

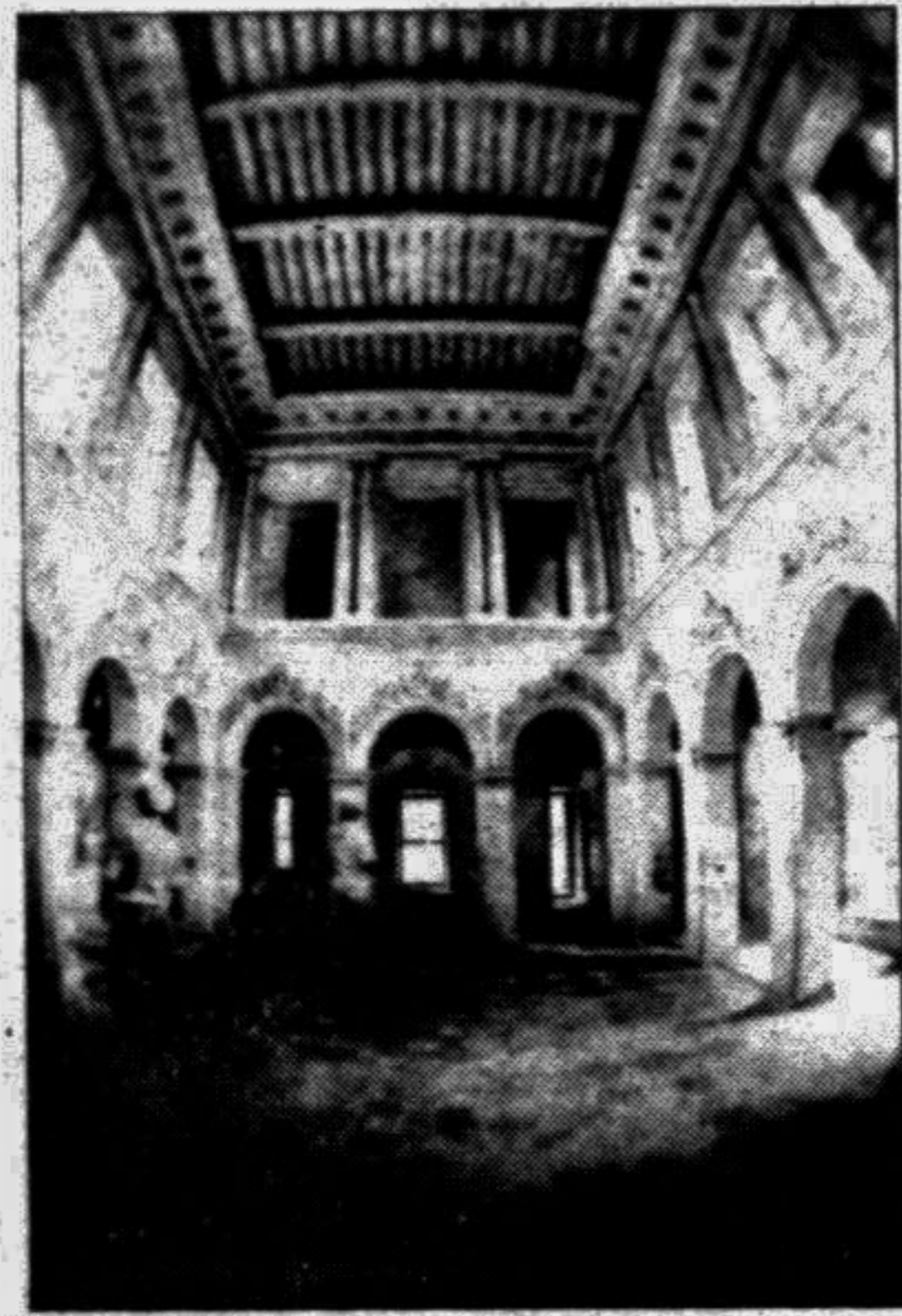
Old City of Sonargaon Save Part of Our Heritage

