

ISTANBUL, a city immensely rich in tradition and history, has evoked admiring comments from many but one of the most beautiful is from a poet of the Middle Ages who described it as a city surrounded by 'a garland of waters'. For that is what makes Istanbul the unique city that it is.

To get a feel for the city, it is not possible from flat ground for the city is built on seven hills. To comprehend the special features of Istanbul and even to find one's way about it, it is highly recommended to get on top of one of those hills (and nowadays skyscrapers) and survey the breathtaking beauty. Spread in front is the beautiful Bosphorus, whose one end leads into the Black Sea and the other end more intimately entwined with the city proper into the Marmara Sea and a little arm called the Golden Horn. The bustling life is around the Golden Horn, with Pera on one side and Eminönü, Sirkeci and the old historical places on the other.

Little bit of History

Historians tell us that Byzantium, the legendary founder of Constantinople, established a colony in 667 BC and this would become in later years Constantinople and today's Istanbul. The city was taken by the Persian Emperor Darius in 512 BC and Philip of Macedon in 340 BC and Alexander the Great in 334 BC. The next important event, which is truly the beginning of present-day Istanbul is the capture of the city by Roman Emperor Constantine, who personally traced the limits of the city in 326 AD.

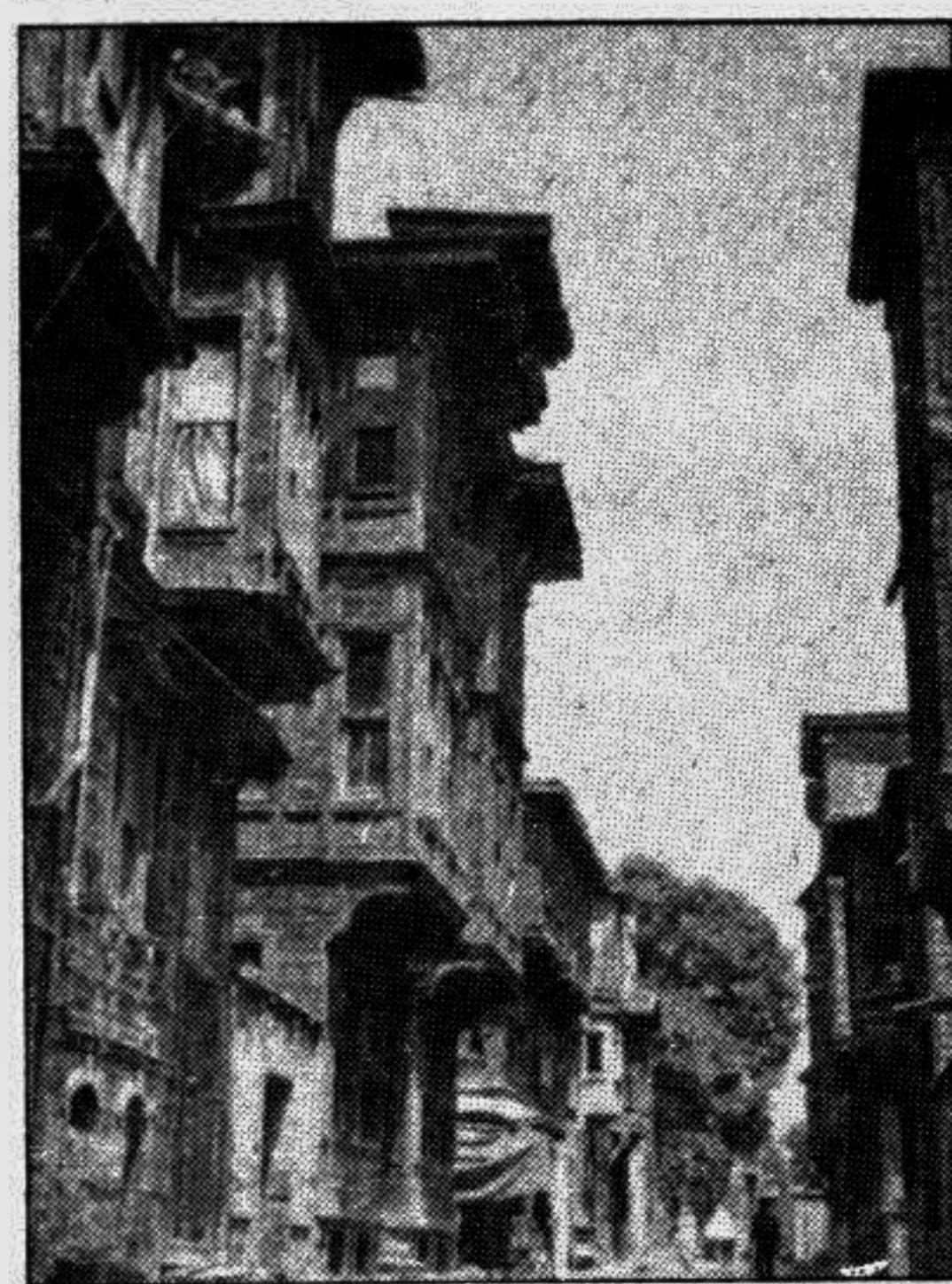
While Constantinople was rising on the European shore, at the same time a charming suburb across the water in Asia called Scutari (Uskudar in Turkish) was being built. The original name at the time of its founding in 686 BC was Chrysopolis (the city of gold); now it is called Kadiköy (the village of the judge). The end of the Byzantine Empire came on May 29, 1453, when the Ottoman Mehmet II conquered Istanbul. Thus began the Ottoman Empire, which was to last till the end of World War I when the Ottoman Empire, along with Germany, was defeated by allied forces. Istanbul became an occupied city till it was retaken by the victorious forces of Atatürk in 1922.

