

A conqueror lies buried at Gov

Calcutta

By Zulqernain Tahir Dawn 13.1.09

LAHORE, Jan 12: While feasting in the dining hall of the Governor's House, the guests may never realize that they are sitting over the tomb of Mughal emperor Akbar's cousin Mehdi Qasim Khan Mir Bahr, who had conquered Kashmir and built the Agra Fort.

However, the cenotaph, bearing Qasim Khan's name was removed during the Sikh period in the middle of 19th century. The Sikh had established a garrison adjacent to the tomb and also demolished the domed tomb and raised an eight-corner brick structure over it.

Farooq Ahmad, a cook at the Governor's House, told this reporter that the outsiders (visitors) had no idea about the tomb or grave beneath the dining hall. "A narrow subway leading to the underground grave escapes the eyes of even a careful observer in the hall."

However, Farooq said, he and some of his colleagues offered *fateha* at the grave once a month. He disclosed that even some of the staffers of the Governor's House were not aware of the grave of a conqueror under the hall.

Farooq thinks that the tomb is of a saint and cleaning the passage and grave can lessen his worldly problems. The tomb's superstructure, which is now used as a dining room in stucco tracery, is the work of the British period carried out in 1851.

The embellishment was modelled after the work and design of Masjid Wazir Khan and Masjid

Maryam Zamani.

According to the Governor's House officials, the government had only painted the dining room and some parts of the dome and no improvement has been made to the structure.

A 19th century myth of grave that it was a haunted house drove most of the visitors and staffers away. The grave was abandoned till people started returning to it.

Bece-Jones, author of *Palaces of the Raj*, however, said about the tomb that the room of the upper storey, which was made kitchen and the cenotaph a dining table, might have annoyed the spirit of Qasim Khan.

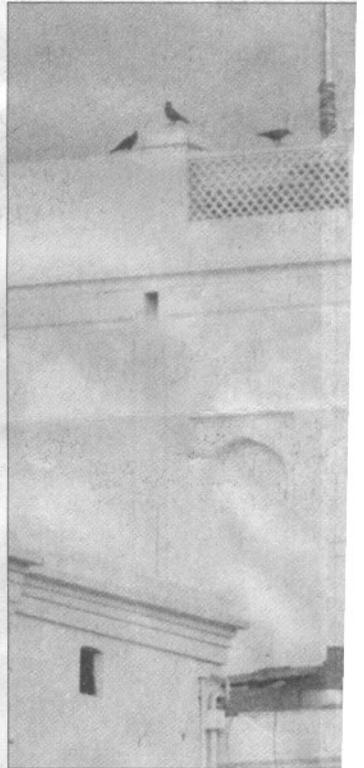
A controversy, however, still exists as to who was buried under the governor's dining room — Qasim Khan or Badruddin Gilani, a saint of Mughal period.

Historians like T H Thornton, J L Kipling, Muhammad Latif and H R Goulding believe that it was Qasim Khan, but Kanhayala claims that it was Badruddin Gilani.

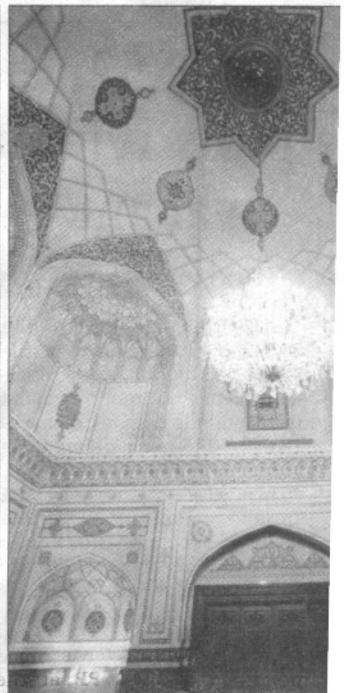
Qasim Khan, who was made commander of Kashmir by Akbar in 1585 and two years later governor of Kabul, was adept in battlefield tactics and war strategy. He was assassinat-



Qasim Khan's grave.



THE grave of a child.



