

The Daily Star WEEKEND MAGAZINE

The Moghul Fort at Lalbagh in Dhaka is one of the most important monuments in Bangladesh. Situated on the northern bank of the Buriganga, the remains of the fort, weatherworn, stand in quiet dignity. The remains — now three hundred years old — carry the echoes across the passage of centuries. This palace fort is the only one of its kind in Bangladesh. It was built by Aurangzeb, the last great Moghul emperor, under the supervision of Shaista Khan, the Governor of Bengal (1677-1779). Later, Prince Azam Shah, when he took over as the Governor of Bengal for the period, built a double storied hall of Public Audience in the fort.

Its plan resembles that of Dalan-i-Sang-i-Surkh at the Lahore Fort in Jehangir's Quadrangle. When Prince Azam Shah left Bengal in 1680, the building of the fort came under the control of Shaista Khan. However, four years later, the death of his daughter, popularly known as Pari Bibi, disheartened him to such an extent that he abandoned the scheme and left the fort incomplete.

Unlike most other forts, it cannot be seen well and appreciated from outside as the present approach lies through a sidestreet off Lalbagh Road. Any attempt to get a good view of the fort from the river is frustrating as slums, houses and sheds fill the space which once lay between Riazuddin Street passing below it.

The incomplete fort was planned as a walled palace rather than a siege fort. Spreading over an area of nine acres, it appears to have been planned with a rectangular outline. Some interesting part of the fort include the building complex in the south-eastern portion, consisting of a massive gateway, a large bastion and adjoining pavilion. Other notable parts are the fortification wall in the south and west, a second massive

The remains of the Moghul Fort at Lalbagh stand mute on the bank of the river Buriganga in quiet dignity, carrying the echoes across the passage of centuries. A trip inside takes a curious visitor to such monuments of historical importance as the Lalbagh Mosque, the tomb of Pari Bibi, a masonry tank and the huge audience hall - all witnesses to a history 300 years old.

A Glimpse of Moghul Ancestry

gate in the north-eastern parts and a smaller incomplete gateway about 750 feet west of this.

The most impressive feature in this part of the fort is the great south gate built in three storeys. Its graceful front in two lofty stages is bordered by slender octagonal minarets. Alcoves, domes, oriel windows and bordering minarets make the entrance very elegant and stylised. A second remarkable feature of the southern complex is the large semi-octagonal bastion which was previously filled up with earth. Removal of the earth from the bastion has revealed a rectangular door which led to an underground tunnel running beneath the thickness of the fortification. Another feature of the southern complex is a roofless pavilion which appears to have been planned as a stable for horses.

Inside the fort enclosure are a number of other monuments of historical importance. These are the Lalbagh Mosque, Bibi Pari's tomb a masonry tank and the audience hall. Tradition has it that the mosque was built by Prince Azam, but the date given in an inscription inside the mosque does not corroborate. It is built on a low platform and is oblong in plan. The facade is marked by three half domes carrying multi-cusped and net pattern designs, below which are the entrances with pointed arches. The roof is covered with three domes, the central being larger than the two on the sides. Inside the mosque are

inscriptions in Arabic which say "Mohammed of Arabia held in great esteem in both worlds."

