs too. He is a mere child, with a rusty Empty tin dish in his hand. He leaps over marshes, fallen trees, Seeking his "Ma" and "Baba". The child is frightened of the darkness. He does not comprehend what he was meant to be. Another corpse of a child, waiting to be buried.

He survived the fury of the cyclone Yet he knows not what survival means As he runs past bloated bodies and carcasses. He yearned for the softness of his "Ma's" bosom. Wanted to be lifted high in the air by his "Baba". Wondered when his sister would lull him to sleep. He had lost them all, knew not how. Only was aware of a rage in the air He was the survivor. A Victim of another War. The War of Mother Nature.

From preceding page
Charges against Sudhangsu were not proved; she was acquitted. However, instead of returning to the Baldah House, she settled in Calcutta.

After the tragedy, Narendra Narayan lost his enthusiasm for creative works. He could only manage to give the finishing touch to Cybele. Narendra wrote the epitaphs for his son and himself. The epitaphs, located in Cybele, bear the testimony of his poetic mind.

Before his death on 13 August, 1943, Narendra Narayan drew up a will through which he left instructions to provide fund from the earnings of Baldah zemindary for the maintenance of Psyche and Cybele.

Anami Prashad, the grandson of Narendra became the legal heir to Baldah zemindary when he was only 13. Rai Bahadur Atul Prashad Roy Chowdhury was very much anxious about the safety and security of his son Anami, particularly after the murder of Nripendra. Atul Prashad arranged special security-measures for his son.

Two Nepali armed guards were engaged to protect me and these two guards used to keep their eyes on me almost 24 hours", remembers Anami Prashad. For studies, Anami had to stay for sometime in Darjeeling where the same two guards were around him.

After the abolition of zemindary system, it became too difficult for Anami Prashad to maintain the creations of his grandfather. So, he had to handover the gardens to the government and the Forest Department took the responsibility for their maintenance. At the same time, the rare collections preserved in the Baldah House Museum were handed over to Dhaka Museum authorities who had shifted all the objects to their own building. Thousands of books of Baldah Library were also donated to the Central Public Library.

"I had no alternative to handing over all these things to the government, since I was helpless. I thought it better to give the responsibility to the government for their proper maintenance", says Anami Prashad. "Life is hard now - now I have to earn living for maintaining my own family."

Anami Prashad has a wife, three sons and a daughter. One of the sons is getting higher education abroad while others are studying at the Dhaka University and colleges. Anami had to let out a portion of the Baldah House and the whole of the ground floor is now rented by commercial firm. Briefly speaking, once a descendant of a big Zemindar, Anami Prashad Roy Chowdhury is now dependent on this house rent and some income from his properties in Baldah and Kashimpur.

The famous Natak Ghar on the house compound no more exists. After the death of its creator Narendra Narayan, it went out of use. Weather-beaten, and we-beaten, after several years, the ruins had to be swept away.

This Natak Ghar was once the attraction for the elites of the city including the Nawab of Dhaka. Many renowned musicians of the sub-continent graced the small auditorium. Ustad Alauddin Khan performed here on several occasions. Among others, Ustad Abdul Karim Khan, Ustad Fayaz Khan, Dilip Roy, Sachin Dev Burman stepped into this house and rendered performances in the Natak Ghar. Narendra Narayan himself wrote many dramas which were staged in this auditorium.



A Murder that Sealed the Fate of a Family

Narendra Narayan had special interest for literature and himself wrote as many as 60 books, mostly dramas.

then the family remained landlords of the area.

There was bitter rivalry between the two Zemindar families of Kashimpur and Bhawal. Anami's father Atul Prashad

became involved in the sensational case of Bhawal's Mejhokumar that went up to Privy Council for disposal. In this case, Ramendra Narayan, a member of Bhawal's Zemindar family who was known as Mejhokumar claimed his due share and right in the estate.

Mejhokumar was considered dead and his body was reportedly cremated in Darjeeling in 1909.

But, after 12 years he reappeared and claimed that he was the Mejhokumar and, according to his version, he was rescued by the Naga saints from the crematorium and since then he lived with them.

It was Rai Bahadur Atul Prashad, who found Mejhokumar on the bank of Buriganga and brought him to Kashimpur with due honour. And the people of Bhawal believed him to be the Mejhokumar, who had great resemblance with original one. But, that is a different story.



Anami Prasad Roy Chowdhury, the grandson who now lives in the Baldah House as the lone inheritor.



The Baldah Garden

From preceding page

The Cacti House contains many rare cactus plants and houses some of the most dreaded plants in pots of various sizes. There are over 2000 orchid plants of 50 species and a rich collection of aloe plants in this garden.

The famed camellia plants from Japan, whose bright pink flowers inspired Tagore to write his poem "Camellia" during a visit here in the late-

twenties, is another attraction of this garden. There is also a Bhojpatra tree, whose bark was used as paper in the olden days, located on the eastern side of Psyche. The Ashoka tree famous for its trunk flowering and the Cannonball tree are also located in this part of the garden. The Amazon lily is also another proud collection of this garden.

The Psyche also contains an observatory tower, the super-

intendents office, residence, a plant hospital, store and a pottery shed.

Cybele, the second part of the Baldah Garden located on the northern side of Nawab street was completed around 1938.

