

Restoring Jerusalem's Dome to its Golden Glitter

Michael Jansen writes from Jerusalem

FOR centuries the famous dome of the "Noble Sanctuary" or *Haram es-Sharif* on Jerusalem's acropolis was covered in lead sheeting. In the 1960s it was covered in tinted aluminium, giving it a distinctive golden colour. It was undoubtedly beautiful, but the poorly designed aluminium plates failed to protect the shrine from the elements because they buckled in the heat and cold, permitting water to damage the delicately carved ceilings of the interior of the shrine.

For the moment, covered in insulation material, the dome gleams white against the skyline of the Holy City. Soon it will be covered with gold plated nickel. When the work is completed in early 1994, the cupola of the Dome of the Rock on Jerusalem's acropolis will, for the first time in its 13 centuries of history, be decorated with pure gold.

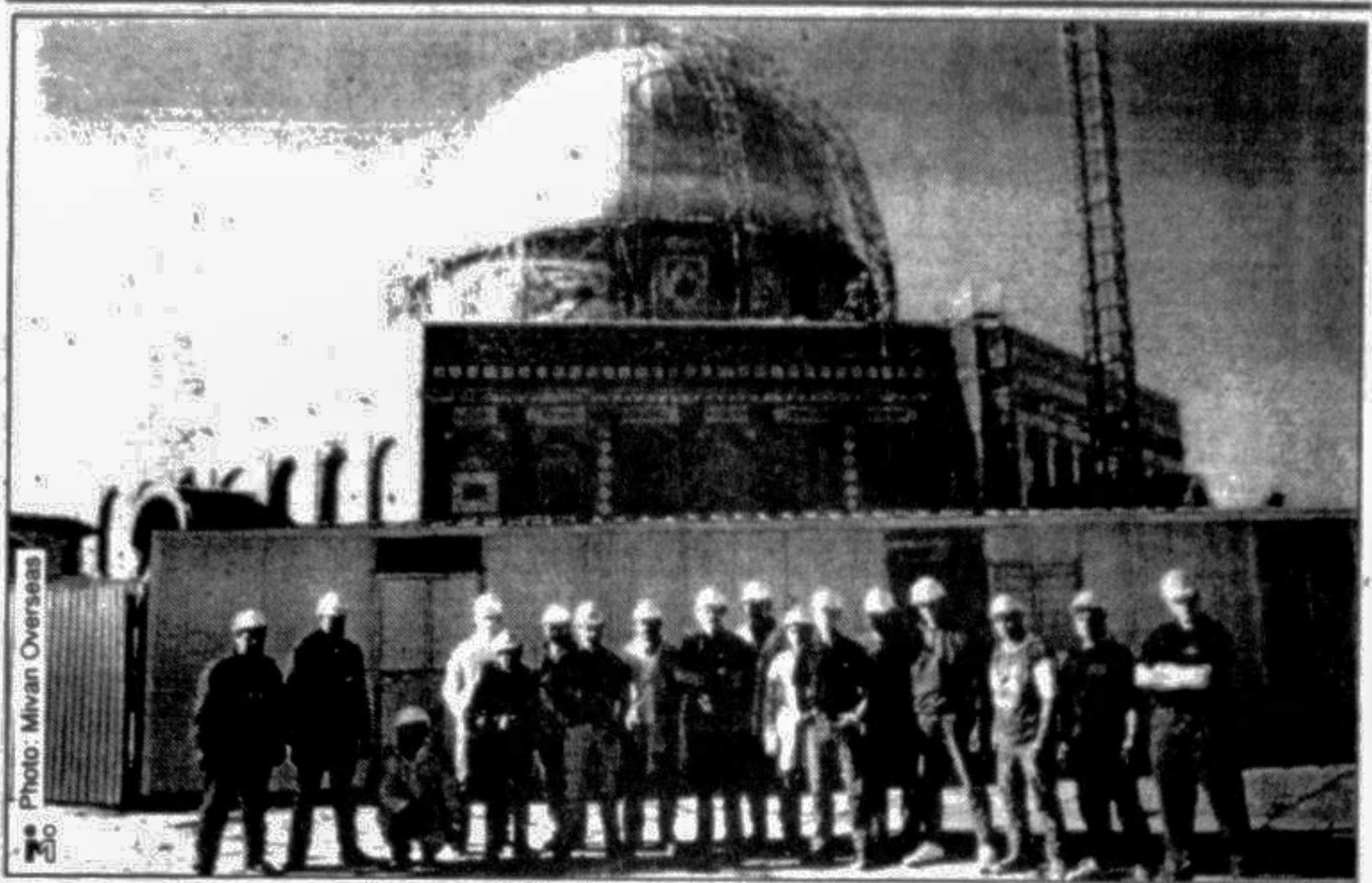
The lead sheeting it bore for centuries worked remarkably well, said Issam Awad, the Palestinian engineer in charge of the mosque complex. The new plates are being modeled on the old, reverting to the design of seventh century craftsmen.

