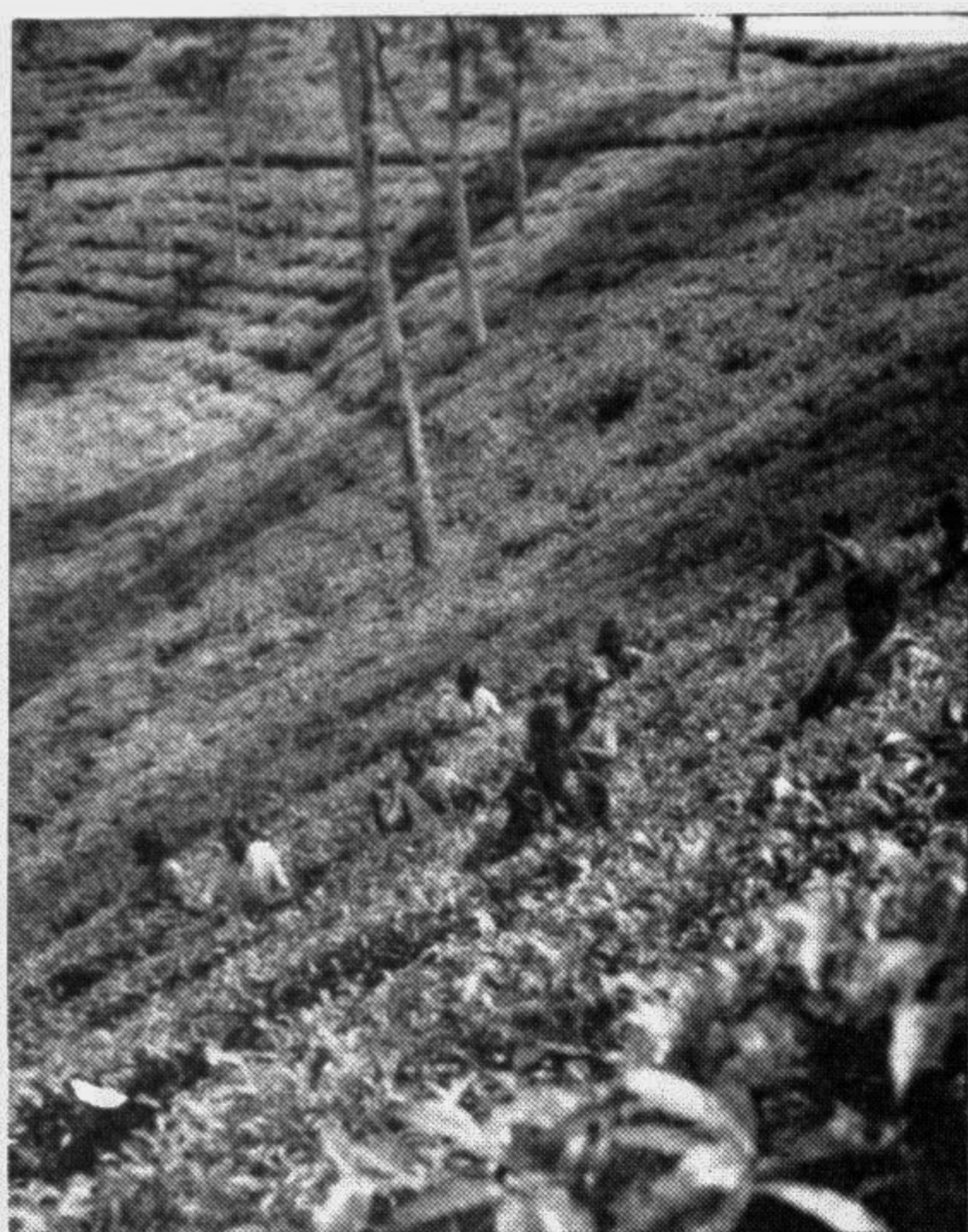


TEENS and TWENTIES

Heaven Is Not Far Away

by Siraj-us-Saleheen Lovell



DWARFED trees overwhelmed by huge shade trees, sloped tillahs, men and women working perilously — oblivious of everything around them, baskets behind them, plucking some sort of leaf — hum! What could it be? Yep — you got it right, it's a tea garden I'm talking about. Now, now, be cool. Nothing to be jealous of. So what if some of you couldn't be the lucky one's to visit, at least once a tea garden. Let's take a short one-day journey through one — the 'Shumshernugger Tea Estate' of the Duncan Brothers (Bangladesh) Limited.

