

The Daily Star WEEKEND MAGAZINE

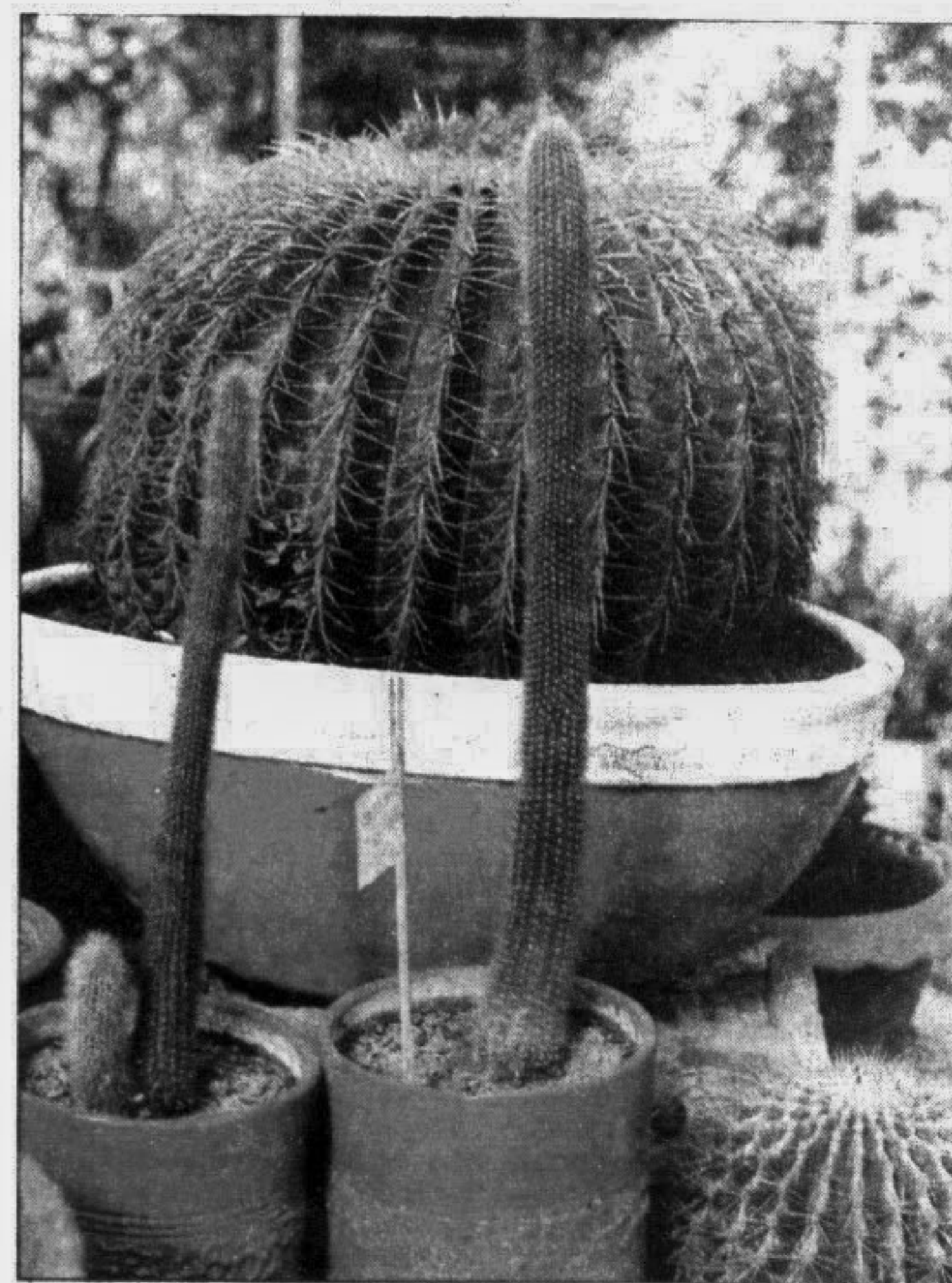