Text and Photos by Mohammed Anwer

THE old city of Sonargaon is not unknown to most of the people living in Bangladesh. The dwellers of Dhaka quite often take a break from city life to go to Sonargaon over weekends, or holidays. When one goes to the old capital of Bengal, the centre of the kingdom of Isha Khan, one sees an old 'Rajbari', a sculptural adaptation of a famous painting of Zaimul Abedin, and more recently a newly built administrative building. What is probably unknown to many visitors is that within walking distance from this 'Rajbari' are the remains of the old city of Sonargaon: One narrow street lined with two storied buildings on both sides. These are the houses once occupied by the Zamindars — now lying abandoned. One cannot help but fill with awe by looking at these buildings. And while looking at these buildings, one must turn back clock by about a hundred years. One can imagine the beauty of this region. Each house different in its architectural beauty and design, exquisite in its pattern and masonry work. There are houses with huge 'Darbar halls'. On seeing these, one cannot help but go back in time and visualise him/herself standing in the Darbar of a local Raja, the Raja giving orders to his subordinates.

Unfortunately, the place as a whole is breaking apart. Most of the buildings are not occupied by their legal owners. Their cast iron fittings are being taken away for melting and recasting into other objects — what a waste of heritage! It is sad to see that such a landmark of history is being torn apart by time and people. Other countries would pay an arm-and-a-leg to get a piece of their history like this. Is anyone not aware of these losses? Time is destroying a part of our history for lack of preservation. People are adding their mite to this process of destruction everyday. We must

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From John Brown's Pants to Elvis' Guitar, Somebody Wants it

Nicola Cole writes from London

It is not always the shocking or the bizarre which command best prices in the memorabilia market, as some experts like to claim. The belongings of the Great and the Good also fetch good money. Gemini News Service reports on the unquenchable demand of the collectors.



decades ago, his autographed letters — and he personally signed most missive leaving the White House — retailed at no more than \$4 apiece. After his resignation in disgrace, the asking price quadrupled. Today ... who knows? According to New York dealer Charles Hamilton it is "always the shocking which commands the highest price in autographs."

Maybe — but what of the 43 love-letters from the scheming, soon-to-be-beheaded Earl of Essex to his "most fayr, most deere, and most excellent" Elizabeth I?

Morocco (originally worth just over £2,000, now valued at £35,000).

There would also be mileage in joining the saintly relics trade. But beware of parting with vast sums before getting proof of particular items' provenance.

Otherwise you could end up with John the Baptist's second head, or one of the nine breasts of St Eulalia floating around Italy, not to mention enough pieces of 'The True Cross' to build several ships.

One "collectable" of unimpeached origin comprises the "rather horrid" tartan underpants (an auctioneer's unofficial description) worn by John Brown, Queen Victoria's devoted Scottish servant — and alleged lover — after Prince Albert's demise.

The 120-year-old garment, complete with quaint back-flap and front-fly, has been traded almost as often as it has gathered moth-holes. The price two years ago: £10,120 — nearly £4,000 more than in 1990.

A few years ago you could not give away publicity shots of The Beatles; the photos currently fetch £100 a set.

And the boots alone of their murdered founder/leader John Lennon, recently sold for £3,080.

The record would probably go to the man who gave Hitler and his minions so many sleepless nights before during and after the D-Day landings — British wartime leader Winston Churchill.

His whole collection of private and public papers was not long ago estimated to be worth £50 million.

The other statesman whose documents could ultimately approach that figure is South Africa's first black president, the Nobel Peace Prize-winning Nelson Mandela.

In memorabilia salerooms, it is the great and the good who ultimately pay better dividends.

Exchange rate: \$1=£1.67
NICOLA COLE is a British freelance journalist.

The Writings of Golam Maksud Hilali

by Amanullah Ahmed

Golam Maksud Hilali is the name of a neglected scholar, although his writings bear testimony to his profound learning particularly in an area which is of great significance today. Dr Hilali was deeply interested in the cross-currents of human cultures, the impact of one upon another and the resultant enrichment of man's endeavour towards a better understanding of his fellow beings across the world. It is said that to understand is to love. Dr Hilali worked throughout his life to enhance this rare quality in man. No scholar can set himself to work for an objective nobler than this. Those who are acquainted with him (their number is sadly dwindling) know how deep and abiding was his commitment to his scholarly ideals and how disregardful was he of all adversities, though in private life he was very humble and gentle and totally free from pride of any kind.

