

**U**LUGH Khan Jahan Ali, torchbearer of Islam to the south of Bangladesh, laid the nucleus of a prosperous city -- Bagerhat -- in the heart of a deep mangrove forest -- the Sundarbans, one of the few primordial Janapada like Pundranagar, Gaur, Sonargaon in our Bengal history. Later it became a mint town of the Independent Sultan of Bengal and was then called Khalifatabad during the Husain Shah Dynasty (1493-1519AD).

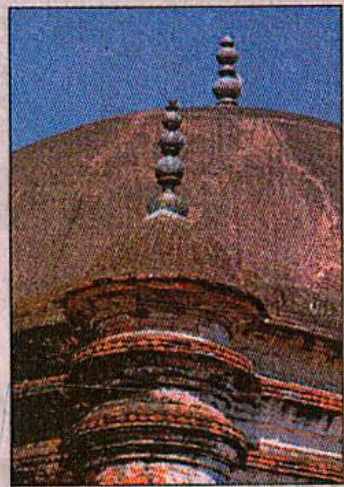
A debate still exists among the historians about the title, origin and identity of Khan Jahan Ali. As one group believes he was an original Turkish warrior who later became a minister under the reign of Muhammad Tughlaq of Delhi, another identifies him as a man from Bangladeshi soil -- a General of Sultan Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah of Sonargaon during Nasiruddin Mahmud Shah of Gaur regime. (1442-1459AD).

The area of Khan Jahan, as we know, is from Jhenidah to Jessore, Satkhira, Khulna, Barisal, Patuakhali and Bagerhat. Thus the works associated with Khan Jahan, cover a vast area of southern Bengal. Bagerhat was included in UNESCO's World Heritage list under the convention concerning the protection of the world Cultural and Natural Heritages. He garlanded Bagerhat with about 350 mosques, roads, bridges, *dhigis* and palaces in a very short span. A few of the important buildings are Mausoleum complex of Khan Jahan Ali; Shait Gambud, Chumakhola and Nine Domed mosques.

Overlooking the beautiful Thakur Dighi, the mausoleum complex stands on a high embankment made from the excavation material of the dighi. The east west oriented dighi was constructed by Khan Jahan Ali and has a broad steep flight of steps from the embankment leading down to the vast expanse of water where today gives the impression to be a performing stage of crocodiles.

The notable two -- *Kala Pahar* (black mountain) and *Dhola Pahar* (white mountain), are fed daily with live chicken by the *Mutwalli* of the tomb to the great amusement of the horde of visitors or onlookers. The feeding of the crocodile is also a religious belief by worshippers.