He did not want the traditional lead dome, however, because the people of Jerusalem and Muslims the world over had come to expect a golden dome and would no longer be satisfied with black lead. "It has been gold for thirty years now... everybody knows what this dome stands for," he said.

By making this dome unique and easily recognised, Muslims have reasserted their claim to this holy place, a claim contested by radical messianic Jews who seek to raze the mosques on this site and build a Third Temple. Their reasoning is that the site is also the location of the First Temple of King Solomon destroyed in 586 BC and the Second Temple of King Herod destroyed in 70 AD.

The Dome of the Rock, or *Qubbat al-Sakhra*, is an octagonal building erected over the

Ancient craftsmen who built The "Dome of the Rock", the third holiest mosque in the Muslim world and today probably Islam's most beautiful building, created a shrine that stood for hundreds of years. Thirty years ago modern builders had a go at restoring it, but now it needs more work. GEMINI NEWS SERVICE reports on the international effort to restore the mosque to its former glory.



Jordan's King Hussein is paying for repairing The Dome of the Rock, Islam's third holiest shrine

rock venerated by Muslims as the place from which the Prophet Muhammad (SM) ascended to heaven during his mystical pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

The site was chosen for Muslim worship by the second Caliph Omar in 636 AD when he conquered the Holy City. The Caliph went to the highest point in the walled city, which was then covered with municipal debris, and ordered the old Herodian platform round the rock to be uncovered and a mosque to be built upon it.

The Dome of the Rock is often called the Mosque of Omar, but it was actually built by the ninth Caliph Abdel Malik about 50 years after Omar's time, between 685 and 691. Since then nearly every

Muslim ruler of Jerusalem — and a number of distant Muslim potentates — have repaired or renovated the shrine in order to lay claim to good works and inscribe their names over the many gates of the sacred compound, which houses the Dome of the Rock, the rectangular al-Aqsa mosque and other smaller shrines. The shrine is said to have known its greatest glory in the 16th century after extensive renovations by the Ottoman Caliph Suleiman the Magnificent.

The work done during the 1960s was meant to repair the ravages of time on Suleiman's building. It was a cooperative effort under the direction of Egypt, partly financed by Saudi Arabia, to which the King of Morocco contributed carpets

and the Shah of Iran gave the distinctive blue, gold and white tiles for its outer walls and carpets. Said Awad, the 1967 war disrupted these renovations because, he asserted, "The Egyptians would have ruined the site." He said "This was the only good consequence of 1967" when Israel occupied and annexed the Holy City.

The 3.8 million-pound cost of the present project is being borne solely by King Hussein of Jordan, who sold a country residence in Britain to raise the money. Saudi King Fahd, the "Guardian of the Two Holy Places", Makkah and Madinah, contested King Hussein's right to finance the work, but Jerusalem's religious trust, the *waqf*, supported Hussein's claim to be the guardian of

Muslim holy places in this Holy City, which he ruled until 1967. Saudi King Fahd is now the "Custodian" of Islam's two holiest places: Makkah and Madinah, only because his father drove King Hussein's great grandfather, Sherif Hussein, from Makkah during the House of Saud's conquest of Arabia.

During the 1991 Gulf War King Hussein reasserted his claim to the custodianship of holy cities, styling himself "Sherif of Makkah" because of Saudi sponsorship of the United States-led assault on Islamic and Arab Iraq. Relations between Jordan and Saudi Arabia remain distant and cool. The present renovations are being carried out by Mivan, a contractor from Northern Ireland. There are eight Irish engineers now working at the site, the majority from the north of Ireland although two specialist firms from Dublin in the Republic of Ireland are also involved.