Between the main road from Sri-Mongol to Shumshernugger there's a sharp turn towards the garden which is basically the main entrance to the depot of natural excellence known as the SN Tea Estate. When entering you'll be greeted with a very bumpy ride from the man-made just-to-do road for which a Toyota Carina is definitely not recommendable. Through those bumps and burps you can catch a glimpse of slopes whose occupants are dwarfed tea plants methodically situated and groups of people doing some sort of methodical plucking.

Well, in any case you've just arrived and very exhausted. Better see a more detailed version of what you've just seen later. You'll be greeted by the garden guardians (Manager or Asst Manager) at their Bungalow (More precisely Palace) and after a short while your tender body tells you to call it a day. You go to bed thinking of the findings of next day.

On instinct you get up early in the morn, open your window and do a little stretching (Aerobics OZ style) and in the middle of your stretch you become dumb-founded — what's this I see in front of me? Your eyes follow the tillahs as far as possible, but the morning fog tells you to stop and ogle what's near about. Green and green and again green.

The tea plants, like yourself, seem to stretch themselves out of the night-map. The high shade trees extend their arms over them with motherly care. You watch the green goblins

with their morning purity, still untouched and undisturbed from the hands of pluckers and think — 'Now this is a place where I can stay for decades!'. Suddenly "Ding! Ding!" Rise and shine, breakfast ready sir — the bearer announces breaking your fascination with the most uncanny of voices and at

that moment you could just kill him. Well — welcome to reality. Even to ogle at beautiful things one must fill his/her stomach. After a hasty breakfast you start the expedition on foot (the best way) to have a close examination of what you've just experienced in the early morn. By

this time the labourers are coming out to the fields by one's and two's and you just follow a group to their destination. The group, mainly consisting women, stop at a section. It their plucking utensils in the proper way and start plucking — all done so methodically as if you, a total stanger were not their at all.

Now this is another beauty to look at. The women, while plucking through the narrow walking path (Galli), either talk and make fun of one another (maybe even you), or sing some sort of local country music — which under the circumstances, makes Kenny Rogers a whinny-poop. No use trying to catch the wordings — just the sound of it feels good enough.

A sort of routine tik-swish-plop sound fills the air while the ladies pluck. You have an urge to try out the plucking yourself and ultimately you do — God forbid, at least don't show your plucking pictures to your friends. You've had enough — it's time to move on.

What's going on there? Aha! their planting new tea plants. Now let's see where it all starts from. You pick up a plant and wonder "How can this tiny-winy buddy be such a grown beauty." That's the seedlings you dumb-dumb. The labourers first plant these seedlings in a suitable period and nurture them properly with fertilisers and weedicides as well as pesticides for four/five long years, and then they become what you've just seen in the plucking section. If you think I'm gonna tell you more about tea plantation — think again. You'll find these in any "Handbook on Tea Planting". I'm here to introduce nature to you.

Some sections ahead you find a place where people are ready to uproot the plants. You ask their leader (Sirdar) what's up and he answers "They've become too old". How old? "Oh, about 90 years" — is his airy answer. W-w-what! 90 years! How long does a tea plant live then? Why about 120-150 years you numb-skull. If only man could live so long! (And live with his



wife, are you crazy?). Suddenly you realise that it's lunch time and you need fuel for your engine. As you start back for the Bungalow, the workers bring out their small pouch of food and as for water, they drink salted tea which regenerates their strength.

