

# A glass

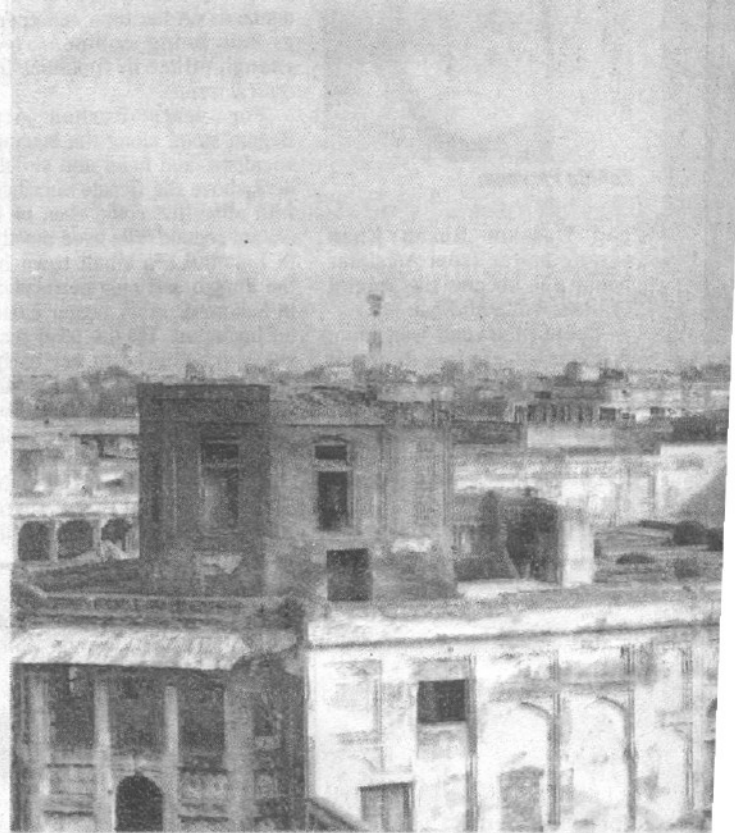
Immediate measures are required to save the ceiling of the Shish Mahal in the Lahore Fort

News 23-03

**T**he beautiful ceiling of 400-year old Shish Mahal in the Lahore Fort has been in a precarious condition for over a decade now. Experts have made several studies and recommended ways to save this building but no concrete measures have been taken. Now the governments of Norway and Sweden have provided funds to start work on the preservation of this monument.

"The problems of Shish Mahal date back to early 20th century. The wooden beams of this building became termite infested in 1904 and in 1922 the ceiling was renovated and the roof was covered with coated corrugated iron, nailed too close to softwood boards," says Salimul Haq, Director Directorate of Archaeology (Northern Circle). He says now these corrugated wires have broken and plaster underneath the beam is wearing off and mirrors on the ceiling are falling.

In May 1999, Sir Bernard Feilden, Director Emeritus ICCROM and architectural conservation consultant, had studied the condition of Shish Mahal ceiling, with carved metal work which was once decorated with jewels (replaced later with mirrors) and recommended possible ways to preserve this precious historical heritage, considered unique in the world. Later, another Unesco expert Tani



Mahal and make recommendations for its conservation.

Early this month, a 10-day workshop in the Lahore Fort, attended by a host of national and international experts on architecture, conservation and history deliberated how to proceed on the preservation work and made recommendations for conserving the Shish Mahal and the entire Fort. The Fort is on the world heritage list.

Noted architect Kamil Khan Mumtaz says: "During the workshop, we have studied the building on the spot and discussed how to start work on its preservation by keeping the past recommendations before us. Now the next step is which course we should adopt to implement these recommendations."

In May 1999, the Archaeology Department placed some support shuttering on the floor of the structure to save the roof from caving in. And only six months back from now, when a lot of damage had already occurred, the department built a temporary roof of corrugated sheet over the roof to save it from rains and resist

high winds as directed by Feilden.

"The experts have now recommended that first of all a thorough investigation and documentation of the structure and ornamentation of Shish Mahal should be completed and maps of it made," says Salimul Haq. He says experts will study the condition of the beams of the ceiling by investigating the roof and will do photography of its motifs. But before this, the temporary roof over the Shish Mahal will be sealed so that no rain water seeps in.