The truth of the above remarks are amply borne by the fact that two of Dr Hilali's most serious works are on contact of alien cultures. The first one is his dissertation for the degree of DPhil at the University of Calcutta — *Iran and Islam: Their Reciprocal Influence*. It was published in 1963 by the Asiatic Society of Pakistan and also by the Islamic Foundation, Dhaka, in 1989. The other book *Perso-Arabic Elements in Bangali* speaks of his excellence as a lexicographer. Dr Hilali was a linguist and philologist of a high order and had command over such languages as Arabic, Persian, Hebrew, Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin in addition to English and French. But his knowledge of the languages was a means, and not an end in itself. He did not spend his valuable time indulging in the passion for recondite areas of philology or narrow linguistic exercises — which, often, are the hobby-horses of such scholars. Instead, Dr Hilali used his knowledge of the languages in tracing and identifying broad currents of cultural and lin-



guistic interaction and showing how they contributed to the broadening and enrichment of human civilization.

Dr Hilali's signal contribution to Islamic Learning is his book *Iran and Islam*. Although there is a chapter on the influence of Islam on Iran, most of the work is devoted to identifying Persian elements in Islam. The book is a constant eye-opener, drawing our attention to facets of our religion and culture which we are habituated to accepting matter-of-factly without understanding how much indebted we are to other beliefs and traditions, or with what flexibility Islam in its early stages absorbed new and heterogeneous elements from other cultures and civilizations. Dr Hilali has shown, methodically, how before and

after the birth of Islam the Arabs came into contact with the Iranians and were influenced by them in various spheres of life. But after the Arab conquest of Persia during the caliphate of Umar (RA) the interaction between the two peoples became wide and comprehensive. Dr Hilali argues that no other country contributed so substantially to the enrichment of Islamic culture and civilization as Iran did. In his words "Persia gave Islam a new shape and colour". In describing the cultural scene after the Arab conquest of Iran, he drew the analogy between the Greco-Roman relationship and that of Arab and Iran. Like the Greeks, the Iranians, though defeated physically, made the cultural conquest of the Arabs. Dr Hilali

has also shown that in those days, Iran, was a fertile land where new ideas grew and developed. In addition to Zoroastrianism, Islam came into contact with Manichaean, Buddhist and Neo-Platonic doctrines through its relationship with Iran.

In the limited space, it is not possible to discuss fully Dr Hilali's depth and range of scholarship he has shown in tracing the Iranian influence on Islam. Suffice it to say that he has presented to us a picture of Islam which is flexible, eclectic and dynamic. Like all other great and ancient religions, it has many schools of thought, systems and tradition. Dr Hilali's Islam is neither monolithic nor intolerant.

Dr Hilali was a conscientious and labourious scholar. He knew that what he was saying might give rise to controversies. That is why what he said was thoroughly documented. He pressed his scholarship to making his findings precise and accurate. This liberal, tolerant view of Islam is the measure of Dr Hilali not only as a scholar but also as a man. His love for his religion was pure and passionate. He was a pious and practising Muslim, but he was absolutely free from any bias or prejudice against other creeds and religions.

This liberal attitude of Dr Hilali is reflected in his other writings also. He was modest and self-effacing and did not take any interest in preserving his writings. Those works which were published in his life time remain scattered, and some he left behind in manuscripts. His son Mr Humayun Khalid has been trying for the last few years to collect the works of his father (a commendable task indeed) and up to the present time, published two volumes of them. The contents of those volumes show unmistakably the range and variety of Dr Hilali's intellectual interest. He writes both on the past and the present, Islam, philology, dead and living personalities

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A Memorable Meeting with Murayama

by Al-Haj Syed Abul Hossain MP

POLITICS and cricket are said to be the games of uncertainties. There is no last word in politics, and politics, indeed, makes strange bed-fellows.