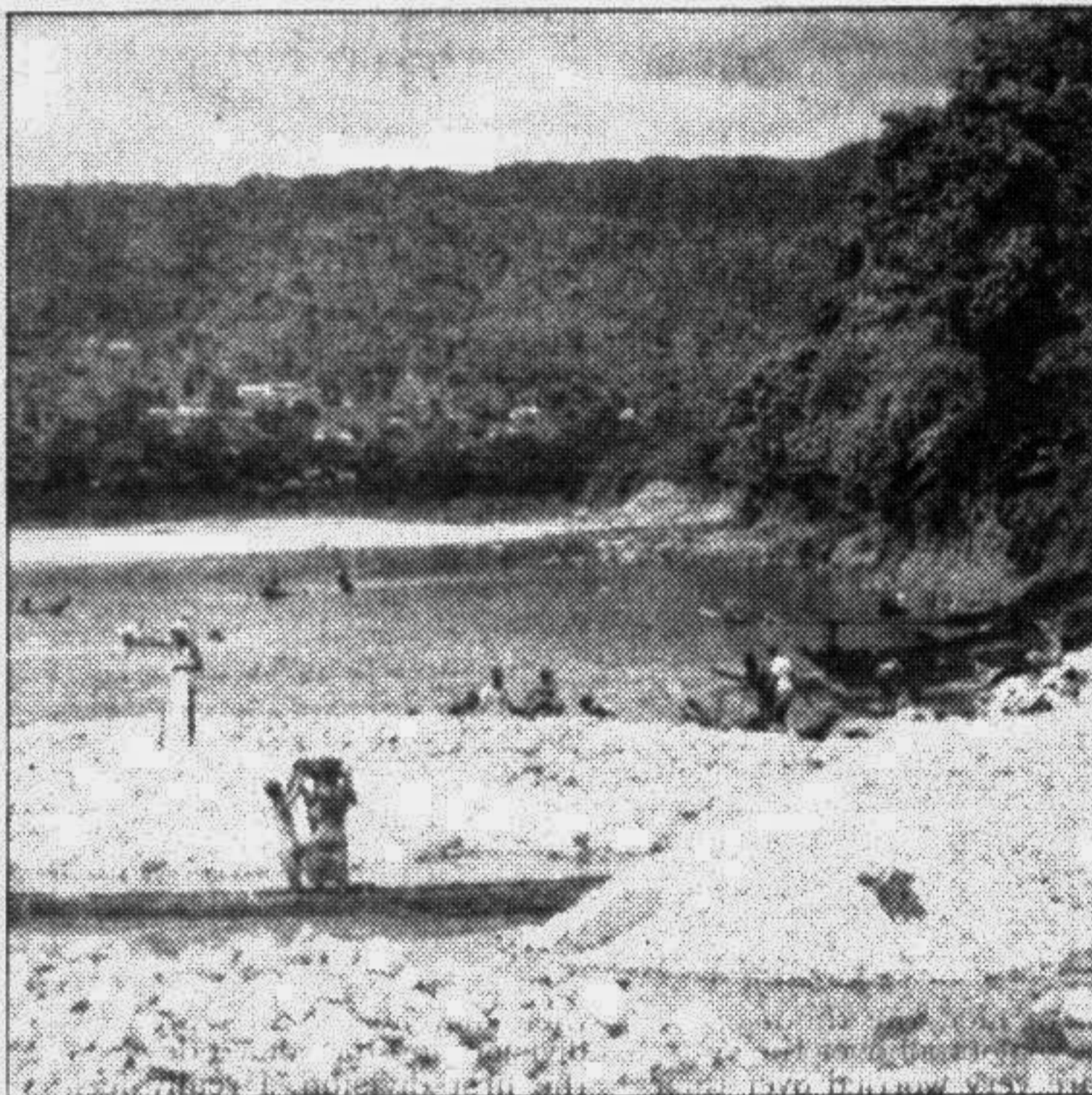
You refuel yourself for the evening session — a trip to the factory. In the evening, you reach the factory which looks like an air-hanger from the outside. While entering you are instantly hit I mean your nostrils by the scent of liquor tea. One thing else hits your eardrums — the enormous sounds of various high power machines — crushing, tearing, cutting or moulding the tea leaves and processing them into powder. You see a worker tasting (testing) the liquor and feel a second urge to test yourself the raw taste of tea. After tasting you come to the decision that

even your own-made tea is better than this.

Well two bags of (complementary) tea you return to the Bungalow. Suddenly you realise that the bed is calling you. You go to sleep and dream that you've just been to heaven — green and green everywhere — tea plants dancing to and fro in tune with an unknown country music and you are joining them.

Suddenly — CRASH! — times up dude, time to go. That confounded face of the bearer pops up and for the second time you realise that the bed is calling you. You go to sleep and dream that you've just been to heaven — green and green everywhere — tea plants dancing to and fro in tune with an unknown country music and you are joining them.

Photographs Courtesy: Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation



Dated Forever....