The earliest monuments that can be seen all over Istanbul today date back from the Roman period, when Constantinople became the capital of the East Roman Empire. The magnificent Cathedral Hagia Sophia, standing on a hill across the Golden Horn, has stood there since 537 AD the time of Emperor Justinian. In 1453, following his conquest of Constantinople, Fatih (the conqueror) Sultan

People and Places

Two Facades of Istanbul, European and Asian

by Arshad Uz-Zaman



Istanbul street scene

Mehmet went to the church and offered prayers. The church was later embellished with four minarets, a mihrab and giant golden letters on the wall in Arabic — Allah and Muhammad.

Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman history nestle side by side in that vast square with the Topkapi Saray of the Ottomans, the Blue Mosque, the obelisk from pharaonic Egypt and the superb gate of Istanbul University dating back to the days of the Ottoman Empire. To reach that area you have to cross the Galata Bridge and you are face to face with Misir Carsi (Egyptian market), famous for its spices. The door takes you inside a domed market which was founded by Fatih and which has not changed much in 550 years.

An amazing variety of traditional goods like beautiful gold and silver work right down to the latest electronic goods are available.

A visit to the Mosque of Hazrat Ayub Ansari is essential for he was a member of the first Arab siege of Istanbul back in 674 AD. On the European shore of Istanbul are located such beautiful palaces as Dolmabahce of the 19th century and Yildiz, in the midst of a lovely garden.

Pera Palas

I came to Istanbul as the head of the Pakistan Embassy information office in 1953. My office was located in Sisi in a wooden building, which belonged to Ottoman Prime

Minister Huseyin Hilmi Pasha. Across our office was a small two-story building, where Atatürk had once stayed. It had been turned into a museum, with personal objects of Atatürk. There were the big hotel — Pera Palas and Park Hotel; Pera Palas was by far the more prestigious. Pera Palas celebrated its centenary two years ago and is proud of the galaxy of its guests like Atatürk, Reza Shah Pahlavi, Sharif Ali Haydar Amir of Makkah, World War I spy Mata Hari, actress Greta Garbo and former First Lady Jackie

Kennedy. The hotel a Agatha Christie room where she wrote her famous novel 'Murder on the Orient Express'. The Pera district, which is also known as Beyoglu and where most of the consulate generals were located and which used to be the hub of the entertainment district, has not changed much. Although large avenues have been pushed through, Balik Pazar (fish market), with a few old restaurants, are there. The tramway existed 40 years ago and has made a reappearance.

The third oldest and tiniest

(700 meter-long) underground called Tunnel is still there although the city has been dug up for a real underground which will be in operation soon. Roads were narrow, particularly the ones along the Bosphorus, which was beautifully tree lined.

Bosphorus was always cooler compared to the city and a stop at Emirgan for tea was a must. Wealthy people had their villas on the water.

Fish restaurants on the Bosphorus including Canli Balik (live fish) were a delight.



Where the continents meet: Bosphorus Bridge.

Now the roads have been widened and Bosphorus Yalis have lost their status. Western embassies had superb summer residences on the Bosphorus but are no longer used due to prohibitive costs.

The Sultan Ahmed Mosques, its interior.