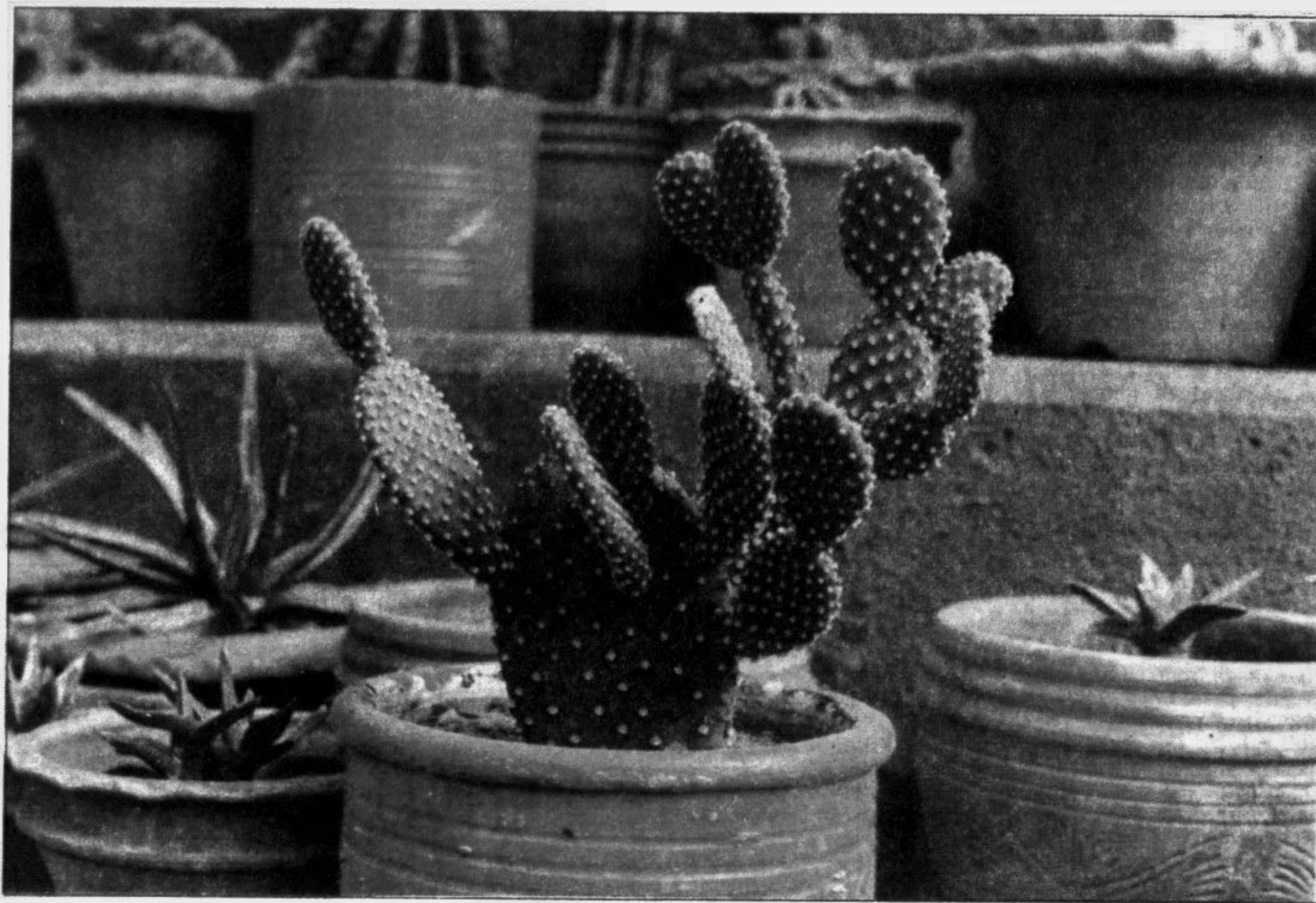
Dhaka Friday, January 19, 1996