The last contemporary example of these precepts is Mr Tomiichi Murayama, Chairman of Japan's left-wing Social Democratic Party (SDP), who has been recently elected his country's prime minister. Only a year back his name was relatively unknown not only in the outside world but also inside his country. What was impossible has been made possible by the fast changing currents and cross-currents of the recent Japanese political development. With only 74 supporters in the more than 500-member Diet, Murayama is now the head of the government of the world's second largest economy. The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), SDP's arch political foe and rival for four decades, has lent support to Murayama in his bid to become his country's prime minister. Left and right, conservatives and socialists all blend into one in today's Japanese power politics.

Jesper Koll, a noted analyst of Japanese politics and economy, writing in the Asian Wall Street Journal (July 1-2, 1994) has succinctly commented, "From a Machiavellian point of view, Mr Murayama is a brilliant leader. He has been at the centre of power politics since last summer and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) was willing to offer the key post to pursue their own goal of getting power."

The noted German statesman of the last century Bismarck once said that politics was the art of possibility. In Japan Mr Murayama has made impossible possible. Since August last year when the 38-year one-party uninterrupted rule of LDP in Japan was abruptly punctuated, as many as three prime ministers have come and gone in quick succession. Murayama is the fourth in the row. LDP is said to have considerably regained its power under SDP's umbrella. LDP is the majority partner in the new coalition and the key cabinet posts have gone to it. Many are of the opinion that the reforms initiated a year ago will now be halted although in his first news conference after assuming the office of the prime minister, Murayama made it amply clear that reforms and

readjustments will continue as stipulated.

Seventy-year old Murayama is Japan's 81st prime minister and the first Socialist head of government since 1948. He himself has candidly admitted that his SDP has moved away from what was once its cardinal principle — socialism. In his own admission "the Socialist Party has changed considerably already. The word socialism does not appear in the latest Socialist Party plat-

form. We are now capable of keeping abreast of time." Murayama has mellowed down like Boris Yeltsin of Russia. A life long trade unionist, his power base is the workers and small enterprises. SDP has long friendship with North Korea's ruling Workers Party. But in the present nuclear row between the two Koreas Murayama will have to support Seoul at least for strategic reasons.

Now, I would like to narrate a memorable meeting with Mr Murayama. This year's grand

International Airport by expatriate Bangladeshis, local Awami League leaders and workers and the Japanese organisers of the conference. On the second day of our stay in Tokyo we had an hour long exclusive meeting with the Chairman of the SDP, Mr Tomiichi Murayama. With white flowing hair he was diminutive but impressive. He is soft spoken, suave and very courteous. His frail feature eloquently spoke of his simple life style.

Mr Murayama received us



Sheikh Hasina with Tomiichi Murayama (left)

annual conference of the Socialist International was held in Tokyo and social democrats both in power and in opposition from all over the world took part in it. Social Democratic Party of Japan and Democratic Party of Japan were the organisers of the conference. A strong delegation from Bangladesh led by Awami League President and Leader of the Opposition in the Jatiya Sangsad Sheikh Hasina participated on special invitation from the organisers because of their strong links dating back to the days of the Liberation War. The delegation comprised Awami League President Member and former ESCAP Executive Secretary S A M S Kibria, Awami League International Relations Secretary Abul Hasan Chowdhury (Liton) MP, and myself, Acting Secretary, Awami League Sub-Committee on Commerce and Industry.

We reached Tokyo on May the 9th and were accorded hearty reception at the Narita

with extreme cordiality. He enquired about the progress of democracy in Bangladesh and the stride towards achieving national self-reliance. Sheikh Hasina thanked him profusely for the invitation to participate in the conference and also for the warm reception and hospitality accorded to her and to the members of her delegation. She emphasised the need for closer economic link and cooperation between Japan and Bangladesh for the mutual benefit of the two countries. Japan has technical know-how and Bangladesh, vast manpower. If they can productively combine their expertise and resources, both the countries will stand to gain. Sheikh Hasina told Murayama:

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