WHEN I am gone remember me this way..... I was the one who was watching you when you thought no one was around. I was the one who saw the other side of you that no one else saw. I was the one to fall everytime you stumbled. I was the one with watered eyes whenever you cried. I was the one to keep you warm when it was cold out there. I was the one to hear you when no one else was listening. I was the one to seek you whenever you tried to hide. I was the one to hold on when you let go. I was the one who would always love you against all odds. I was the one who died a thousand deaths when we drifted apart. by Evana



LIFE

OH! mother, I am going home, yeah! I am going home. On my way I find lots of flowers, I call them memories. What a strange name. Yet when I find thorns in them I call those thorns the same. On my way I find some people they come along with me but eventually all are left behind for only I'm meant to be. Myriad people walk past me, so does night and day. I walk along undaunted straight ahead, as far as I may. In the walk of life we are all alone, under the firmament All our lives, seeds of time has been sown, but still in the long run we are always forever alone. by Scarface

Silver-coloured Toyota Celica stopped at the foot of the fly-over at Zia International Airport. The driver and the other people sitting in the Celica could not be noticed from outside due to the mercury-plated windows. The Celica then sped up the fly-over and parked itself right behind a grey Honda Vitor. The Vitor suddenly accelerated with a loud screeching noise and shot down the fly-over like a bullet. The Celica also started after the Vitor. The Vitor's driver failed to notice a speed-braker at the end of the fly-over and the car hit the pavement trying to avoid it. The Celica reached the Vitor at a flash and two men stepped out of it.

They pointed their semi-automatics at the Vitor's driver and ordered him to put his hands above his head. Three police cars and a police truck surrounded the site of the accident. Armed policemen handcuffed the Vitor's driver and took him away. The officer-in-command examined the gold bars seized from the driver. He thanked the two officers in the Celica and started for the police headquarters with the gold bars. The Celica then started off for its next mission.

The two officers in the Celica were CID officers. Their task was to trace smugglers working through Zia International Airport. They were the best at this task and they had caught many criminals. Let's meet these two officers: the first one was Zillur. He was quite tall and handsome. He carried a 0.38 semi-automatic and used it only when it was really necessary. He was always cool-tempered but when he became angry, none dared to confront him. He had long hair and it was always neatly brushed. Zillur had no interest in driving cars; he loved motorbikes. He always wore clean clothes and he preferred to wear formal clothes all the time. He was against the idea of smoking as he always took care of his health. He never had any vocations for adventures. His friends always teased him as 'Mr Perfect', and indeed, he was always perfect.

Zillur's partner, the other officer, was Tuhin. He was just opposite of Zillur. He was hot tempered and was always angry. Nobody wanted to disturb him even when he was in a good mood. He loved cars and was always in a mood to go out for a drive. He was very tall and could be called cute. He carried a 0.45 semi-automatic and he used it even when it was not at all required. His hair was not so long and he never cared about it. Tuhin always wore jeans and other casual outfits. He smoked about ten cigarettes a day and never took any care of his health. Tuhin loved adventures and he often set off in search of them. But still, these two made a very good team. Their work was acclaimed by the senior officers and they had an excellent reputation in the CID.

"The Last Mission"

by Tanzir Latif

Zillur's and Tuhin's main object was to check gold smuggling in the area surrounding Zia International Airport. They had carried out numerous missions in that area and their success rate was eighty per cent. Huge amounts of gold had been recovered by these two. Their major success was achieved when they captured the ring-leader of gold smuggling in Uttara some months ago. Smuggling in that area was almost extinct for some time. But recently, it had been reported that a new ring-leader named 'Cornel' had taken over the Uttara underworld. Smuggling flourished after Cornel took over and it was really difficult to trace his accomplices.

Zillur and Tuhin were able to capture only the Vitor's driver in the last two months. They were sure that gold smuggling was still carrying on at the normal rate but its network was unknown to them. A few number of gold bars were recovered from the Vitor's driver. But Cornel was smuggling gold in and out through Zia International Airport and the CID was unable to trace anything. Zillur and Tuhin's next mission was to trace the smuggler's accomplice named Nishi, who was well-known as 'Nishi the notorious'.

The Toyota Celica stopped at the petrol-station in Gulshan-1. Their main objective was not to obtain octane; they had information that 'Nishi the notorious' hanged out in that area. They had waited for her over here for a week or so, but they had no sign of her. The Celica was moving out of the station when Tuhin suddenly jammed the brakes. A white Corona EXIV stopped at the fast-food store near the station. Nishi stepped out of it and entered the store. Tuhin parked the Celica right beside the EXIV.

They watched Nishi through the large glass windows of the store. She paid a man some money and he gave her something in a brown packet. Nishi took the packet and stepped out of the store. She got into her EXIV and started towards Banani. Tuhin carefully followed her in the Celica. Zillur had got down to stop the man in the store. Tuhin followed Nishi up to ABC Plaza without any problem. Then the EXIV suddenly increased speed and entered into the New Airport Road. Tuhin also had to keep up with the increasing speed of the EXIV. He watched the speedometer climbing from 80 kph to 110 kph. Nishi was driving like a maniac. She overtook several cars and tried to shove Tuhin



off her back. The Celica increased its speed to 130 kph and now it was right behind Nishi's EXIV. Nishi again increased speed but she had to stop because the level crossing barriers were dropped to allow a train to pass.