According to the numerous diversified legends, these

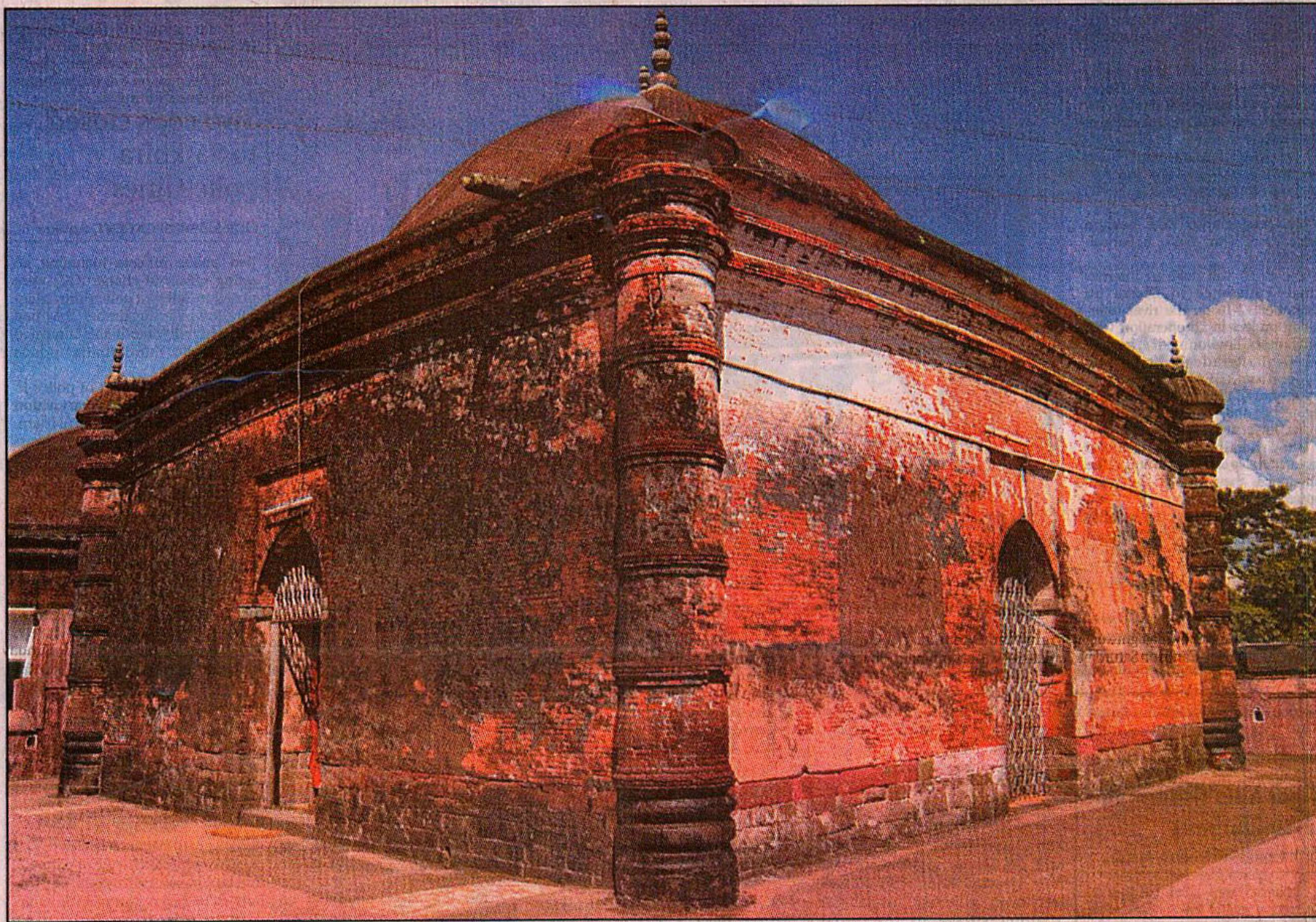
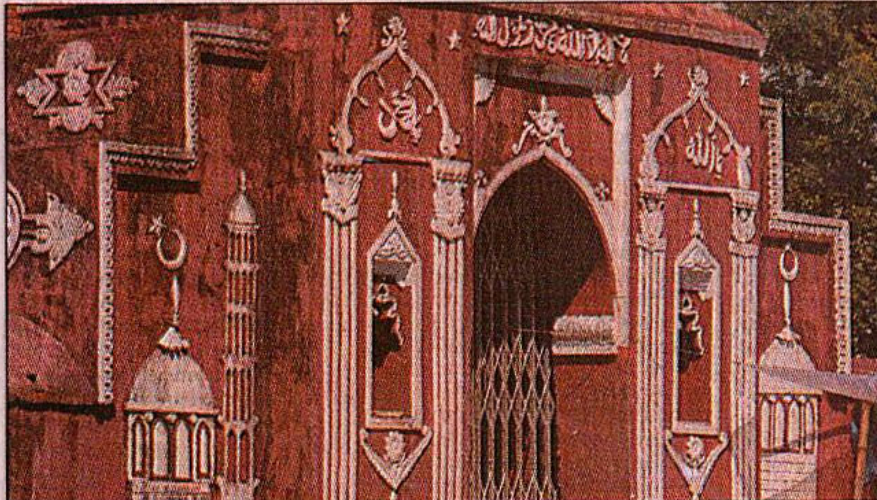


crocodiles have had certain association with Khan Jahan Ali, for ones says that Khan Jahan Ali two horses or two favourite supernatural beings were turned to crocodiles guard of the area.

A few historians, who excavated this *dhigi* were supervised by Pir Ali, alias Muhammad Taher, a Muslim convert who was a close associate of Khan Jahan. Ali often called him with indulgence as Thakur. Thus the name *Thakur Dighi*. The *dhigi* has probably four *ghats* at each bank, ruins of which are still visible. The northern or the existing main *ghat* was originally smaller than the present one. It was extended to 28 steps and made wider by 60 feet by the former Bagerhat District Administrator Ali Ahmed in association with the local people.

