SYED MAQSUD JAMIL

PHOTO: STAR FILE

arriages are made in heaven but customs are made in society. In pre-partition and early fifties of Dhaka pairs were united and marriages took place; and there were customs reflecting the ethos of the Muslim society of Dhaka. As time passed on, as modern advancement took over, the customs changed, a time and its custom became history. It still makes an interesting story!

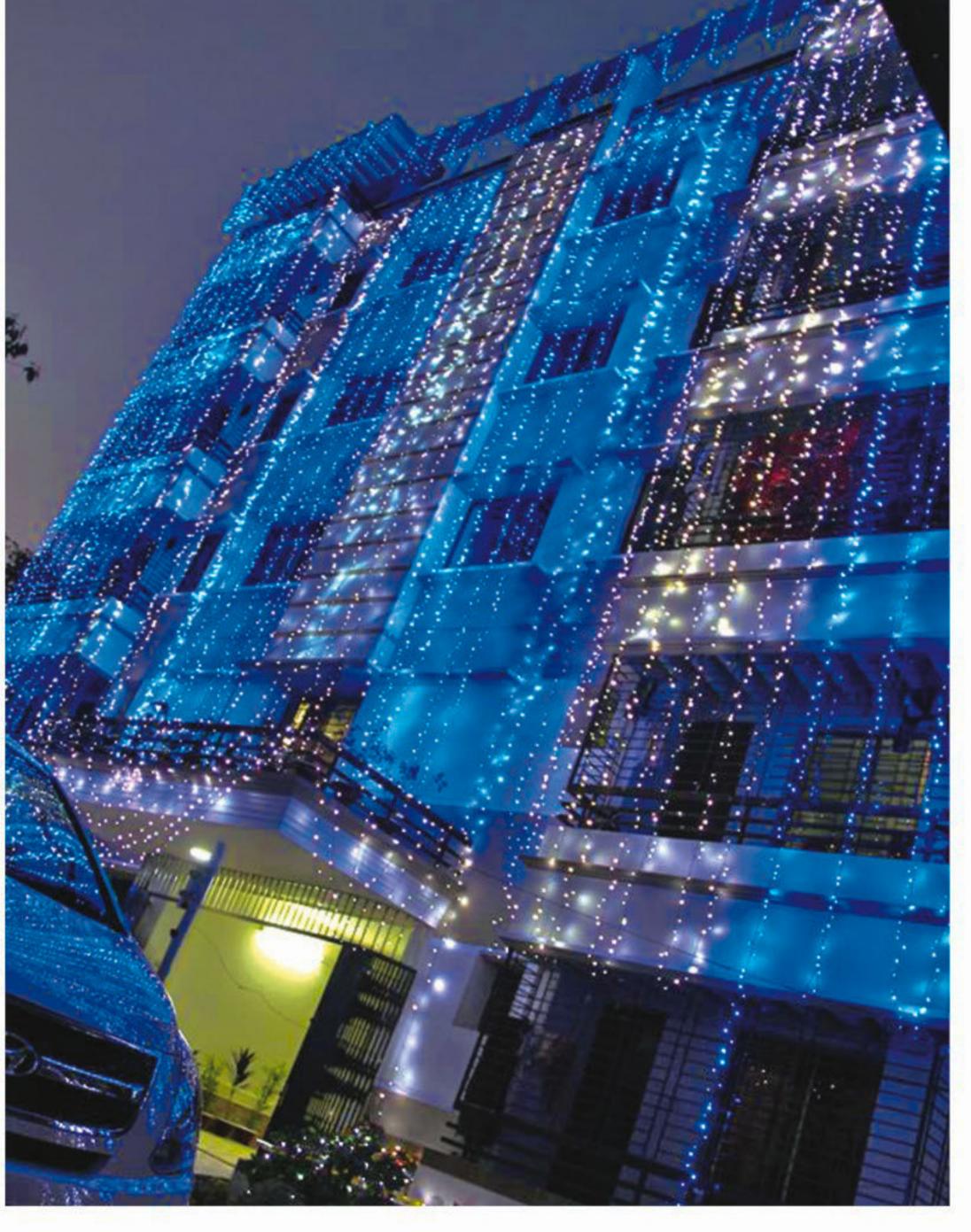
In those times, arranged marriage was the practice. The Mutashas or the female matchmakers tied the nuptial knots. A burqa clad woman the Mutashas went from family to family conveying the paigham (offer). When the choices meet the married ladies of the boy's family is invited to the girl's house. They take a closer look at the girl as to her looks and physical soundness. The visit is preceded by a procession of sweetmeat carriers; the sweetmeat carried on trays covered with red satin shroud with golden frills generally weighed two and a half maund to four maund. Paan or betel leaves were also there. It created an awakening in the area that a paigham is being sent.