Cute Suburb

In summer I used to spend weekends with friends in Uskudar, crossing the Marmara Sea by ferry. Uskudar had remained the cute suburb of nearly 2000 years ago. With



Side-walk (left) and open air restaurants.

the beautiful Bosphorus bridge of 1973, a qualitative change came about in Istanbul. The Asian side ceased to be a quiet suburb but has become another city. Thus there are in reality two Istanbul. Forty years ago Istanbul had barely one million; now the estimate is 10 million. The Asian side does not have much history to talk about but has a relatively affluent population with beautiful villas along the Marmara Sea.

Istanbul, the garland of waters, lost its place as the Imperial City with the founding of the Republic. During my 40-year association with this city, the most profound change is that now it is a tale of two cities. For the residents of Kadiköy live differently, dress differently and have a different outlook toward life than those on the European side. Bagdad Caddesi (Avenue) is not Beyoglu but has beautiful shops, restaurants and young men and women who stroll together on balmy summer days.

After the fall of the Empire, Istanbul regained its luster. The collapse of the Soviet Union brought about another dramatic change. If you walk the streets of Beyoglu or the Sirkeci district you will hear a bewildering variety of Turkish from Central Asia and mongoloid faces from Kazakhstan as you will meet Bosnians and Kosovans. In this vast human movement Istanbul once again has emerged not the Imperial city of old but the confluence that makes it the garland of waters.



The Muslim ICS Officers of Bengal

by A R Mamun

THE history of the Indian Civil Service is of fairly long standing. It started from the year 1800 when the Calcutta Fort William College was established at Calcutta. Surendra Nath Banerjee and other politicians joined this association whose name was changed to All India National Congress.

The teachers of the college included eminent personalities like Dr Cary, Mr Colebrook, an ex-President of the Asiatic Society, Iswar Chandra Vidya, sagar, among others. In addition to Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, Greek and Latin languages the students had to read many other subjects including politics, economics, history, geography, chemistry, astrology, biology, botany etc. The civilians were saved from this ordeal after Governor General Dalhousie abolished this College on January 24, 1854.

Initially the members of the Civil Service used to come from England after being successful in the Indian Civil Service examinations held there. Satyendra Nath Tagore, son of Devendra Nath Tagore and an elder brother of Rabindra Nath Tagore was the first Indian civilian.

It was Mr Hume, a retired Secretary to the Govt of India, who thought of forming an all Indian association consisting of prominent leaders from different provinces, who could bring to the notice of the Indian government the grievances of Indians. He thought that such a representative body would have considerable bargaining power and would be able to remove the misunderstanding between the rulers and the ruled.

The first meeting of the association was held at Poona with WC Banerjee, Bar-at-law of Calcutta as President. Mr. Hume was careful in avoiding the leaders like Surendra Nath Banerjee and politicians of his group who were not in the

good book of the government. However, in the second meeting held at Calcutta, Surendra Nath Banerjee and other politicians joined this association whose name was changed to All India National Congress.

The congress adopted a resolution that the I.C.S. examination should be held simultaneously in India and England and the age limit for appearing at the examination should be increased. This was acceded to by the Govt. of India and the number of Indian civilians started to increase gradually, who proved themselves to be equally and sometimes more competent than their English counterparts.

In Bengal, however, large number of Hindu students not only competed in the I.C.S. examination but a number of them including Ramesh Chandra Dutta, Annada Shankar Roy, Debesh Chandra Das, Hironmoy Banerjee, Ashoke Mitra etc. distinguished themselves in the field of literature. Also, Annada Shankar Roy has just completed his ninetieth year recently but is still prominently active in the pursuit of creative literature.

Unfortunately, no Bengalee Muslim could compete in the I.C.S. examination and in the mid-twenties of last century, the government decided to nominate three Muslims as I.C.S. officers. They were A F M Mujibur Rahman, K. G. Morshed and Nurunnabi Chowdhury. A F M Mujibur Rahman broke the record of Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee in the M A Mathematics examinations of the Calcutta University. Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee who was a member of the Selection Board, introduced A F M Mujibur Rahman to the Board saying, 'This is the boy who broke my record'. After this there was no difficulty about his selection though he was a

bit short in stature. A F M Mujibur Rahman had an ambition to become a Wrangler but he could not refuse the post of an I.C.S. Officer when it was offered to him. K G Morshed also had a good academic career and was a very handsome young man with lot of personality. Nurunnabi Chowdhury also served in the Territorial Forces before he joined the Provincial Civil Service.