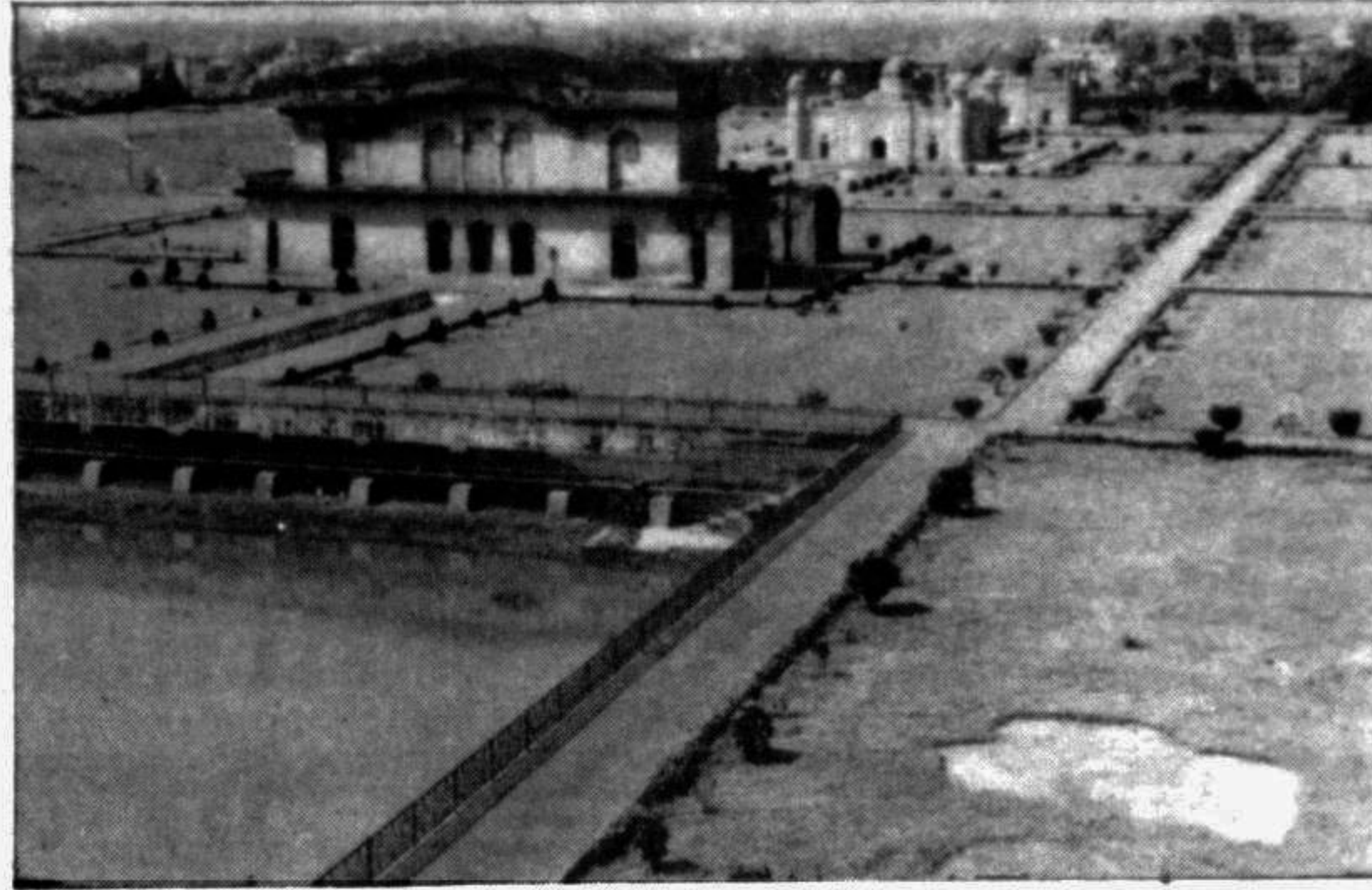
The tomb of Pari Bibi or Iran Dukht, born of some obscure concubine, a daughter dear to Shaista Khan, has its well-made stones and marbles brought from far off Jaypur, Chunar and Gaya. The sarcoph-

by Fayza Haq

agus is made of white marble and rises in three terraces, each nine inch high. The door of the chamber are closed with marble screens while the sandal wood door has a Chinese cross design. In the southern chamber is another smaller grave of smaller size where Shamsah Banu, another daughter of Shaista Khan lies buried.

On the eastern side of the fort, midway between the north and south gateways, is a fine masonry tank 235 feet square. The masonry terraces along its bank have now totally disappeared. A pavilion supported by pillars was built for bathing in the late nineteenth century. Reportedly the Indian sepoys, killed in 1857 Mutiny, were thrown into the tank, and the area around it was for a long time, supposed haunted.

The Audience Hall looks a bit like the famous Naulikha of Lahore from the outside. This stands 130 feet from the tank and it is delightful for its polygonal columns of sandstone and concrete filigree work. The Hammam or bathing



Bird's eye view of the Lalbagh Fort complex.

house has the tiles redone with modern blue, black and white ones but they have not the beauty of the original which one can gather from the display of the museum housed in the Audience Hall.