AN inside view of the tomb-tur

d at Governor's House

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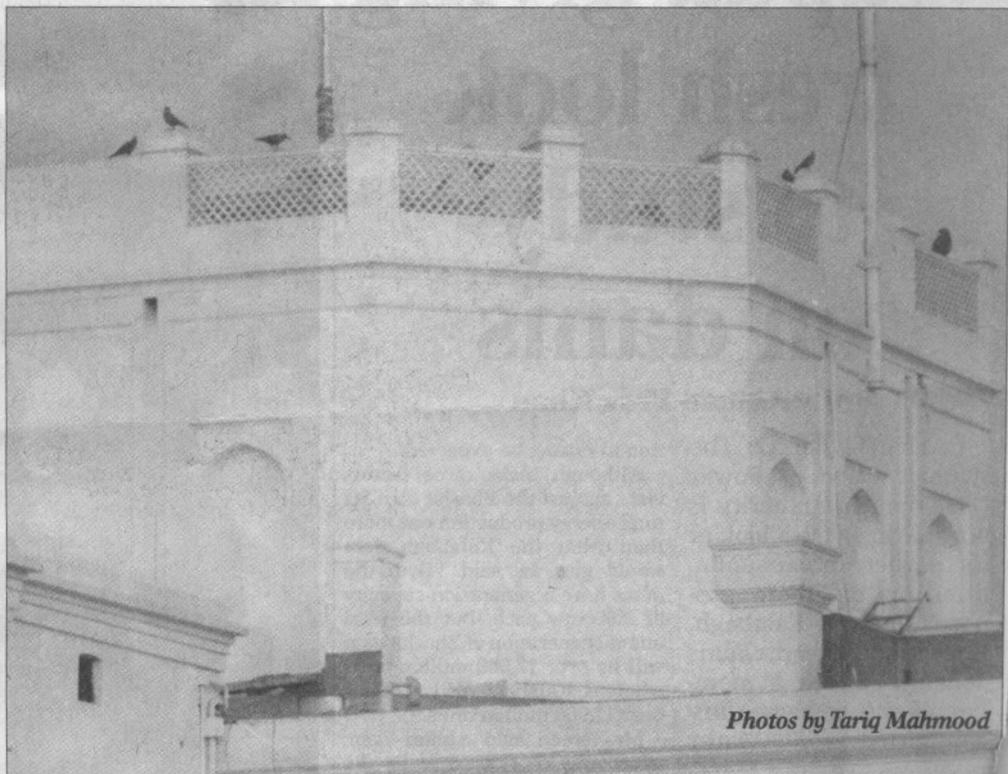
Qasim Khan, who was made commander of Kashmir by Akbar in 1585 and two years later governor of Kabul, was adept in battlefield tactics and war strategy. He was assassinat-

ed in Kabul in 1593 by an impostor, Muhammad Zaman, who was later killed by Qasim Khan's son Hashim Khan in revenge.

Qasim Khan was also a great patron of wrestlers. The ground nearby was a scene of many wrestling matches, which even continued to be held long after his death. Thus the tomb came to be known as "Kushtiwala Gumbaz or the Wrestlers' Dome."

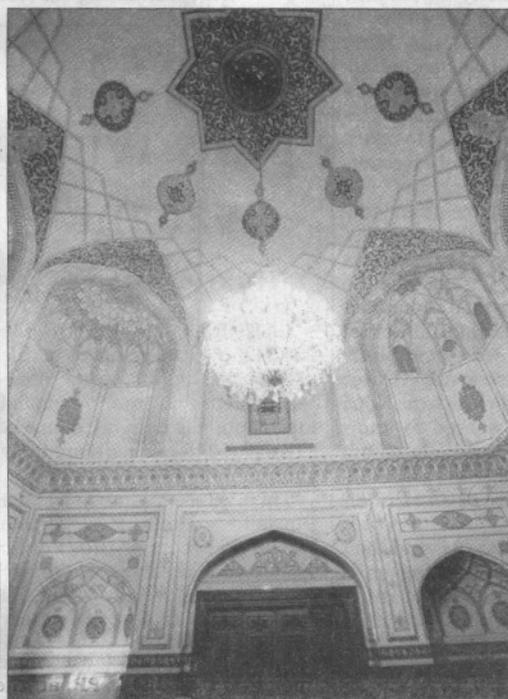
There are two more graves in the Governor's House, one of them identified as of Hazrat Anyat Ali Miran Shah Gilani. The other seemed to be of a child whose name was not displayed.

The staff of the Governor's House celebrate annual *urs* of these saints. They lay floral wreaths on the graves once a week and believe that some saints are buried there.



Photos by Tariq Mahmood

THE tomb of Qasim Khan.



AN inside view of the tomb-turned-dining hall.



THE shrine of Hazrat Anyat Ali Miran Shah Gilani.