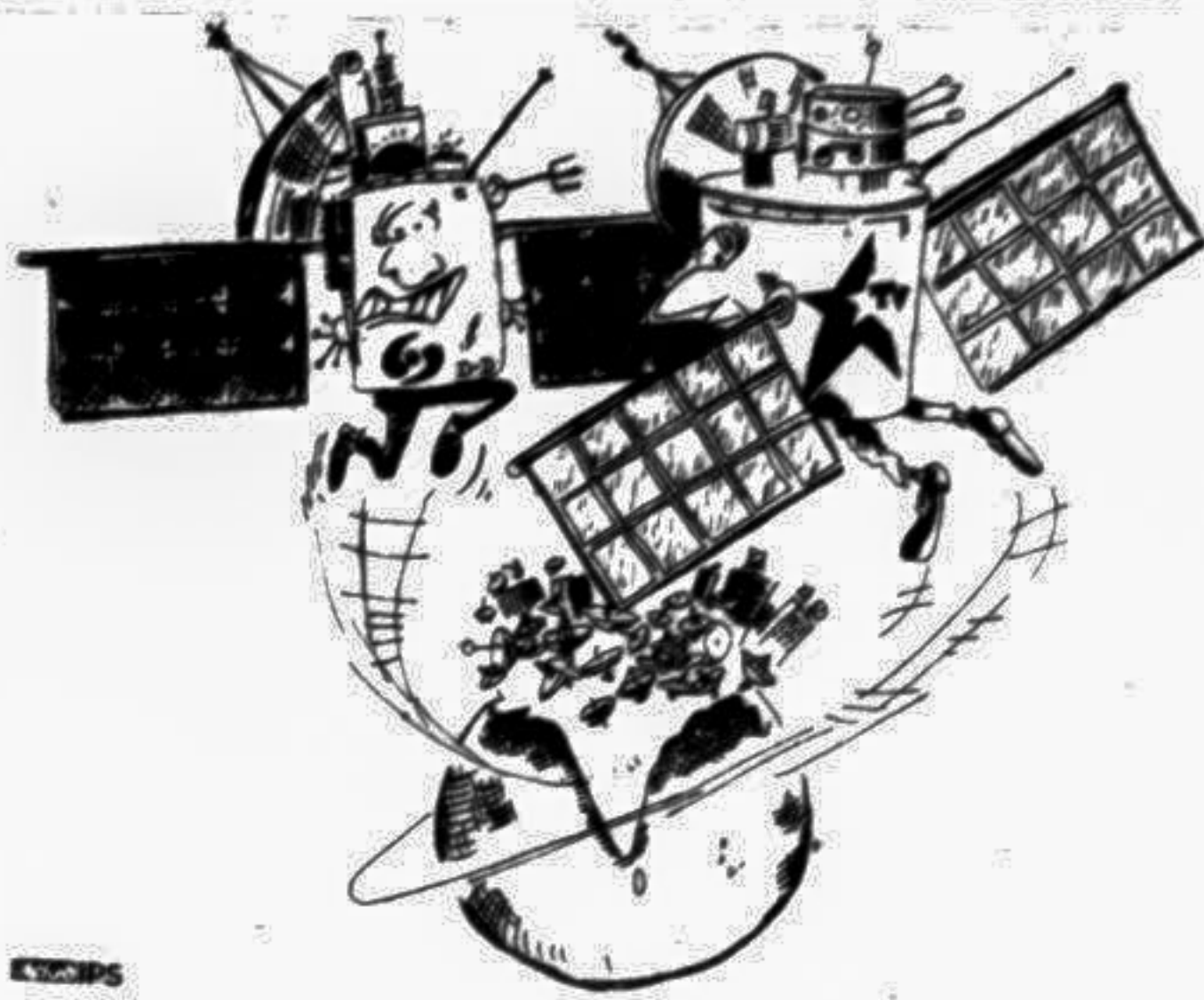
Patrick O'Hare, Mivan's project manager, and several of his colleagues have a distinguished history of international projects, including the restoration of the Qadmain mosque and Ghalayni shrines in Baghdad, restoration of the Admiral's Tower in Gibraltar, work on the EuroDisney complex in France, and on a more mundane plane, construction of the flyover on Palestine street in central Baghdad. Mivan is also due to commence work in Gaza on a 232-bed hospital for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees.

Awad is pleased with the work of the Irish engineers because they are "emotionally committed" to the restoration of the Dome of the Rock. It is a labour of love undertaken by two peoples from two distant lands, a labour dedicated to the greater glory of the God they share.

Michael Jansen was born in the US. She lives in Cyprus, and has covered the Middle East for many years.

State TV vs. Star TV

India's stodgy state-run television joins battle of the airwaves. Mahesh Uniyal of Inter Press Service reports from New Delhi.