Mujibur Rahman served in the judicial branch and was a District Judge of Dhaka also for about two years. When he was being considered for promotion as a Judge of the Calcutta High Court he suddenly died of heart failure at the age of 48, before partition of India. K G Morshed left for England at the time of partition and settled there. Nurunnabi Chowdhury was the seniormost among the ICS officers who came to East Pakistan after partition of India but was posted as Divisional Commissioner of Rajshahi and Aziz Ahmed, who was much junior to him, was appointed as the Chief Secretary of East Pakistan. Nurunnabi Chowdhury is still remembered by people for his lifelong pursuit of the programme for uplift of the rural masses of the then East Pakistan.

Akhtaruzzaman, a nephew of Professor Humayun Kabir, was the only Bengalee Muslim who joined the Indian Civil Service through open competition in 1939. Among the students of the Calcutta Presidency College who graduated in 1936, three competed in the Indian Civil Service — Akhtaruzzaman, Ashoke Mitra and Shudhendujyoti Majumder in the B A Honours examination Akhtaruzzaman stood first class first in history and also secured the highest marks among the honours students of different subjects. Ashoke Mitra stood first class

first in English but appeared in the ICS examination with history and Shudhendujyoti Majumder stood first class second in philosophy.

As it is difficult to gather more details about the three nominated Muslim ICS officers at such a distance of time, I shall briefly discuss about Akhtaruzzaman who was my batchmate in the Presidency College and also lived with me at the Y M C A hostel at 62, Keshab Sen Street, Calcutta for two years, in two rooms on the same floor. This hostel for the undergraduates had all the facilities for indoor and outdoor games and had the unique distinction of winning Bengal championship in basketball continuously for sixteen years from 1917 to 1933. Perhaps Akhtaruzzaman was the only hosteler who did not take part in any outdoor games.

Akhtaruzzaman came from Bikrampur of the former Dhaka district, the birthplace of many Bengalee scholars of international fame. His father Mr Abdul Majid was a Deputy Magistrate and Deputy Collector and died at a premature age.

He had a brother and two younger sisters. During his stay in the Y M C A hostel he used to leave the hostel for a month or two and live with his maternal uncle Professor Humayun Kabir at his Ahiripukur Lane residence.

Professor Humayun Kabir was a professor of both English and Philosophy in the Calcutta University and he was my teacher in the fifth year only and joined politics in the next year.

Professor Kabir became a Joint Advisor and then Advisor to the Govt of India. He finally became the Minister for Education and earned a good name for himself as such. He

wrote a number of books on education including the future educational policy of India and received doctorate from six foreign universities. However, he was suddenly removed from the Cabinet when Lal Bahadur Shastri became the Prime Minister of India for a short time. Towards the end of his life Professor Kabir had to live perhaps a frustrated life.

A brief reference to Prof. Humayun Kabir in this article is relevant because it is generally presumed that at the time of partition of India Akhtaruzzaman opted for India at the instance of Professor Kabir. However, it did not take him long to understand the difference between the position of an ICS officer in India under the British regime and a Muslim ICS officer in predominantly Hindu India. He was never given any important charge. When he was holding the post of chairman, Gas and Mineral Oils, he finally decided to resign and settle in England. Probably the two main considerations for taking such a decision were that he was a bachelor and according to the terms and conditions of his service, which were accepted by the Govt. of India at the time of partition, he was entitled to get pension in foreign exchange.

The Calcutta University could not award the prestigious Ishan Scholarship to Akhtaruzzaman, though he secured the highest marks among the honours students in 1936. Like Bankim Chandra Gold Medal, Ishan Scholarship was also a communal award for which Muslim students were not eligible. The Govt. of India also readily accepted the letter of resignation of Akhtaruzzaman but refused to allow him pension in foreign exchange.