The Lalbagh Fort Museum is an institution of limited scope which aims to supplement knowledge of the Moghul times by displaying some material remains other than the monuments standing in its vicinity. In this respect, it shares the same scope as the Moghul Gallery in the old Fort at Lahore and the Museum at Umerkot. The importance of

the Moghul period lies in the fact that it catalysed the process of cultural integration. In the words of Dr. Spear, "The Moghul Court, so long as it lasted, was the school of manners for Hindustan. From the time of Emperor Akbar it had much influence upon Indian manners as the Court of Versailles upon European. From Bengal to the Punjab Moghul etiquette was accepted as the standard of conduct. Such an influence was invaluable cement to society."

The small museum, set up with modest beginning, contains a representative collec-

tion of various antiques, replicas and objects of art, which give the same idea of the cultural and artistic manifestation of the people during the Moghul period. The repository of the Museum comprises arms and armour, manuscripts, specimens of calligraphy, and royal "farmans". The collection ranges the widest period of Moghul history, from the coins of Babur who founded the dynasty in 1556, to the instruments of war used in the skirmishes with the Sikhs, who took possession of the Punjab towards the end of the Moghul Em-

pire. A portrait of Prince Azam Shah and the inscribed slab of stone recovered from Pari Bibi's tomb are two significant relics with direct bearing on the history of Lalbagh itself. The collection is limited in quantity and divided in variety.

The theme in the plan of the exhibition simply brings together the grouping of like subjects. The weapons are displayed on the ground floor. Copies of the Holy Quran and other manuscripts are to be found in the first room. To the left of this are the display of Moghul coins, with the map of the Asian subcontinent showing Moghul mint towns during the reign of Aurangzeb. Jars and vases of ceramic are kept in the central hall. Also found in the hall are three Moghul carpets, miniature paintings and a small replica of the Badshahi Mosque of Lahore.

In the paintings the Persian delicacy of details and linear grace has combined with the Indian love for deep colours in the varied shades of green, red, orange, blue and mauve. Court scenes and portraits of princes and princesses are found in the collection. The specimens of calligraphy bring in the beautiful Naskh, Nasta'liq, Shikasta and Tuluth done by well known experts of the time. These inscriptions in Arabic, Persian and Urdu, were meant to be wall decorations in the houses of noblemen and as indirect means of education for the young. The borders of the writing of the Quranic verses and quotation from the Hadith are beautifully illustrated with gold, blue, orange,

and other pleasing colours. The display of the royal decrees, property deeds and marriage contracts include documents issued by Akbar and Shah Alam. These are in Persian and are valuable for research and study. A lively scene of riders hunting ferocious animals in a forest is found in one of the carpets which is on display. Carpets were an essential item for domestic comfort for the rich during the Moghul period. The Chinese jars and vases in turquoise, yellow and azure have dragons, gryphons and flowers to decorate their beauty. These specimens are again representative of what the well-to-do Moghul used in daily life.

The coins from the time of Babur to Mohammed Shah are on display. A few of the dated coins include ones from the time of Babur, Jehangir, Shah-Jehan, Aurangzeb, Shah Alam and Muhammed Shah ranging from 936 A. D. to 1132 A. D. Most of the coins also show the names of the towns at which they were struck.

Moorish Shields, swords with floral patterns and quotations from the Holy Quran along with the name and Battalion of the Soldiers too are to be found at the museum. Daggers and spears decorated with gold and silver are seen here. The "Kukris" and "Kirpans", daggers with curved double-edged blades again draw attention.

One would think that with the attraction of such a magnificent fort there would be a guide book but this is not so. The collection of the entrance fee could also be raised. With the added collection of entry charge the work of restoration could be done in a more effective manner. There are but a few museums in Bangladesh and they deserve the utmost care. Even in a developing country, one cannot afford to ignore the value of preservation of historical monuments.

FURORE OVER 'CITY OF JOY'

Sumanta Banerjee
Special to The Daily Star

Circumstances surrounding the filming of 'City of Joy', based on dominique Lapiere's book, directed by Roland Joffe of 'Killing fields' fame has sparked widespread protests in Calcutta for the makers' attempt to portray the city in a bad light.