AS MNurunnabi

LOCATED in the middle of a busy and bustling area at Wari in the old part of the Dhaka city, the Baldah Garden, covering an area of 3.36 acres of land, contains a rich and unique collection of indigenous and exotic plants and trees. It is one of the city's most exciting attractions for the naturalists and tourists. The garden, started in 1909, was founded by Babu Narayan Roy Chowdhury, a naturalist, philanthropist Zamindar of Baldah. It has two units of walled enclosures by the Nawab Street at Wari. The two units are thematically named "Psyche" (the soul) and "Cybele" (the mother goddess of nature). The Psyche is the earlier construction completed in 1936; Cybele was started in 1938 and completed in 1940.

With Roy's death in 1943, the expansion of the garden came to a stop, and its maintenance became a problem. By 1951, the management of the garden was vested in the Court of Wards but the situation did not improve. The garden was then handed over to the government in 1962. The Forest Department then took over the management of the garden. The Forest Department undertook a development scheme for renovation and rehabilitation of the vegetation in the garden. This helped somewhat in restoring the past glory of the garden.

The garden houses about 700 species of 339 genera belonging to 87 families.



bloom in colours ranging from the snow-white to yellow, scarlet red to blue, these pools add an enchanting beauty to the garden.

The roses : Once the home of the richest collection of roses of 217 varieties gathered from all over the globe, there are now only 15 varieties in the garden, most of which are newly introduced. Most of other varieties were destroyed by floods in the fifties and sixties.

The rockery and wall plants : It is the only garden in the country which has artificial rockeries in its conservatories to accommodate that remarkable groups of plants which are used to cover the hardlines and barrenness of open rocks and masonry structures. The rockeries of the garden contain 24 species exquisitely arranged in artificial settings of its conservatories or on the walls.

The arboretum plants and miscellaneous flora : The arboretum contains 396 species. Many of these species are exotic, a great number of them are rare and quite a few of them are famous.

Besides, there is the Aloe house which contains 16 species of these medicinal plants and a Cycas section containing 5 species which are important from a botanical point of view.

The richness of the flora has made Baldah Garden one of the most attractive places in the city for the visitors. It is the home of a large cross section of Bangladesh flora and the richest collection of exotics in the country.

The Charm of Baldah Garden

Many of these are exotics and rare plants from about 50 different countries of the world. They represent varied climatic zones and many of them have been cultured and propagated in the garden under artificial conditions.

The plant collection in the garden may be classified under seven main groups, namely, i) The orchids ii) The cactus iii) the conservatory plants iv) The aquatic plants v) The roses vi) The rockery and wall plants and

vii) The arboretum and miscellaneous flora. Some of the main features of these varieties are noted below.

The orchids : The garden houses more than two thousand orchids covering fifteen genera and fifty species of

both indigenous and exotic breeds. Continued efforts are reportedly being made to enrich the stock through collection of more indigenous and exotic species.