The girl came with a bowed head with the head cover or aanchal lowered to hide

the gaze. The matronly ladies first looked at her eyes to assure them that she is not squint eyed. Her locks were unfastened to reach to its full length. Then they took a look at her ankle. It has to be slender for a stub shaped ankle means that she will become a widow. The back is then checked to determine that she does not have a hump of a camel. When the

inspection is satisfactory the paigham proceeds. The Mutasha or the match maker is given a pair of sandal, an umbrella and a saree.

Panchini or engagement ceremony is an event where the patricians of the two families confer to agree on den mohr or alimony, kabin Muslim marriage bond, ornaments, dress and on the date of the



| MUSINGS |

wedding. The visitors are welcomed with a quarter glass of *sherbet* followed by sumptuous dinner; kupta pulao, korma (chicken curry), rejala (mutton curry), shirberen or a special kind of dessert.

Panchini is followed by Bala Bali or "Gaye Holud" marked by many customs with effusion of merriment particularly in the bride's family. The bride is placed on a chowki wooden platform with a paati rattan mattress with four plantain trees in the four corners and a red sheet overhead. Then *uptan* turmeric paste is applied to the forehead and cheek of the bride and rubbed all over her body. Then mehedi or henna design is made on her palm and

Five items - five leaves of paan, five strands of grass, five paddy grains, five betel nuts and five green plantains with an earthen lamp are placed on a kulathreshing pan. In succession the ladies holding it move the kula around the face of the bride in a circle five times and then apply turmeric paste to the forehead of the bride and on their own foreheads.

An earthen pot of shirbirin(sweet dish)with a rolled betel leaf tucked into it is placed near the platform. Seven girls or Balis and a boy or Bala from bride's brothers and sister's families play around and partake of shirbirin.

On the day of marriage the boy's family sends sets of dresses for the children of the family of the bride. This is called Bachkanya. The boy's family also sendssets of dresses for the seven friends of the bride. This is called Saatsuhagan conciliation of seven friends of the bride.

From the day of Bala Bali the bride does not take fish till the fish from the boy's side arrives. All this time the bride keeps her gaze shyly lowered. The bride will raise her gaze to see her husband under a red *urni*a shroud overhead in a mirror held between the two! Her prince charming!

Through these customs, efforts were made to endow the wedding with all the elements of a fairy tale. Marriage is a dream. In the colours of the customs the couples of Dhaka lived that dream!

HERITAGE"