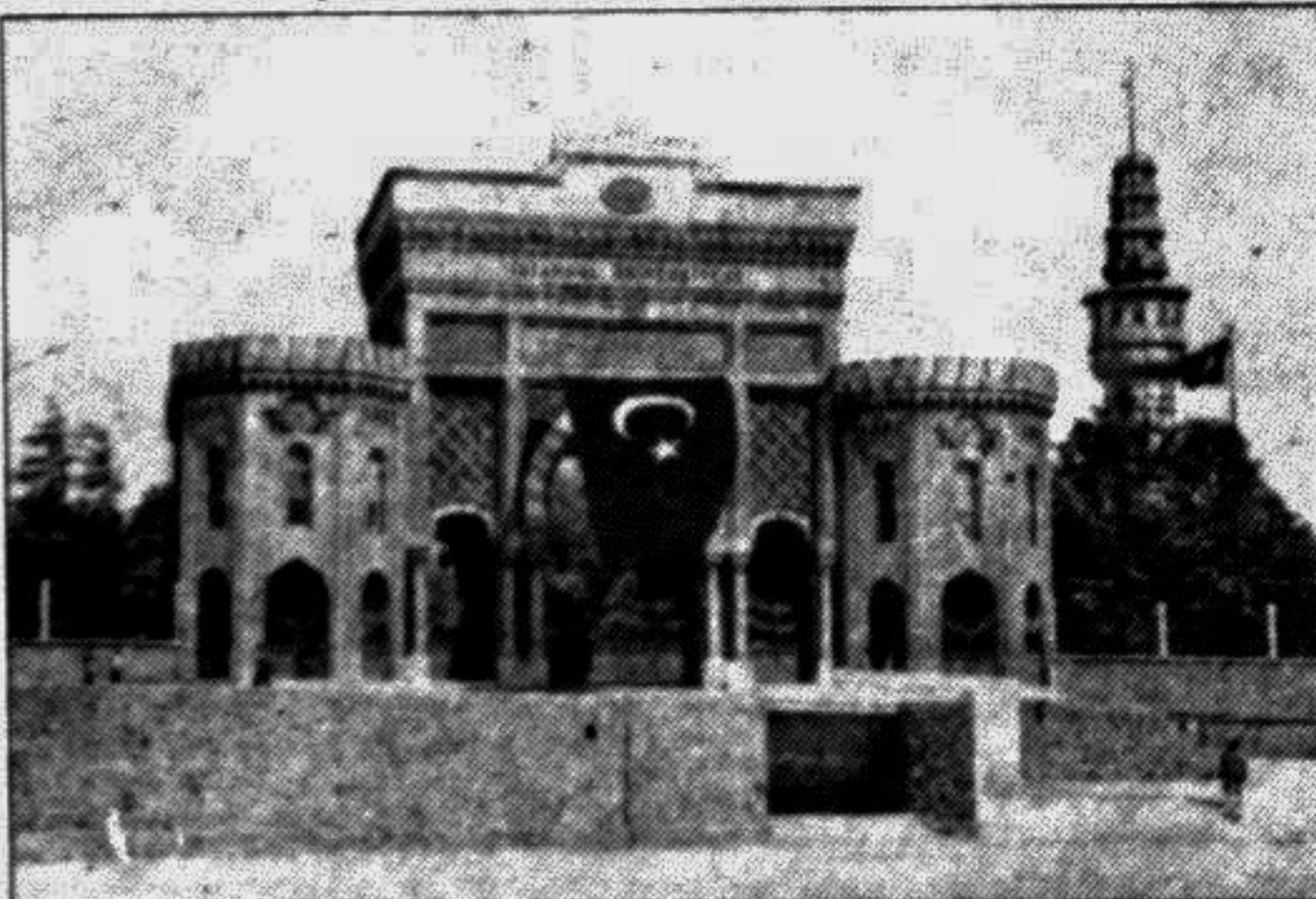
Though it was one of the terms of his service already accepted

at the time of partition by the Govt. of India, Akhtaruzzaman filed a suit against the government and when the government felt that the verdict of the court might go in favour of Akhtaruzzaman, they got a resolution passed in the Bidhan Parishad that the Govt. of India would not allow any Govt. officer to draw pension in foreign currency.