The tomb of the founder and his son is located here which adds an air of solemnity to the gardens serene atmosphere. The Shankharid pond with its majestic marble-tiled steps leading to the water level is located in the middle of this part of the garden. The Cybele is also richly stocked with orchids, ferns and conservatory plants housed in the largest green house of Baldah Garden. There are two green houses located in each section and six conservatories in the garden.

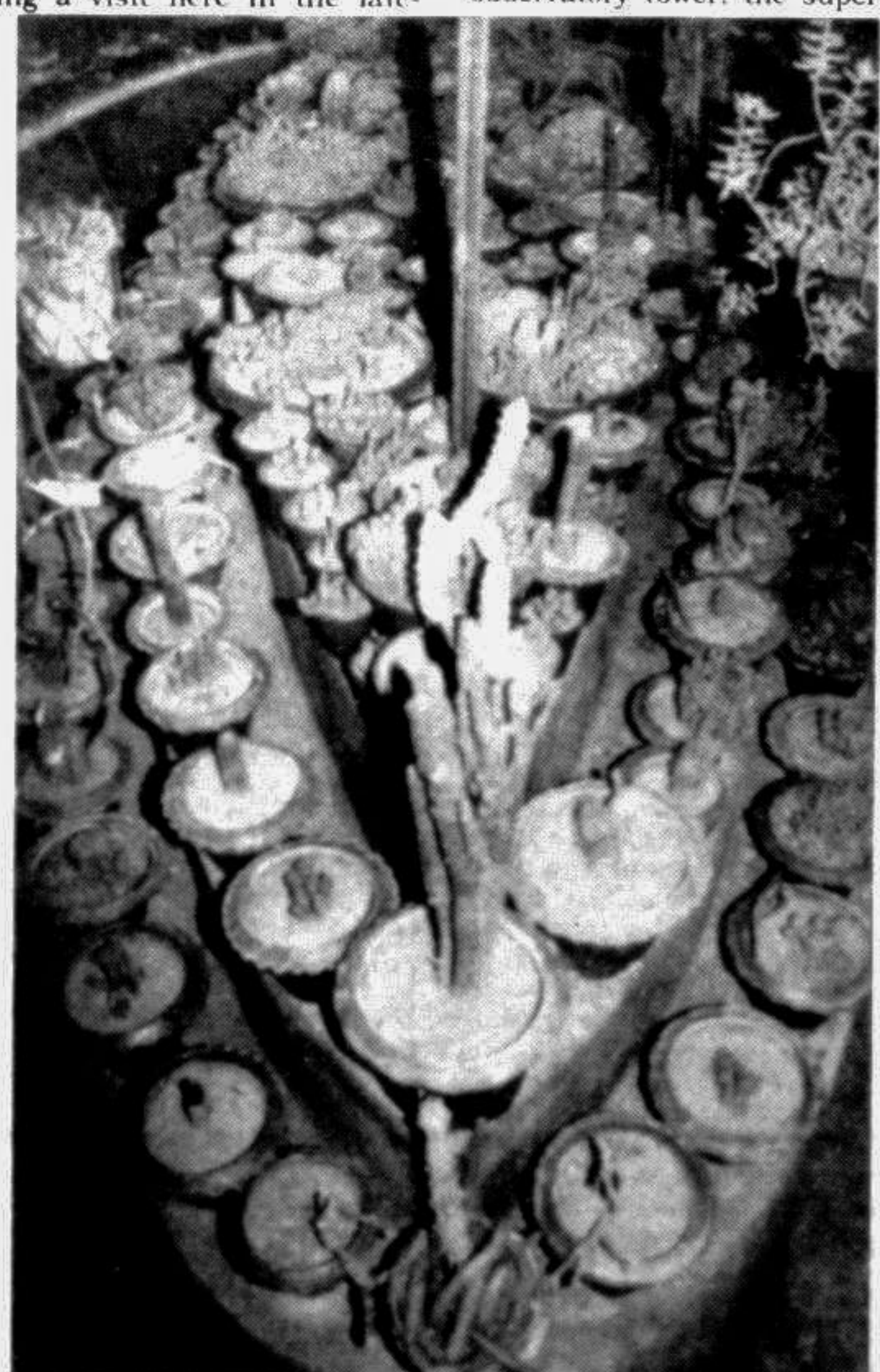
The famous Century plant is also located at Cybele. The first Century flower in this garden bloomed in 1952 and the last time it bloomed again in 1975.

There is Baobab tree in this garden, this Central African tree was used by aborigines to seal their dead in holes dug into the cavities of these trees to mummify them. The Cybele is also rich in its collection of arboretum plants and also houses the rose garden. There were 217 varieties of roses in this garden at one time. Today, only a few variety of roses are left and the rarest of the left-overs is the green rose.

There is also a well-built sun dial at Cybele which gives the accurate time on a sunny day even today.

The Baldah Garden is open for public visits from 8 am till 11 am in the morning and from 2 to 5 pm in the afternoon everyday of the week. An entry fee of Taka Two for adults and Taka One for children is charged at the gate.

However, visitors are not allowed into Psyche anymore, as it is being used as a propagation wing of the garden.



Psyche houses the richest collection of over 200 species of cacti in the country.