Calcutta had always evoked mixed feelings in the West, tearing it between repulsion and attraction. The feelings of repulsion, which seem to be shared by the majority of Western tourists and political observers have prevailed over those of attraction felt by a handful of sensitive and sympathetic Western friends of this much-maligned city. Western denigration of Calcutta has taken many forms - from the crude Kiplingesque denunciation of it as the 'city of the dreadful night' in the past, to the affected demonstration of pity and contempt in dominique Lapiere's 'City of Joy'. It is the filming of this book by a team of Western filmmakers that has rubbed Calcuttans on a raw spot. The Rs

150-crore project is being directed by the well-known filmmaker Roland Joffe of 'Killing fields' fame, and the cast includes famous names like Shabana Azmi and Om Puri. What has irked the Bengali intellectuals of the city is the manner in which the film is being shot in the streets of Calcutta. In spite of public assurances by the film-makers that they want to demonstrate their care and concern for the people of the

According to a late message received here the Calcutta High Court in a ruling has ordered postponement of the filming of 'City of Joy' in Calcutta.

city in the film, in reality the emphasis of the film - as evident from the outdoor shooting in the city - seems to be concentrated on the seamy aspects of the city's social life: the red-light areas, whores and pimps, gamblers and drug-addicts. Beggars are being hired to fill the screen. There has been allegations of young extras being taken to the red-light areas for shooting some of the sequences of the film. This has drawn protests from several people, including some newspapers. What has aggravated popular hostility against the film team is a recent incident where the correspondent of a local daily was beaten up by musclemen hired by the team, when he was covering a shooting sequence. This has

become all the more shocking since Joffe himself once took up the case of a persecuted journalist in his award-winning film 'Killing Fields'. Calcutta's sceptical film-buffs have now found an opportunity to sneer at Joffe. They point out that it is convenient for him to shed tears for a Western journalist on the screen, but he has no qualms in setting his goons to beat up a Third World journalist in real life!

Circumstances surrounding the shooting of 'City of Joy' have drawn protests from the city's leading intellectuals including the well-known actor-playwright Utpal Dutt, the poet Subhash Mukhopadhyay, and the painter Prakash Karmakar.

On February 18, a large number of artists and poets staged a protest demonstration in front of Grand Hotel where Joffe's team was putting up - demanding an end to the shooting of the film. They alleged that Joffe was exploiting Calcutta's poverty and squalor and sell the city's darker image to the West. Although a large number of the city's film technicians have also been included in Joffe's crew, the majority among the technicians of Tollygunge (the centre of the city's film making studios) held a meeting recently protesting against the film.

It is not difficult to understand the violent reactions evoked by the shooting of 'City of Joy'. The problem with Calcutta is that while it shares with Bangkok or Hongkong all the shady characteristics of a metropolitan underworld, it also remains the centre of lively political movements and rich cultural activities. Calcuttans, always sensitive to criticism of the city by outsiders, suspect that Ronald Joffe and his team are ignoring the positive aspects of Calcutta's social life and are out to sensationalize instead its disreputable side.

The 'City of Joy', they fear, might turn out to be yet another cheap thriller of the worst Hollywood type.

All these have put the West Bengal Left Front government in a rather unenviable situation.

Glimpses From 1948 and Beyond

In between bouts of choking cough, the lingering after-effect of a weeklong bronchitis, I read our paper's homage to the Shaheed Day last week with a certain pride, but not without some regret that with my name appearing on the print-line as the editor, I had so little to do with the planning of the supplement. Since it gave the opportunity to more experienced hands to produce it, my absence was perhaps something of a blessing in a disguise.

What was remarkable — and this is what this writer felt proud about — was that all the four major pieces appearing on the two opening pages were from writers of at least three (or four) distinct age groups and varied backgrounds. It may not be anything unusual for people of different age groups, even of generations, appearing on the same issue of the same journal. But to write on the same historical event and to assess its impact on their respective lives which have followed different uncharted courses over the years is of course something different.

Here, we offer a hope that may The Daily Star continue to be a living forum, a meeting ground, of people of different generations of writers opening up on issues which they dared not discuss in the past, thus stimulating free (and, hopefully, fair) discussion in the columns of the paper. Herein lies the essence of an independent newspaper.