Initially, experts believed the wires with which the ceiling was reinforced during its first repair in 1922 had rusted and broken. They needed to be replaced with good quality steel wires. But the final decision on how to conserve the ceiling will be made after the documentation, which will take three months.

Kamil Khan Mumtaz says that Feilden's report on conserving Shish Mahal was not comprehensive as it mentions lime plaster has been used in the ceiling but it does not specify what other materials were

By Adnan Adil

## heritage

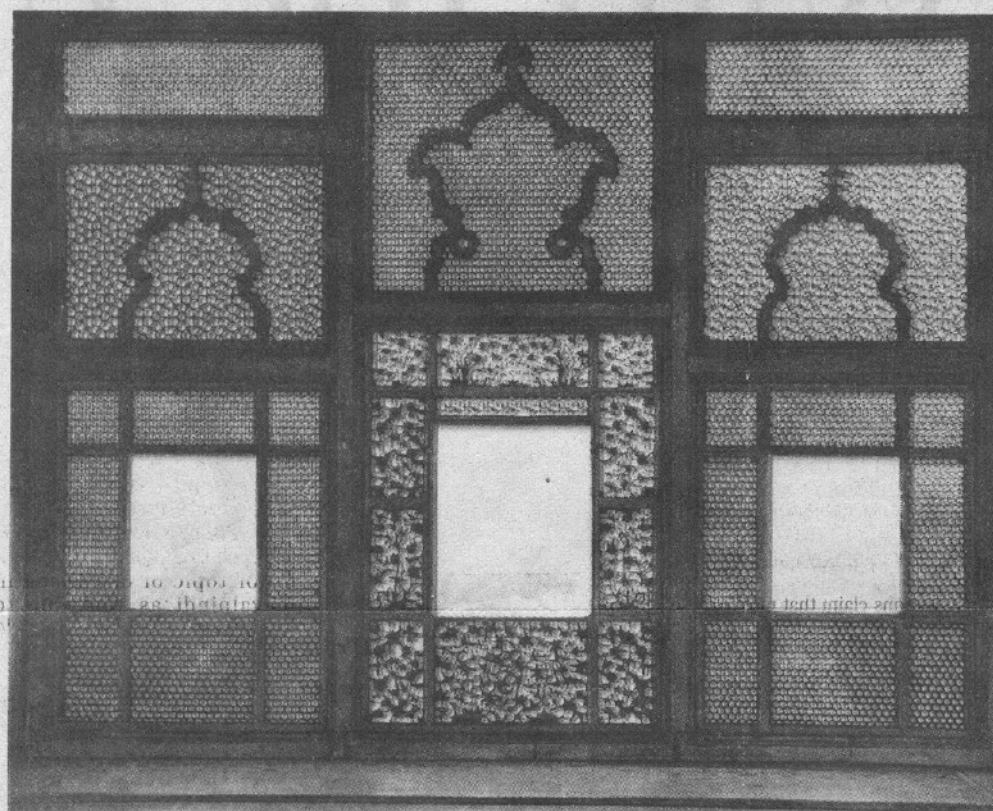
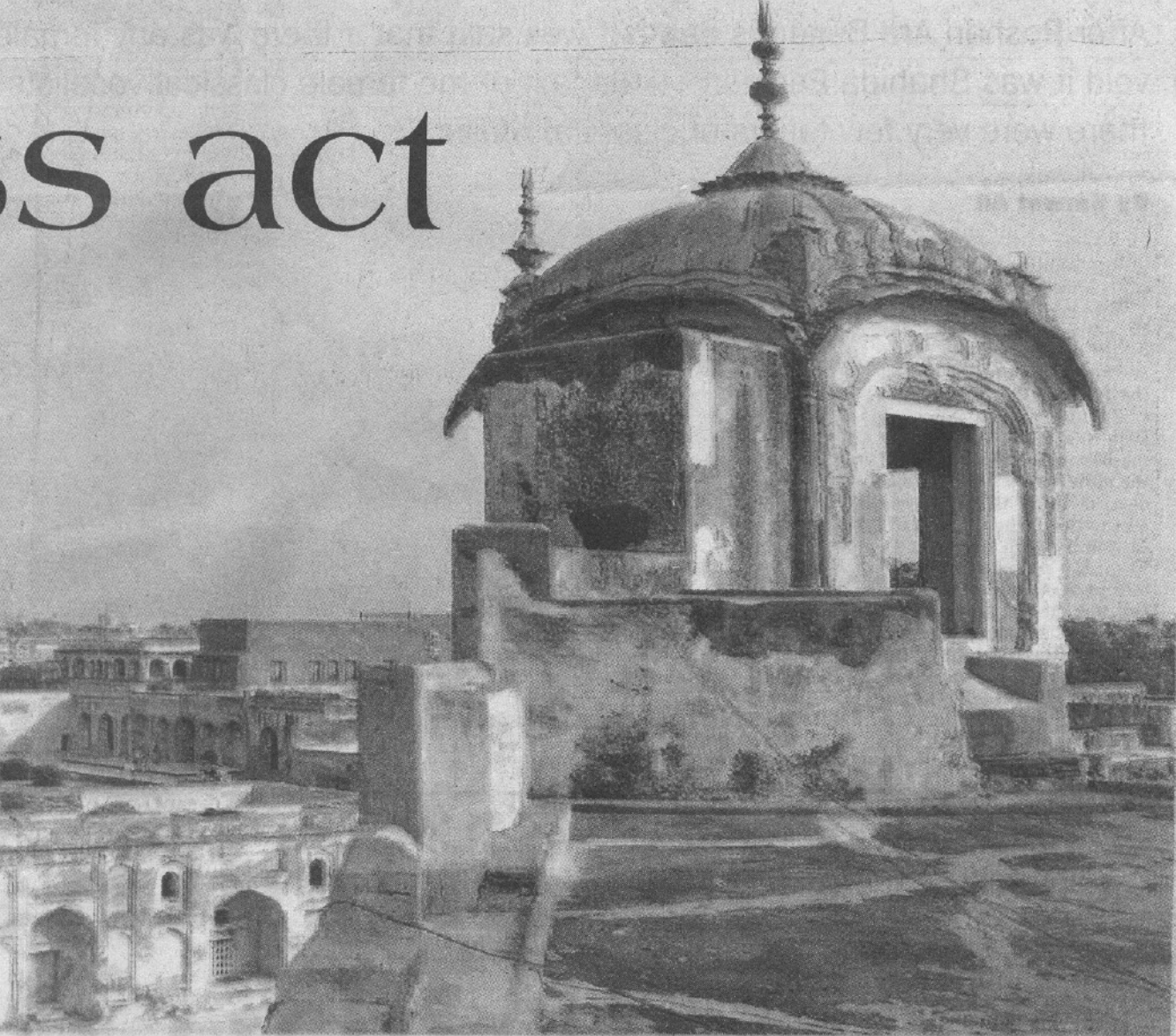
Guchi visited this site twice to assess

the problem and recommended that the government should estimate the implementation plan according to Feilden's report.

According to Feilden, the ceiling of this beautiful loggia is unique, and the walls are nearly as complicated, with decorative panels of mirror work in a series of different designs, arranged symmetrically around the central arch on the northern side.

It seems Feilden's report did not satisfy local experts on architecture and conservation. After four years of this report another effort is under way to study the crumbling Shish

# s act



used in the mortar. He says in the first stage, experts will carry out extensive tests to find what kind of mite has infected the beams and from which direction water seeped in. He says experts will also study the decoration of the building such as arrangement of mirrors in the decoration of the ceiling. A Norwegian expert, Jan Petter Brensd, is studying every beam by making a small hole in the roof to assess the damage done.

Kamil Khan Mumtaz says funds have been provided for one year to carry out investigation and documentation of Shish Mahal and the entire Lahore Fort. If this work is completed satisfactorily, more funds could be available to start the actual conservation of the monument.

Yomada Shoka, a conservation architect who also attended the workshop, says that complete conservation of the monument may take several years: "Meanwhile we would like to keep further damage at bay it with minimum intervention until we have solid base for future conservation work."