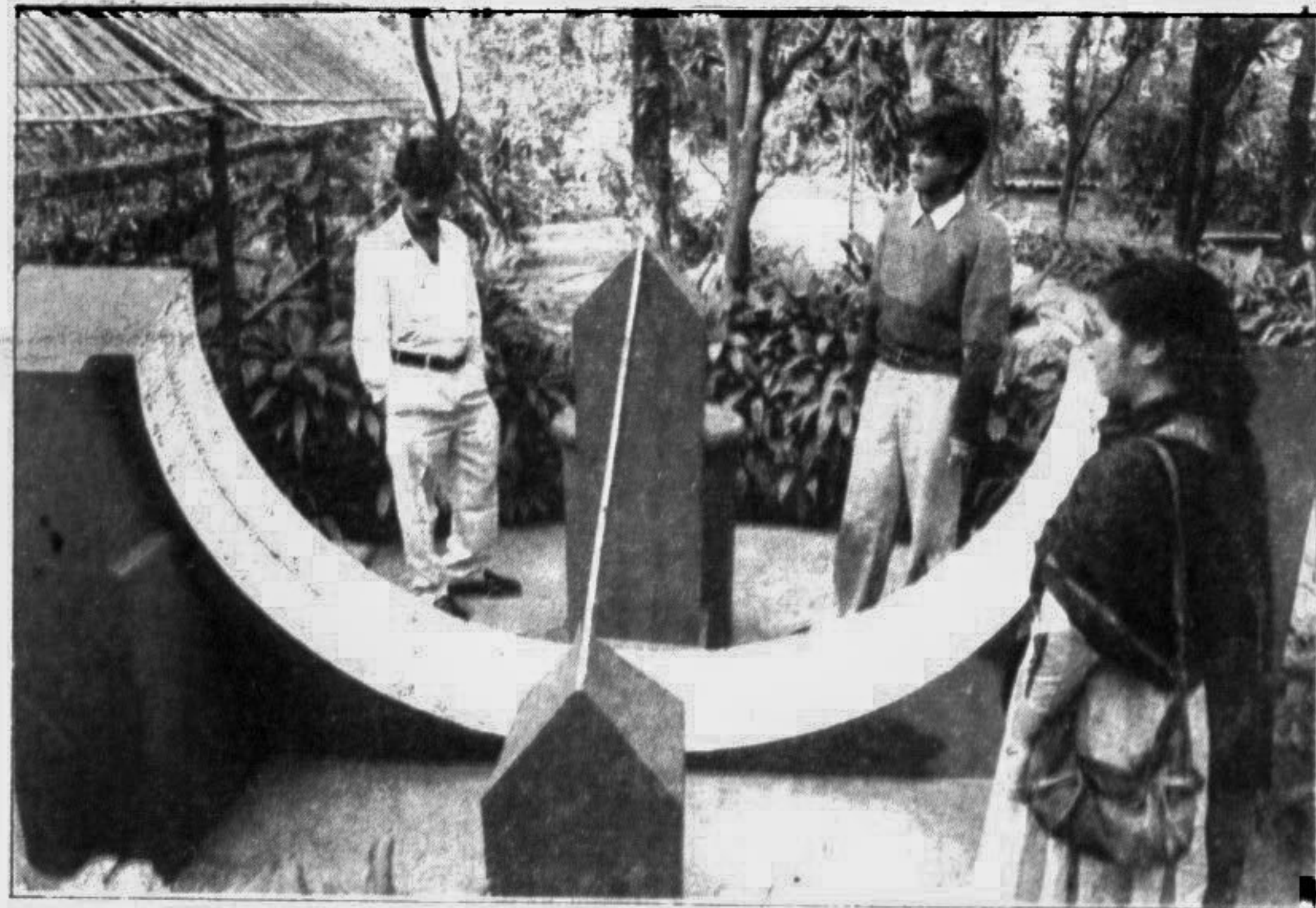
The cacti : The garden possesses the country's richest collection of cacti. There are more than two hundred species of each in the garden that cover nine genera. The cacti are mostly of Mexican and Arizonan origin. Most of the cacti blossom at night in magnificent colours, shape and size and as such, to a night visitor, the cacti houses offer a great experience. A lucky visitor in February-April, may come across a beautiful golden-foliated climbing cactus variety which looks different from the normal cacti whose pink coloured flowers look like roses. These are the famed camellias that inspired the great Bengali poet, Rabindra Nath Tagore during his visit to the garden in the twenties and his famous poem "Camellia" was born.

The conservatory plants : There are large groups of plants which grow in special environmental conditions. Some plants grow in shades,