It is not just the Shaheed Day that brings people together to pay their common homage to the martyrs of the language movement. One can always fill a room with a function on Tagore or Nazrul.

We attended one such function — on the birth anniversary of Tagore — at the Beijing residence of Razia and Anwarul Amin just about two years ago. The medium-sized flat was packed with nearly 50 people of six or seven nationalities, most of whom, thanks to the persuasive skill and charm of our hostess, were obliged to recite a Tagore poem, sing a song or just say something on the poet's long enduring relationship with China. The whole evening was a treat. But nothing could move me more than the recitation of a Tagore poem, translated from Bengali into Urdu, picked up from a collection published from Lahore. We did not even know such a publication existed.

At the risk of sounding slightly immodest — isn't that an editor's prerogative? — I must report that my own short contribution concerned a dinner meeting which had taken place 20 years earlier with Parvati and Udaya in Peking, two former Chinese students of Kabiguru Tagore at Shantiniketan in the twenties, where they were close to my late uncle, Syed Mujtaba Ali. I will fall in my duty if I do not mention that the dinner was arranged by my dear friend and cousin, Faruq Ahmed Chowdhury then serving in China and his charming wife Zeenat. Just a footnote, they had met Parvati — a name chosen by none other than Tagore himself — when she, then in her late fifties, was asked to be the interpreter of Moulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani during the Bengali leader's meeting with — yes, you guessed it right — Chairman

our people, an identity that would not be based on the "Two-Nation Theory", but an identity that would give our people a new sense of nationalism. In those days, many of our leftist friends firmly believed in the Soviet approach to the nationality question.

If there was a single most important question that dominated our thinking, it was our urge for self-assertion, in which our birthright to give our mother tongue the place of our state language was an integral one. This self-assertion assumed many forms. If, in

came a typical folk song by the young singer, amidst a kind of hushed silence that filled the hall. Then, as the final presentation, Laila sang a particularly difficult Tagore song and, as the saying goes, brought the house down with applause. We were no longer poor cousins of our friends in Calcutta. In a matter of months, Kalim Sharafi and Abdul Ahad joined Laila in creating that superb trio that so much influenced our music scene for years.