WAKING up to full impact of an invasion from the sky, India's state-run television has finally joined the battle against international satellite broadcasters. But even before launch, the five new satellite channels of the state-run 'Doordarshan' (DD) network are crippled by legal wrangles, and critics warn that a competing flood of entertainment will turn India's middle-class into couch potatoes.

For the first time, DD allowed private producers to use its new channels launched on Aug. 15, India's Independence Day. Beamed up to full impact of the country's latest multi-purpose satellite, Indian television hopes to lure viewers back from the foreign networks with irresistible substitutes to its usual dull fare.

Over the past year, the Hong Kong-based multi-channel STAR TV has made a big dent in DD viewership, capturing an estimated 25 million viewing households all over the subcontinent.

But, declares Pranroy Roy, able commentary on the liberation war of 71.

Nitya, Gopal and Neighbours

In the last three or four years, everytime I called on Basanti Dee I found her busy with her flower pots with plants of a wide variety and Gopal lending his helping hand for the manual jobs that the plants required and the little girl Nitya keeping her company. Gopal was the driver of Dr Guha Thakurata. Extremely loyal and devoted to his master, Gopal enjoyed unreserved trust and affection of Dr. Guha Thakurata. Gopal has never stayed away from Basanti Dee and has become a permanent member of the family. From my talks with Basanti Dee I came to know that she used to spend most of the evening in writing. Every evening she also used to have some fun with Nitya, an eight-year old girl of her neighbours Mr. Omar Hayat and Dr Sultana. When not in the school, this little girl was her constant companion. From what Basanti Dee told me about Nitya, I could feel that this little girl had become her source of delight in her old age. With her natural ability to befriend people, she easily won a host of friends and admirers in her residential compound. Dr. Strajul Islam Choudhury and his late wife Nazma Jesmin Choudhury were intensely intimate with her. They also used to live in the same premise.

When I heard Dr. Shariful Alam and his wife Arzoo who are intimate with me and residents of the same campus, speaking in superlative terms about Basanti Dee who was not known to them for long, I got confirmation of my view that although Basanti Dee had weathered a dangerously stormy sea, she had not surrendered anything on the way. She retained all the faculties that went into the making of a great personality that she was.

Salute to the Thespian

We condole Basanti Dee's death. We are sorrowful over her final departure. It is all the more painful that she departed from Calcutta and not from Dhaka, her beloved city, in the country of her origin. She loved Dhaka so greatly that she refused to leave the city and migrate to Calcutta against all the instances by her rear ones living in Calcutta. It is a painful irony that ultimately she left her loved city — never to return. We are in grief. Grief and sorrow can be a source of real baptism. There is a positive aspect about pain, if we consider that most of the best things about human life have their origin in pain.

The memories of great people can serve us great purpose, if we care to use them that way. The nation today is badly in need of examples rather than instructions and advice which are suffocatingly pouring in like floods. Can we put the example just left us by Basanti Dee to any purpose? Once again our salute to Basanti Dee. May her soul rest in peace.

one of India's best-known television producers: "Once they really open it up (to private producers) it will wipe out STAR TV." Indeed, producers are already excited by DD's open-access policy where programmes will be telecast without clearance from the powers that be as at present. Says Roy: "In terms of production talent we are almost a developed country, very unlike a developing country."

With more than 529 transmitters and reaching out to more than 80 percent of India's roughly 880 million people, the three-decade-old network is the world's largest. Its estimated earnings last year was pegged at more than US \$ 100 million from commercial sponsors, about 95 per cent of the total spent by advertisers on television.

But this already reflects a dent made on DD's revenues by STAR TV, which ended DD's monopoly early last year. Indian viewers were soon switching to Zee TV, a channel of popular Hindi entertainment beamed through STAR's AsiaSat satellite. Zee TV is telecast from Bombay, India's own Hollywood.

A survey in January, quoted in the Daily Telegraph, revealed 3.3 million Indian homes were hooked to STAR and Zee's entertainment channels including MTV, the sports channel and BBC television which is also telecast by the Hong Kong network.

Between June 1992 and February 1993, subscriptions to STAR TV had more than doubled in the four Indian metropolises of Calcutta, Bangalore, Bombay and Delhi.

As commercial sponsors be-

gan deserting DD, the government clamped restrictions on the release of foreign exchange to advertise during STAR's mindbogglingly popular US soaps like Dallas and The Bold and the Beautiful.

But realising that it was better quality programmes that were luring viewers away from DD, the government threw open a second channel to private producers in India's five big cities.