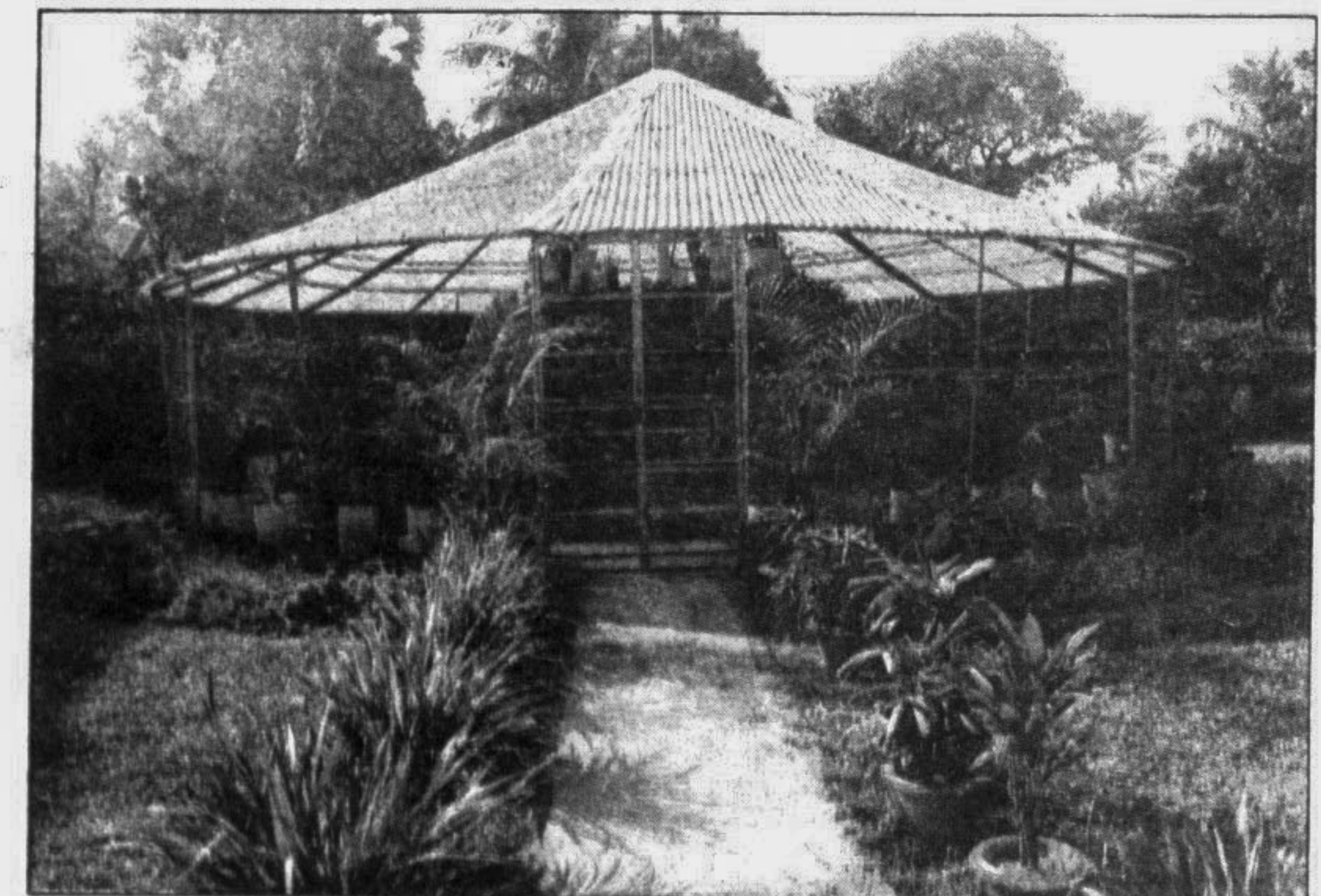
some on floors, some in moist-humid sites. Again, there are plants in the garden which do not even belong to the tropics. These plants, therefore, are being reared under special conditions in different plant

houses including four green houses, two in Psyche and two in Cybele.

Aquatic plants : There are about 150 lily ponds and lotus tanks in the garden and in summer when the lilies and the lotus are in full



Photographs : A K M Mohsin



Nawab Shaesta Khan : Subadar of Bengal

Roushanara Haq

THE name of Nawab Shaesta Khan reminds us of the great glory and splendour, the peace and prosperity that Bengal, (the present Bangladesh, West Bengal and Assam), enjoyed under his efficient administration. The Muslim historians described him as a Nawab of great excellence. The splendour and magnificence of Dhaka reached its zenith under his rule. During his period the English traveller Thomas Bowry visited Dhaka. He wrote, "Dhaka is an admirable city for its greatness, for its magnificent buildings and multitude of inhabitants."

Nawab Shaesta Khan was the Subadar of Bengal for two terms, the first being from 1664 to 1677 and the second from 1680 to 1688. His reign had been described in history as the 'golden period' of Bengal for its abundance and prosperity. It was recorded that eight maunds of rice were sold at Taka one only. In the field of architecture also he achieved success.