SULTANATE ERA MOSQUE IN RUIN

MINHAJ UDDIN, CHITTAGONG

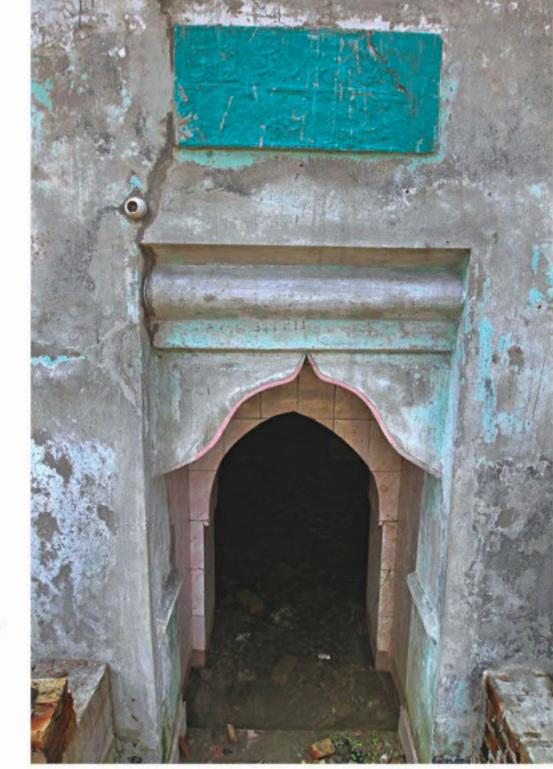
PHOTOS: STAR FILE

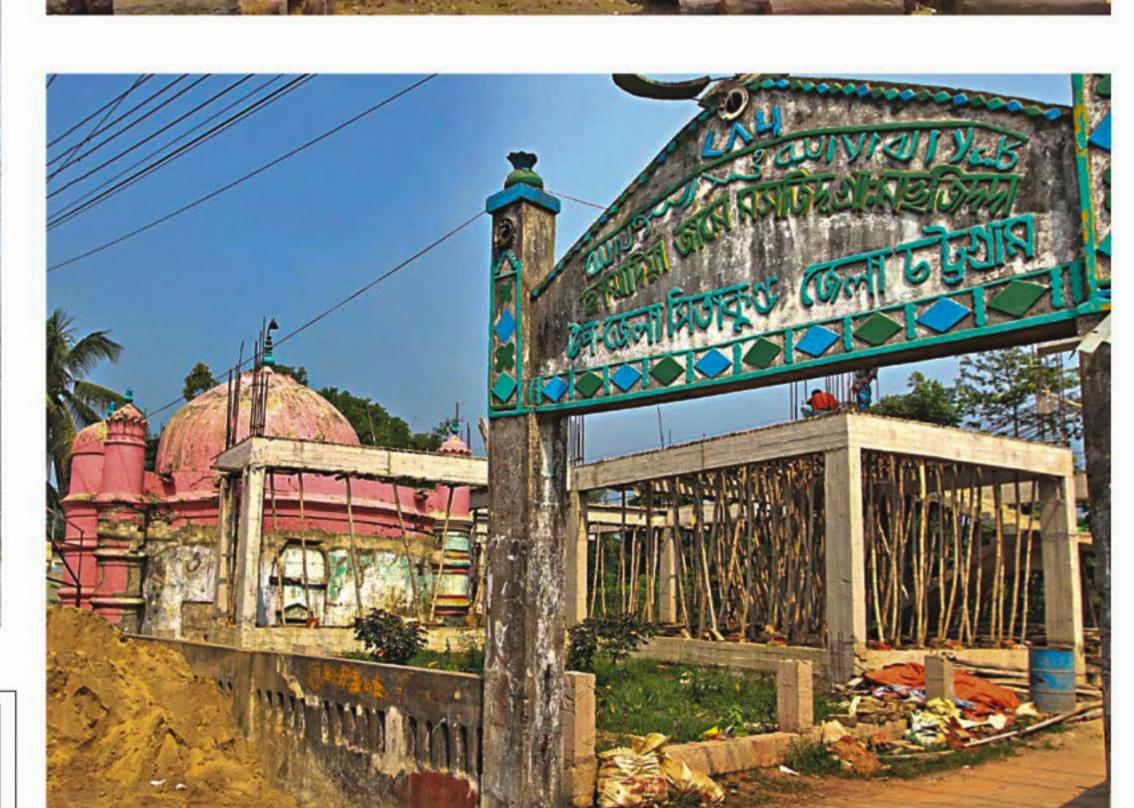
It's a wonder how one comes across unique structures from history and that too in Chittagong.

The Hammadia mosque is one of the only two Sultani era structures in Chittagong, still standing in its original

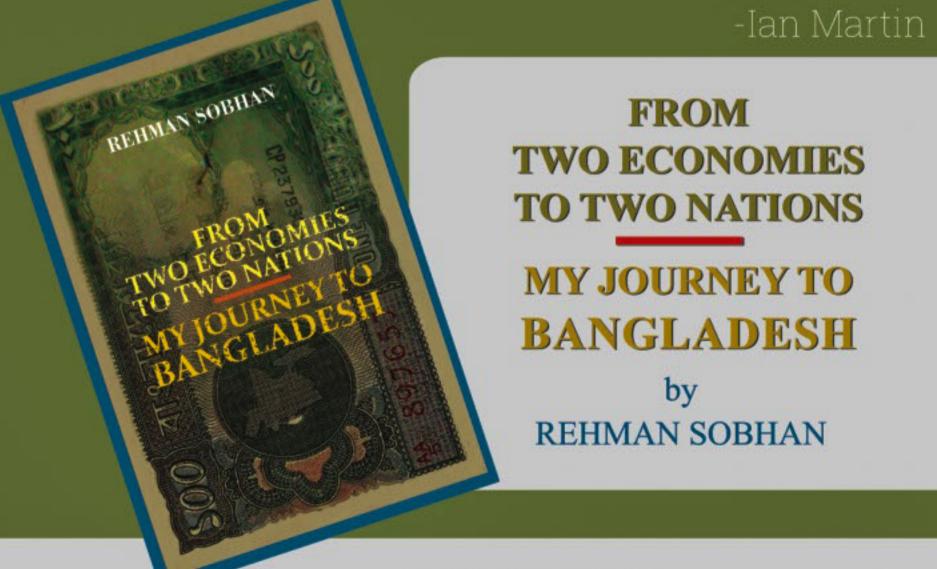
The five-century-old mosque is situated at Masjidda village of Sitakunda upazila, east side of the Dhaka-Chittagong highway at Choto Kumira. Due to lack of initiatives from the authorities to preserve it, the unscrupulous locals have covered the beautiful antiquity with an extension building from its three sides, this covering

According to historians, the mosque was built in between 1533 and 1538, during the era of the last Sultan of Gaud --Sultan Giasuddin Mahmud Shah's reign. Historian Abdul Karim came across the mosque in 1966 and discovered it to be of the Sultanate era, based on the Arabic stone inscription. The black basalt stone inscription is still there at the entrance of the mosque.