The 'Metro channel' launched early this year was an instant hit and brought the advertisers back. Its success in halting the growth of STAR and Zee — both are estimated to have since lost substantial advertising revenue — encouraged DD to privatise the new satellite channels.

But DD's troubles are still far from over. Most cable television operators who will distribute the new channels are complaining that the new satellite's signals are weaker than STAR's. "We have not been able to get all five channels at the same time," says Harjeet Singh, an operator in South Delhi.

Cable TV operators countrywide are also up in arms against a law before parliament to force them to air at least one DD satellite channel. Moreover, the government is intent on making the operators responsible for the programmes shown on cable TV.

Said an exasperated Singh: "We are not the people who are making the programmes." And if DD is unable to keep tabs on what is aired, he asks, how can it expect small operators to weed out the undesirable from the desirable?

Apart from such dilemmas, DD has also been unable to decide on how private producers can bid for time on its new channels. Its first-come first-served basis for allotting slots has been contested in the courts by some producers who feel it was designed to favour certain producers.

Meanwhile, the deluge from satellite television has sparked off fears that India will suffer health and psychological problems like that caused by television in the West.

Social scientists and educationists warn the new generation, brought up on a diet of mindless western soaps, will be unable to think for itself. There is already a noticeable decline in book sales in urban areas and US serials are the topic of conversation in student cafes and in affluent drawing rooms.

A recent survey by DD found that satellite TV has reached four percent of India's half a million villages where the English-language soaps are the most popular.

Basanti Guha Thakurata : An Intimate Recalling A Thespian Not Meant for a Surrender

by G A Momin



Basanti Guha Thakurata speaking as chief guest at a city cultural function.



Basanti Guha Thakurata with noted Indian writer Shiv Narayan Chakravarty, among others, at her residence.

and sometimes very long, continued till I last saw Basanti Dee at the Enayet Hospital. My association with this family lasted for over forty years.

When I visited Basanti Dee at Enayet Hospital, I noticed a few things strikingly similar between my first visit and the last. She looked very much the self-same person — serene, composed with a lingering smile in her face. In spite of her very serious illness she did not part with her natural hospitality as was evident from her anxiousness to serve us some tea from her flask. The only change I saw was what age inexorably inflicts on one's person.