The most remarkable achievement of Shaesta Khan was the conquest of Chittagong which was forcefully occupied by the Raja of Arakan and was used as a centre of piracy by the Portuguese adventurers. The Raja of Arakan gave shelter to the Feringis and shared the booty with them and the local Mogh pirates. They terrorised and plundered the people off and on. In 1617 the Arakanese conquered the island of Sandwip and thus secured a half-way house for their raids into the southern districts of Bengal. They even carried off local people and sold them as slaves to the Dutch, English and the French.

No sooner had Shaesta Khan landed at Dhaka in 1664 than he began to prepare for the conquest of Arakan to put an end to these pirating expeditions. He built a strong naval force with three hundred vessels ready for expeditions.

For the conquest of Sandwip Shaesta Khan sent admiral Ibn-e-Hossain with a large fleet equipped with heavy guns. Muhammad Beg was sent with 100 war boats. The plan was that Noakhali would be their starting point and that the fleet will creep along the coast of the Bay of Bengal and Buzurg Ummad Khan, his son, at the head of a large army will march parallel to it. As a result of the feud that arose among the Mogh rulers of Chatgoan and the local Portuguese pirates the entire Feringi Colony escaped from the island to the Mogh camp at Noakhali with their family in 42 boats.

The first naval fight was fought near the Kathalia channel. The Mogh fleet again took to flight. Ibn-e-Hussain's forces burnt the Mogh defences and at the battle that followed both the Mogh and the Feringi forces were defeated, about ten thousand Feringis were killed and many more were taken prisoners. Sandwip was occupied.

Next day the fort of Chittagong was besieged and bombarded. The naval force of the Moghs was annihilated. Buzurg Ummad Khan entered triumphantly into the fort of Chittagong. Many thousand Bengal peasants who had been carried off and reduced to serfdom were released. The port of Ramu which includes the present Patenga

and Cox's Bazaar was also conquered by him. Chittagong was renamed as Islamabad and it was made the seat of a Mughal Faudar. In order to commemorate this occasion, a Juma Mosque was erected in Ander-killa in 1667.

Shaesta Khan was the brother of Empress Mumtaz Mahal and that is why he was honoured by the then Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb as next to the heir apparent. His second son Zafar Khan was appointed as the Thanadar of Chittagong. Haji Shah Ispahani, the then Dewan of Bengal became jealous of the tremendous popularity of the Nawab as the Emperor awarded him with five lacs of rupees and many elephants and horses with jewelled trappings. The Dewan brought charges of misappropriation against him. The Emperor recalled him to Delhi in 1677.

In 1680 Nawab Shaesta Khan was again appointed governor of Bengal for the second time. This period was specially remarkable for the suppression of the English traders. By that time the English merchants had considerably extended their trade. In 1688 the East India Company's trade and export from Bengal had risen annually to US \$1,50,000/- in value. The Company was authorised by the Crown to coin money, to raise troops and to declare war and peace.

With the permission of James II they had even fortified Calcutta and concentrated troops at their different headquarters. Shaesta Khan immediately sent his forces to Hooghly to guard the town. Finding their posi-

tion hopeless the English evacuated the town with their artillery and munitions. Then Captain Nicholson was sent from England with reinforcements to capture and fortify Chittagong. Shaesta Khan foiled both of these missions. When the expedition of Nicholson arrived at Hooghly in October 1688 the town was heavily bombarded and the English were compelled to retire 27 miles down the river to a village called Sutanuti, the site of the present Calcutta. All the factories at Patna, Cassimbazar, Masulipatam and Visa Kapatam were seized. Captain Heath was sent with reinforcements from England. He bombarded and burnt Balasore and sailed to conquer Chittagong. But the place was too strongly defended by Shaesta Khan to be captured.

After one month's futile fighting the English lost all their battleships and was compelled to retire to Madras to their Port of St. George. His youngest son Iradat Khan conquered Kuch Bihar and Rangamati. The Rajas of Hill Tipperah, Jaintia and Morang also were forced to surrender to the Nawab.