The EXIV failed to come to a dead stop and it hit a garbage truck waiting on the level crossing. Tuhin braked the Celica with all his experience and it stopped just about three inches away from a Maruti Suzuki. He got out of his car and arrested the injured girl. The police vans and an ambulance carried Nishi to a hospital. The brown packet had a walkie-talkie in it. Some gold bars were found under Nishi's seat and important papers were recovered. A large truck had arrived to move the damaged EXIV when Tuhin started for the store where he had left his partner.

Tuhin found an ambulance waiting at the fast food store. The police was surrounding the place. Zillur was shot in his hand by the man. He refused to give in to the police and had taken a girl hostage inside the store. Zillur's hand was bleeding seriously. The man threatened to kill the girl if the police tried to enter the store. Armed

officers trained their guns at the man. An automatic was held at the girl's head; she was crying desperately. The police and the CID officers were waiting impatiently for their commander's orders. Tuhin was also pointing his 0.45 at the man, but there was nothing they could do. A sixteen year old girl's life was at stake.

An old man was allowed to leave the store. He told the police that there were seven other people in the store. He gave a letter to Tuhin. It was written by the man with the gun. He wrote that he wanted to leave the store safely. He would take the girl with him and then drop her somewhere nearby. He warned the police not to play any tricks or else he would blast the girl's head off. He told the police to move away from his black Pajero Super Select, and that he wanted an answer within five minutes.

it increased its speed. Tuhin called Uttara Police Station and told them to block the Pajero by all means.

The Pajero tried to push the Celica out of the road but it failed. Tuhin fired two rounds at the Pajero. The jeep increased its speed from 110 kph to 140 kph. The Pajero and the Celica passed Zia International Airport and entered into Uttara. A road-block was waiting for the Pajero. The Uttara Police Station brought all the men and motor cars they had. About thirty-five policemen were waiting with their guns. Large Bedford lorries were used to create a strategic road-block.

As soon as the black Pajero became visible, all the guns were pointed at it. Sirens were sounded from the patrol cars. When the Pajero came closer, it was ordered to stop by a megaphone. Tuhin tried his best to blow the Pajero's wheels off from behind, but he failed. The Pajero braked with a loud screeching sound. Tuhin also stopped the Celica right beside the jeep. He lowered the front window of the left hand side of the Celica and pointed his semi automatic at Cornel. As soon as Cornel looked at Tuhin, the hostage unlocked the jeep's door and jumped out of it. The girl ran away from the Pajero as fast as her trembling legs could carry her. Cornel was surrounded by police patrol cars. Cornel took his automatic and pointed it right at Tuhin.

The situation got tensed. Tuhin was pointing his gun at Cornel from his Celica. Cornel was pointing his gun at Tuhin from the Pajero. The policemen were pointing their guns at Cornel. The officer-in-command spoke to Cornel through his megaphone. He ordered Cornel to give himself up. He also said that the police would open fire if he did not surrender within five minutes.

Cornel thought about it for some time. There was no way he could escape now. His gun was still pointed at Tuhin. Every one was sure that the ring-leader would at last be caught. Tuhin was waiting impatiently for Cornel's answer. He was to get a long holiday after his marriage was arrested. His only sister's marriage was only a week away. How he would celebrate the occasion! His sister was the only relative he had in this whole world. He had promised their dead mother that he would take care of his sister and do everything for her happiness. Tuhin had told his sister that his 'last mission' before her marriage would be the one in which he would arrest Cornel. He had also said that it would be the last mission before the occasion. Tuhin was thinking of his sister in wedding clothes; how good she would look! Suddenly, Cornel's automatic roared into life. A bullet raced right into Tuhin's head. He crashed against the door and died instantly. The police opened fire and shot Cornel dead. Tuhin died in his 'last mission'.

Kaleidoscope

Dear Avid Readers! Did it ever occur to you that photographs do have hidden meanings? From now on you will have a photography column, Kaleidoscope, to be printed in the Teens and Twenties every Friday. The snapshots will definitely keep you wondering and we welcome any comment you care to make about them.



Monkey as a pet or Darwin strikes again?? Photograph by Zahedul Islam Khan