Last time I heard Laila was in 1981, at the official residence of the Bangladesh

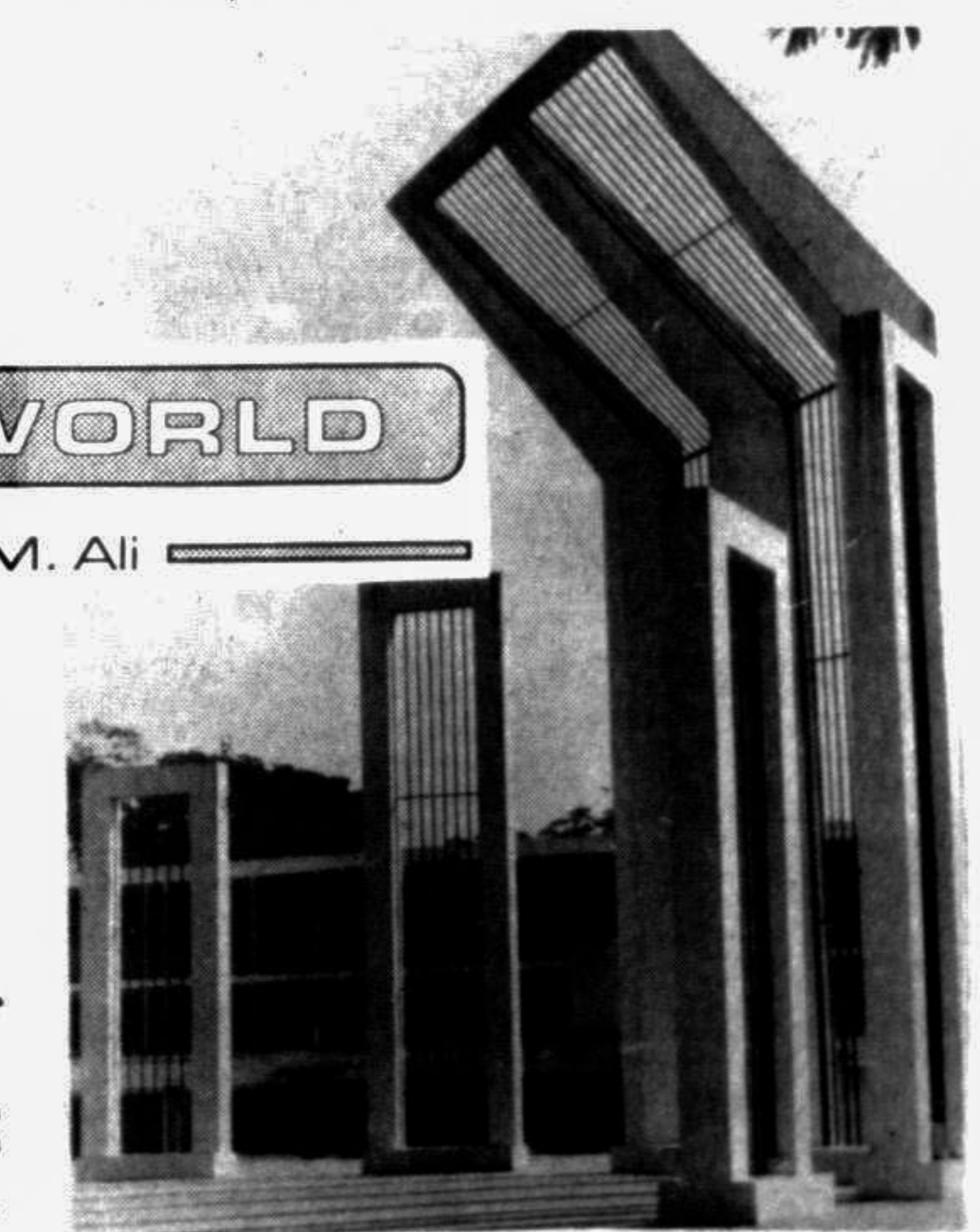
MY WORLD

S. M. Ali

Mao Tse Tung. That's another story; we will save it for the future.

Reading the Star's supplement on the Shaheed Day, I kept trying to put together bits and pieces from my hazy recollections, with not much success, to recreate some kind of a coherent picture of those traumatic years. Some time ago, a researcher came to ask if I was a member of the Student Action Committee on the Language Movement in 1948. My answer was a vague affirmative one, but I could not say, how active was my role. How well did I know the artists who designed, planned and built the Shaheed Minar? Then, what was I doing on February 21, 1952? I searched my memory for answers. I got some of them right, to my obvious sense of relief, but not all.

Notwithstanding my hazy recollections, I capture a glimpse of the time we lived in, especially in the late forties and early fifties. We had among us budding poets and writers who, in a matter of years, established themselves as leading literary figures in the country. I like to think that they shared with others, like Shaheed Shahidullah Kaiser and the late Tajuddin Ahmed the urge to find an identity for



1948, we had to prove to Karachi that, as people we had to come into own, even to denounce Mr Jinnah's statement as Urdu being the only state language of the country, we also had to show our friends like Calcutta that we were no longer their poor cousins who, many in West Bengal thought, were yet to acquire our own cultural base. In 1948, we took a big delegation to the World Youth Congress (whatever it was called) to Calcutta, which included a young promising singer, Laila Arjumand Banu. If I remember correctly, Laila first sang a Ghazal which made a part of the audience say, just a little sneeringly, "Well, that's the new Pakistani culture." Then,

Ambassador to France, singing religious songs in memory of the late President Ziaur Rahman. She was introduced to me as Mrs Shamsul Huda. But, then, when she sang, the voice belonged to someone else. It was Laila Arjumand Banu bringing the house down in Calcutta with a song of Tagore, some 40 years earlier.

It was part of our self-assertion that took us through the Liberation War and beyond. But the process does not stop here. No, never.

Next Week: More on the Language Movement.



Director Roland Joffe (foreground) filming on location on a Calcutta street with his central character Hasari Pal, the rickshawpuller, played by Om Puri (left).