In 1688 the Nawab retired from Bengal. He was made the Governor of Agra where he spent the rest of his life. Historians had described Shaesta Khan as the pattern of excellence. His reign had been described as the golden age of Bengal. He patronised the Muslim industry of Dhaka and Silk industry of Maldah. He was very particular about his official duties and promptly despatched all official orders. He was fond of pomp and grandeur. From William Hedges' diary we get

a vivid description of the Magnificence and splendour of his court.

Shaesta Khan was a great builder. The few architectural remnants of the big mosques and mausoleums built during his time bear ample testimony to his magnificent style. The Nawab built a Mosque for the prayers of his family at the compound of the present Mitford Hospital.

On the north of the Mosque is the Mausoleum of his daughter Sajjada Khanam. The embankment and the landing ghats of Baburbazar are of Shaesta Khan's time.

Over this ghat there was a Naobatkhana. The Chawkbazar Mosque was constructed by him in 1675. The Subedars and the Umerahs in Dhaka used to perform their Juma prayers in this Mosque. For the accommodation of some members of his family the palace of Chota Katra was constructed in 1671. There were two imposing gateways on the north and south of the palace.

In the centre of the compound there was a big Mosque. The Mausoleum of Bibi Champa was also built during his time. Khawaja Amber, the chief eunuch of Nawab Shaesta Khan built a bridge, a three-domed mosque and a well at a place called Karwan near Tejgaon. The bridge is still existing. There were many other mosques, mausoleums, bridges and Sarais most of which had been destroyed by time. All these monuments bear ample testimony of the greatness of Nawab Shaesta Khan as the greatest Subadar of Bengal.

Film-maker Picks her Way Past Censors

Fons Tuinstra

IT is roll call at Beijing police station and the officers are being briefed : "Listen, of course you have to kill the dogs, but this time don't do it in front of the eyes of those who love dogs."

Although On the Beat is a feature film, director Ning Ying admits it sometimes feels like a documentary.

She belongs to a new generation of Chinese film-makers determined to break from a tradition of mythical stories set in the past to explore instead important changes happening in Chinese society in what she believes in a surreal period.

"I feel like an anthropologist," she says. "China is changing very fast and I want to catch these changes. They are too important to miss."

She resists being categorised as this or that kind of film-maker. "I'm not following anybody. I don't want followers," she says. Neither does she talk admiringly of being influenced by certain writers or colleagues. "My inspiration comes from daily life," she insists. "I want to show real life."

On the Beat, her third film, observes a few days in the life of police officer Yang Guowei who hunts down potentially rabid dogs belonging to China's 'new rich', interrogates migrants and moans about his meagre pay.

As tensions at home and work press in on him, Guowei snaps and assaults a prisoner. Ning, who works at the Beijing Film Studio, wanted to examine how such a character could reach breaking point. "A police officer should represent the state society. He stops doing this when he starts hitting a prisoner."

The film is revealing, showing how much Beijing has changed in a short time. It used to take Guowei's predecessors in the police only a few days to catch a thief because everybody knew everybody else in the neighbour-

hood. Officers would know details down to which thieves would use a screwdriver to break open a door and which would use their shoulders.

Now that millions of people are on the move in China, crime is rising and thieves are harder to catch.

Pregnancies outside the official one-child policy are also harder to control. In the 1980s, it was fairly simple to ensure compliance by checking on married couples. Now there are many unmarried women.

Ning feels she has an almost historic duty to record these changes.

"When I came back to China in 1981 from my first trip abroad, I realised how big the differences were between China and the rest of the world," she says. Since then, however, she has no-

ticed that the differences are rapidly narrowing.

"All the world is going to look alike," she says sadly. "Just remember Italy from the films of the 1960s. Then it was really a different country. I think it is a tragedy."

She fears the prospect of Hollywood films conquering her country. "All those Hollywood-style movies limit themselves to one simple story. I think reality is more complicated. That is why I show a mixture of stories — often very ambiguous."

This is important, she explains, because these are confusing times for Chinese people. "We are part of a system that is changing very fast. In using a new way of telling, I try to explain all this."

— GEMINI NEWS



Ning Ying: 'I want to show real life'