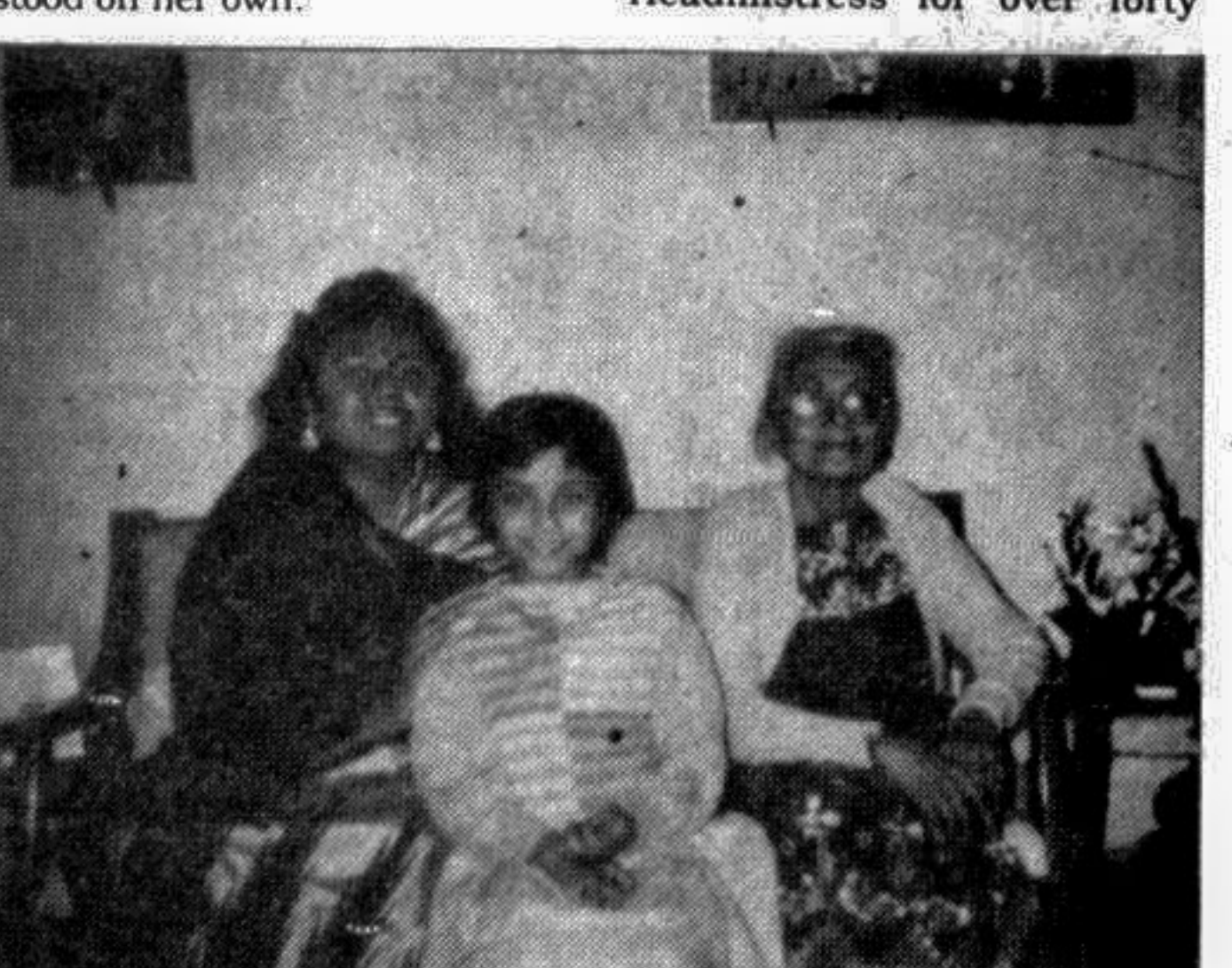
Cultured, civilised and Full-living

Dr. Jyotirmoy's household because almost a sanctuary for many like me, with Basanti Dee contributing a lot for making it so. Their residence whether located at Wari, or Hrishikesh Das Road or in the University campus had always a distinctive character — not in the physical sense but in matters of spirit and ambience. The Guha Thakuratas, elementally altruistic, hospitable and generous, had shared a meticulously cultivated taste, a genuine zest for life, love for flowers and music and all the good things of life — not the shape of material possessions. They had an unalloyed love and concern for people around them. In their company I silently received erudition on matters ranging from literature and art to social conditions, music and flowers. But they did not preach anything. They taught by illuminating, through enlargement of mental horizon. I must mention here that Basanti Dee herself was a

highly educated lady and was the Headmistress of a girls' high school in Gandaria. Everytime I visited the Guha Thakuratas I felt, on my way back home, that I was returning a richer person emotionally and intellectually. Dr Guha Thakurata and Basanti Dee jointly presented us an immaculate picture of what civilised, cultured and full-living should look like. This, I believe, is a very rare example in our society.

A Mute Doer

Basanti Dee appeared in her full spectrum after the death of her husband. As the brightest of the stars is kept out of view by the reigning sun, similarly Basanti Dee, in spite of her great qualities, was a little overshadowed by her very bright husband. After the brutal and terrifying killing of Dr Guha Thakurata in '71, Basanti Dee stood on her own.



Basanti Guha Thakurata with daughter Dr. Meghna Guha Thakurata and Nitya.

Forlorn and prematurely widowed with a minor child in her care, Basanti Dee looked a potential weed to be tossed about and cast away by the hostile wind blowing across the country at the time. But this weed was a different mettle and too sticky to be blown away.

She put up a courageous fight against all odds. Her ordeal and all her horrifying experiences have been vividly described in her famous book 'Ekatturer Smriti'. At times she felt like 'Annie Frank' in the besieged city of Dhaka. Through her mastery action-plan and extraordinary physical courage she not only saved herself and her daughter Meghna, but also contributed very considerably to the proper functioning of her school 'Maniza Rahman Girls' High School' in Gandaria of which she was the founder Headmistress for over forty

years. Her respect for duty and a sense of belonging to the school was so great that in 1971 when even Muslim women hardly dared to venture out, Basanti Dee, a Hindu woman and the widow of a murdered intellectual, used to go to the school almost regularly only to ensure that the school was being properly looked after. This 'Maniza Rahman Girls' High School' and Dr Meghna Guha Thakurata are the products of her own making. Both have been deared by her from infancy to adulthood.