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The hut-like mosque bears the legacy of the unique architectural traits of the Sultanate era.

Karim published an article on the mosque in the Asiatic Society Journal where he mentioned-- Hamid Khan a governor of Chittagong under the sultan of Bengal built it and dug a tank in front. The mosque and tank were named after Hamid, later distorted to Hammadia by

The square-shaped one-domed mosque measuring 20'11" externally and 14' internally has four minarets. There are three arch-doors on the east side and walls are more than three-feet-wide. Two of the three mehrabs are built of stone and have chain and bell motifs.

The huge tank still exists on the east. But the mosque governing committee seems to be ignorant about its origin. For example, in the adjacent Eidgah, the mosque is eluded as of Mughal era. Negligence and carelessness could be

found on every facet of the mosque. In a recent visit, the black-basalt stone inscription has been found damaged badly. It has been painted green and some writings are not readable. The inside-walls are covered with tiles destroying motifs.

The structure under construction of the new complex will cover the unique view of the mosque. Heavy pillars have been

put on the old structure at its north, south and east walls that would create immense pressure after the three-storey complex is completed. Two of the three doors have been blocked by walls.

However, Abdus Sukkur, the governing committee chairman says that the new structure would not hamper the old one and would be completed within a year.

Quoting Public Works Department documents, history researcher Shamsul Hossain says, "The mosque was even enlisted by the British government as an ancient monument to be preserved in 1896, where it was mentioned that the mosque was more than 400 years old. The mosque is one of the only two remaining buildings of sultanate era in Chittagong," he added. The other sultanate era mosque is situated in Hathazari upazila.

The Antiquities Act, 1968, (amended in 1976) states that any ancient (minimum 100 years old) product of human civilisation, illustrative of architecture, warfare, politics, or culture, can be called an article of antiquity. The government can declare an antiquity to be preserved from destruction.

There are many more of such structures that are being ignored and not taken care of. It is high time that we come together and do something to preserve our history and promote the beauty of Bengal.

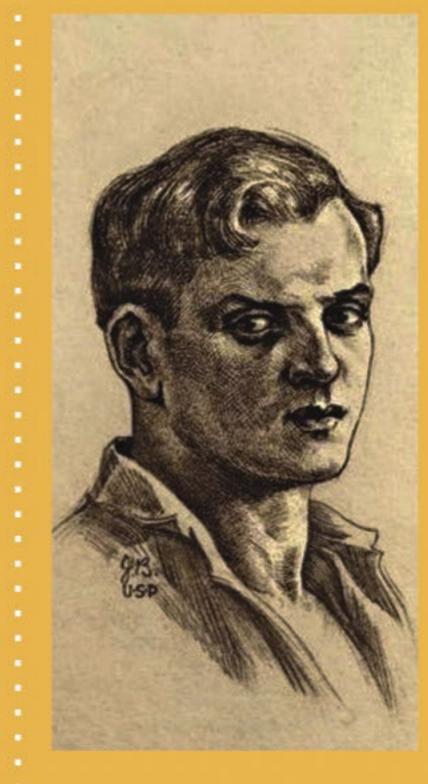
PEARLS OF WISDOM

LABOUR THAT **UPLIFTS HUMANITY HAS DIGNITY** AND IMPORTANCE AND

SHOULD BE UNDERTAKEN

WITH PAINSTAKING EXCELLENCE."

MARTIN LUTHER KING American Baptist minister, activist and humanitarian



"THE WORKING **CLASS OWES ALL** HONOUR AND RESPECT TO THE FIRST MEN WHO PLANTED THE STANDARD OF LABOUR SOLIDARITY ON THE HOSTILE FRONTIER OF UNORGANIZED NDUSTRY." RALPH CHAPLIN

American writer, artist and labour

PROPOSES NO **ADEQUATE** FOR THE MOTIVE OF ENLIGHTENED SELFISHNESS THAT TODAY

IS AT THE BASIS OF ALL HUMAN LABOUR AND EFFORT, ENTERPRISE AND NEW ACTIVITY."

WILLIAM HOWARD TAFT American jurist and statesman