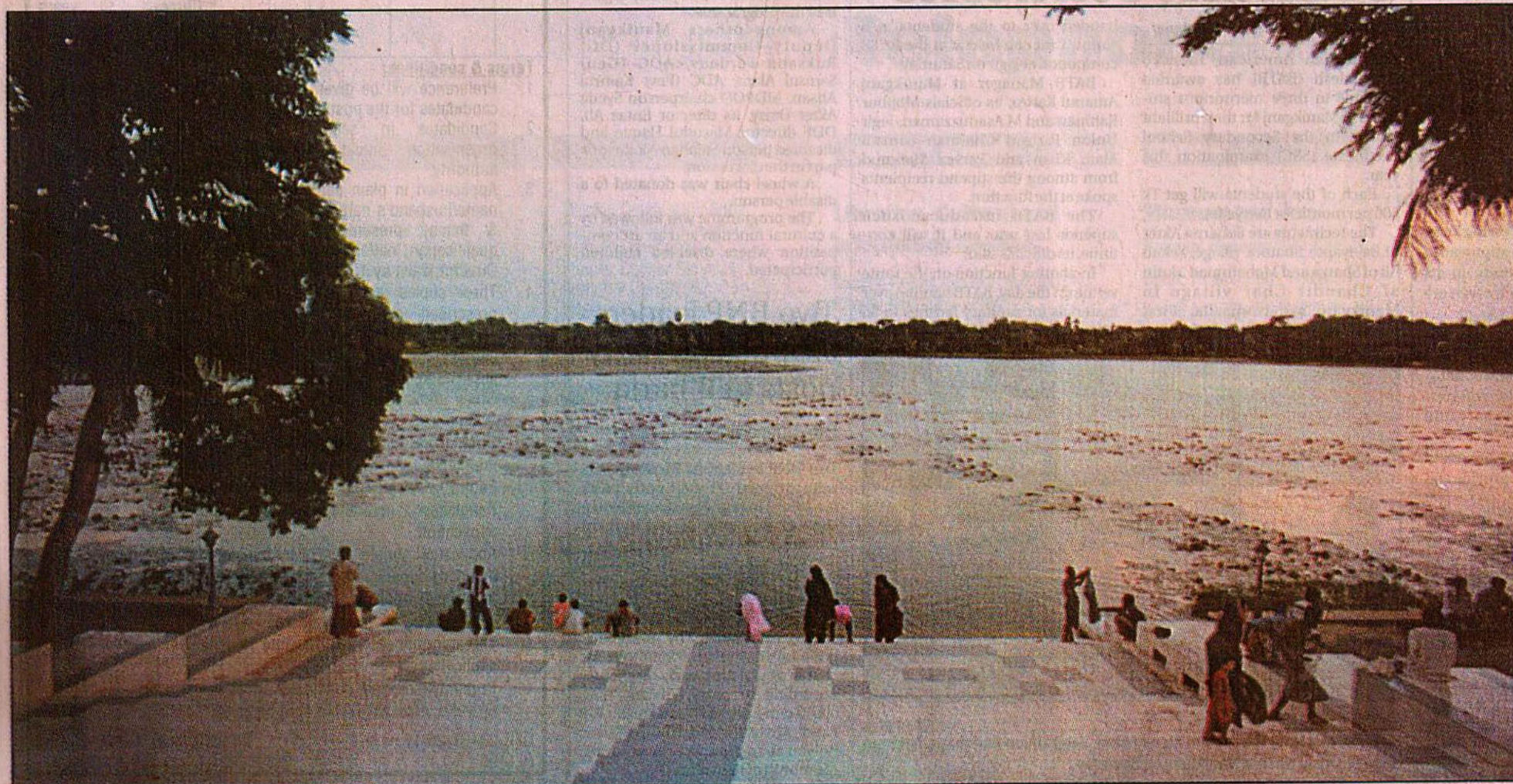
An inner and outer low boundary wall surrounds the whole complex. There were probably five gates in the outer enclosure: two in the southern wall and one in each in the eastern, northern and western walls. An inner boundary wall had three gateways -- one each in the eastern, northern and western walls, surrounds only the tomb area. The interesting feature of the gateways is the Chouchala vault, reproduced from the shape of a rural bamboo hut.

The square shaped tomb above ground level is 9.24m with a square brick structure enclosed by a 2.40m thick wall. The five lowest courses in the wall masonry were constructed with black basalt stones, believed to be from Gaur-Rajmahal, protecting this building against the extreme salinity of the coast. Probably because of the wall construction, only this building in Bagerhat retains its original features and is in a state of preservation.



Khan Jahan Ali's Mausoleum

## Uncover Bagerhat founder's untold legend



Originally the tomb has a 2-m wide entrance on each side, but later the northern opening was sealed with bricks. All four walls contain two niches for a lamp.

The four round corner turrets, faceted at regular intervals with seven brick mouldings, each crowned with original ribbed cupola are still retained.

One striking architectural feature of this mausoleum is an under-ground cell or crypt containing the real grave. In the early 1870s its entrance was opened and a flight of steps was discovered leading down from the north to the crypt, the walls of which were found to be covered by inscriptions that could contain historical information regarding Ulugh Khan Jahan's life.

Later on it was closed down without proper documentation. According to an unpublished manuscript, the floor was covered with hexagonal encaustic glazed tiles of various patterns, predominantly in blue, white and yellow. The tombstone or cenotaph itself of black basalt stone is placed in the middle of the room on the ground level and raised on three steps of the same material. Today the encaustic glazed tiles no longer exist but a number of them can be found set into the steps of the tomb, also



decorating some portion of the floor.

The inscription found in his tomb is the only historical information about the date of his demise -- 24th October 1459 AD. That is why a great deal of controversy exists in the true history of the saint. An earnest appeal to the concerned authorities for an early exploration or excavation of the crypt be undertaken quickly to prove the authenticity of the unpublished manuscript written by R. C. Sterndale in 1866. This will also help to unlock or discover the mystery of the Legendary Islamic Hero - Khan Jahan Ali's identity, career and his activities.

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