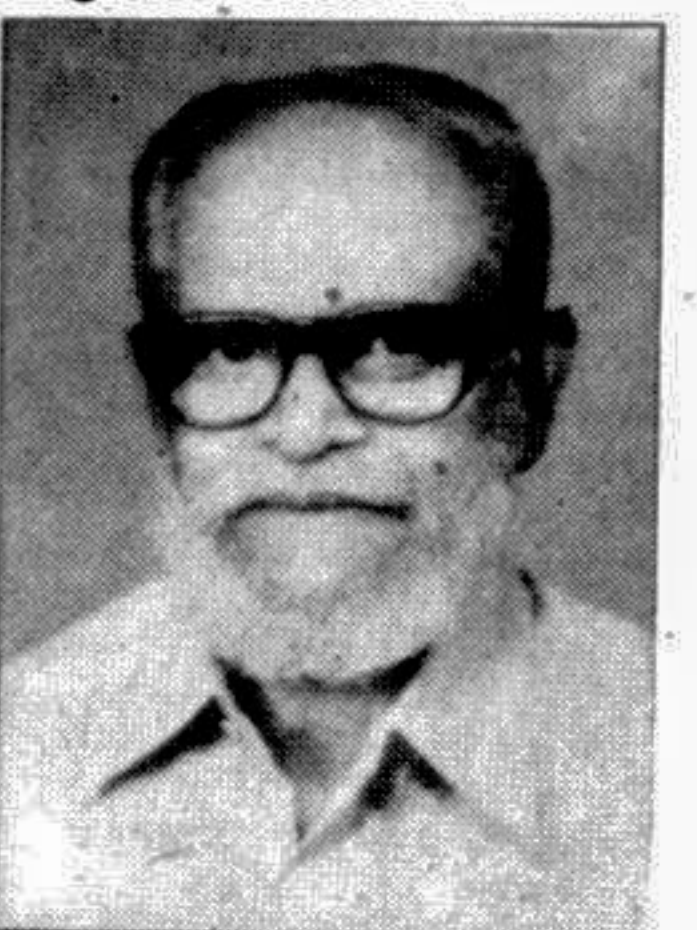
Dr Meghna, her only daughter — a fledgling prodigy in the intellectual and educational arena of our country, — and Maniza Rahman Girls' High School bear testimony to her ability and talents as an outstanding doer — an uncompromising lady of action. For decades she worked tirelessly for Maniza Rahman Girls' School which now stands on a solid footing. She also put up great efforts grooming Meghna who also has come up to be a glowing success.