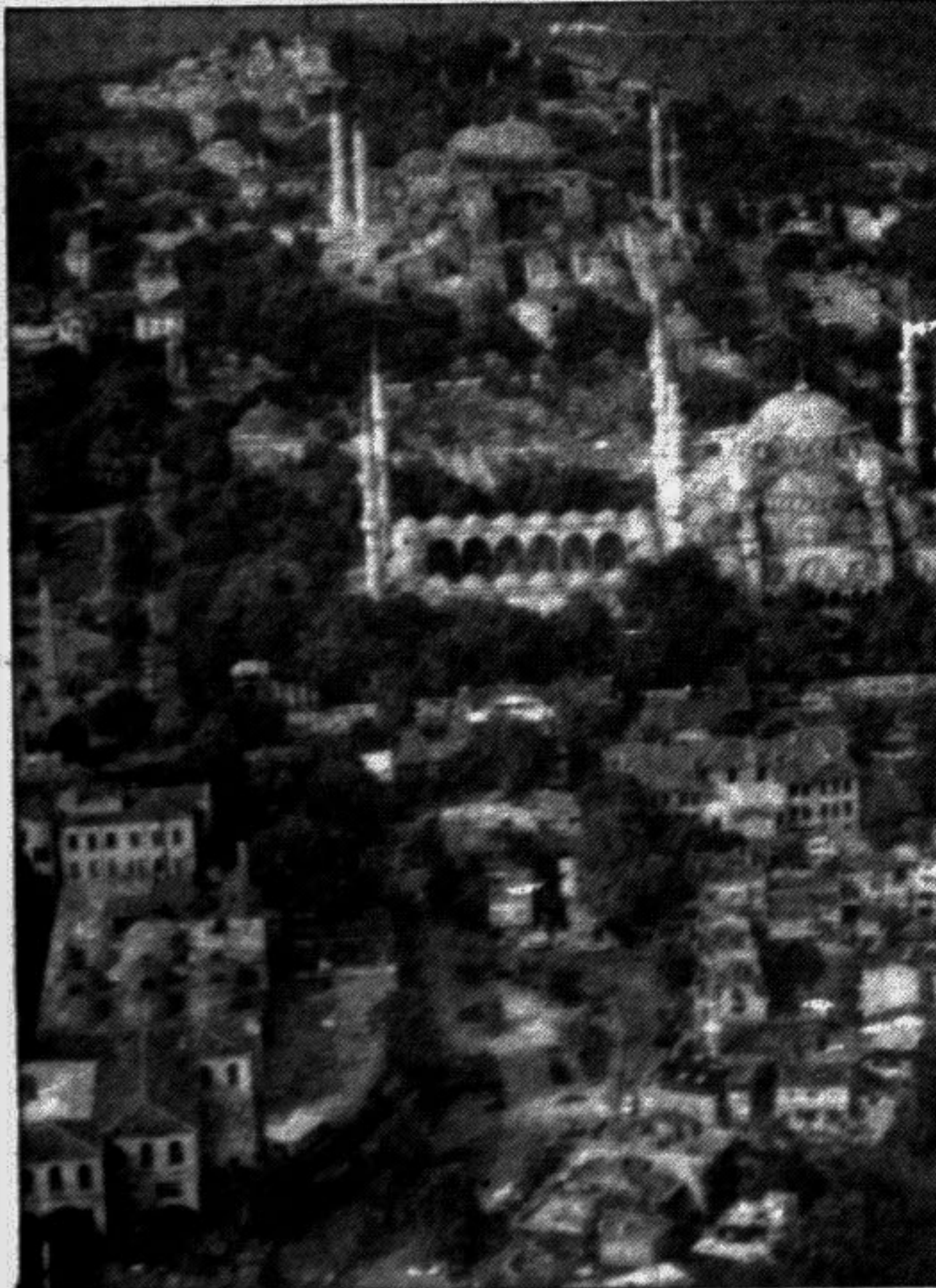
Akhtaruzzaman lived the life of a retired officer in Calcutta on his modest pension and later on shifted to New Delhi on grounds of health. He used to visit his sisters, their husbands and children once a year. I happened to meet him once at the Dhanmondi residence of his brother-in-law Badaruddin Ahmed, a retired Additional Secretary, Ministry of Finance, Govt of Bangladesh. Akhtaruzzaman was not expected to retain his lean and thin appearance with a rather preoccupied look of his college days, but in his advanced years he just grew out of all recognition!

He came to Dhaka for the last time in 1962 and lived with his only living sister and her husband Badaruddin Ahmed. On going back to Calcutta he met with a street accident and died after two weeks of intense suffering on May 20, 1992. Thus ended the frustrated life of perhaps the brightest Muslim student the Calcutta University ever produced.

The Govt of India retained the administrative structure of the British without changing it for a long time but could not maintain its reputation for fairness and integrity. Most of the officers, specially in administrative jobs, could not maintain that 'Mr. Clean' look of the English administrative officers. The secular government of India also meted out the same treatment to Professor Humayun Kabir and to his nephew Akhtaruzzaman for opting to serve in that country! In case of Akhtaruzzaman no word is strong enough to condemn the action of the Govt of India.



Entrance to the University of Istanbul



A bird's eye view of Istanbul