Profile of a Gymnast and Dramatist Mohammad Abdul Latif

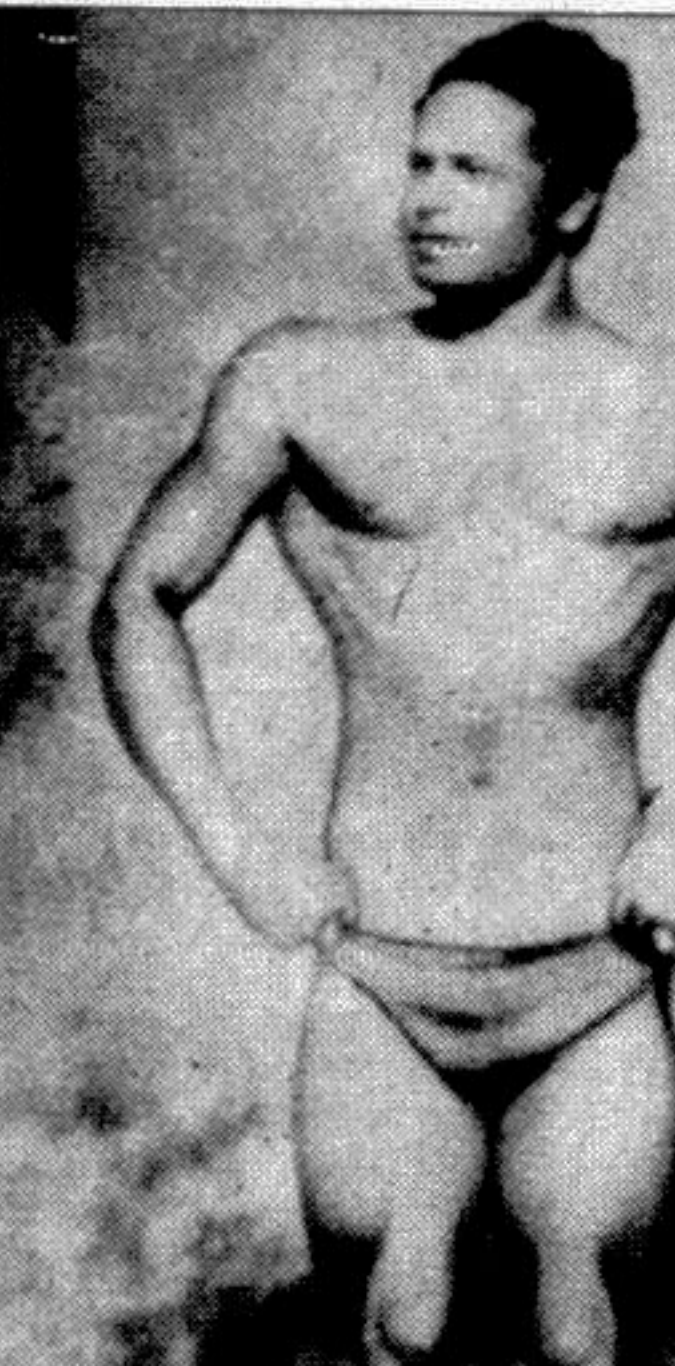
by Mohammad Amjad Hossain

PLAYWRIGHT of five Bangla dramas and renowned gymnast Mohammad Abdul Latif, once a glittering star in the cultural horizon, has gone into oblivion.

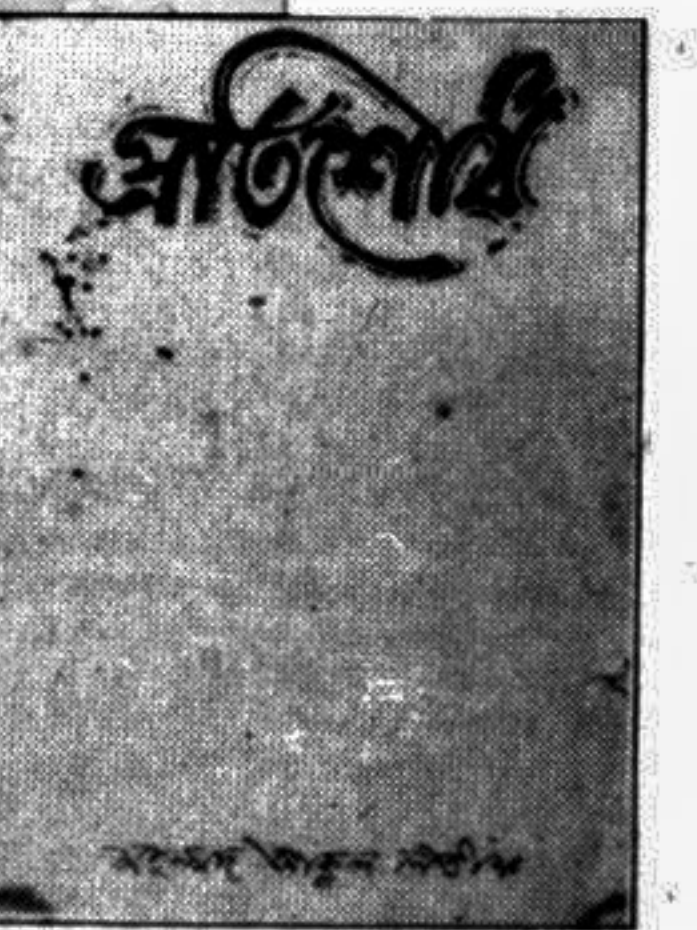
Born in May 1917 in Kushtia, Mohammad Abdul Latif, having passed Matriculation under Calcutta University in 1939, began his career in a furniture manufacturing firm, worked in Food Rationing



Mohammad Abdul Latif (above), as Mr. East Pakistan in 1953 (left) and one of his publications (below)



department in Calcutta and Faridpur and retired from office of Kushtia District Controller of Food. Following retirement from government service in 1950, he started business as a ration dealer and wholesale cloth merchant. Although he had to take up different occupations because of inadequate educational background, but he developed, over these years, a yearning for activities in cultural arena which is evident from his keen interest in sports and gymnasium. Abdul Latif had learnt art and technique of gymnasium from Kushtia Gymnastic Club and all Bengal Physical Cultural Association of Calcutta before partition of India. He was a student at Kushtia Gymnastic Club in 1925 and All Bengal Physical Cultural Association in 1943. From 1947-48 while serving



in Food Rationing office at Faridpur, Abdul Latif had availed of the opportunity in establishing a gymnasium at Kamalpur in Faridpur and became its instructor. A similar gymnasium was opened at Topakhola where physical exercise was imparted to boys and girls. Since 1949 he has been associated with Kushtia Gymnastic Club in various capacities ranging from instructor

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