



A tomb for the Imam

Muslim faithful commemorate a historic martyrdom



Clockwise from top

- Framed by the cardboard skeleton of the tadjah are **DARRYL MERANI, SIDNEY ABDUL KARATEE** and **YVONNE MUNGAL**.
- Three weeks before Hosay takes to the streets of St James, the Imbarara is buzz with work. From left: **MERANI, MARINA RAMSARAN, KARATEE** and **KASSIMA MOHAMMED**.
- Early on a Saturday morning, **MERANI** and **JIMMY ABOUD** talk cloth (centre above).
- **STEPHEN HENRIQUES**, who lives just a block from the Panchaiti camp, glues cloth to a goomgie, one of the smaller minarets on the tadjah.
- Panchaiti camp members who have fasted during Muharram circle the flag truck at the close of worship on Flag Night. On the first night of Hosay's public appearances, Abbas, Imam Hussain's murdered flag bearer, is remembered

- and his fallen flag raised. The promise flags, offered by the faithful seeking a boon, are prized items, and are used as items of clothing and by tassa drummers on their tugnah straps after Flag Night.
- **KASSIMA MOHAMMED** (right) explains the Small Hosay to spectators. The small version of the tadjah remembers the murder of Ali As-gar, the infant son of Imam Hussain.
- The drummers of San Juan Youngstars visit the camp on the fourth night of Muharram.
- **YVONNE MUNGAL** pins material to the goomaj, the largest minaret and centrepiece of the tadjah's design.
- **GObI LAKHAN** discusses **MERANI'S** choices for the cootiah cloth that will skin the tadjah.
- This sketch, sent from the United States by Anthony Millette, Merani's uncle, is the basis for his interpretation of the ceremonial tomb that will be built to honour Imam Hussain.





Prayer observances are part of each night of Muharram, but none are better attended or more vivid than the tenth night, Ashura, before the tadjah rolls onto the streets.



After prayers, sweets are shared with those who have gathered for the occasion, including chocolates, fruit and malida, a home-made delicacy. KARATEE and SHANTI MULLER prepare the treats.



San Juan Youngstars lead the Panchaiti tadjah on the streets of St James on Big Hosay night.

Built with faith

Photographs and story by
MARK LYNDERSAY

DEPENDING on the calculations of the moon and the start of the Muslim calendar, Hosay celebrations move through the Gregorian calendar from June to January, and the festival of commemoration tracks closely with Carnival for several years before the two festivals drift apart.

Hosay involves building beautiful mobile art and drumming, but it is really about sacrifice, with hundreds of people in St James alone giving of their time, energy and talent to commemorate the massacre of Imam Hussain and the faithful followers of the Prophet Muhammad in the desert of Kerbala in Iraq.

The celebration that takes place principally in St James and Cedros is rooted in the Shia Muslims of India, who brought this way of remembering the Kerbala massacre from their homeland two centuries ago.

That dramatic martyrdom is honoured in the prayer cycle of Muharram, the first 10 days in the first month of the Muslim calendar during which believers reflect on the demands and challenges of their religion.

Darryl Merani devotes the weeks leading up to the festival to the work of the Panchaiti

camp, where he works on the construction of a tadjah, an honorific tomb to the slain Imam that is meant to convey all the respect that the Muslim faith invests in the stand that Imam Hussain took against Caliph Yazid.

Merani is joined by dozens of supporters, many of them of other religions, who work on the project under the rules of the Muslim faith.

Threaded through the buzz of energy and the almost continuous toil of the work are elders who remind the next generation of the importance of the tradition they are engaged in.

Merani traces his lineage back to Noor Mohammed, who asked permission of the colony more than 160 years ago for the Hosay procession.

Gobi Lakhan works closely with Merani on producing the Panchaiti effort. That support is most obviously manifested physically, as Lakhan often jumps in to help move things along.

Early on Tuesday morning, after the dramatic silver and black Panchaiti tadjah had taken to the road, I asked Lakhan, who is Hindu, why he does it.

Between bites of tasty paratha, Lakhan reflected for a moment.

“When I see those ladies dress up and take charge of it tonight, well that’s why. It’s theirs now.”



Waiting outside QRC as the ceremonies proceed on the grounds, KARATEE (centre) chats with other elders from the Cocorite camp.



The tadjah makes its final journey back to the camp as the sun sets.



In Muslim tradition, religious artifacts are disposed of in running water. For St James Hosay, that has, for more than a century, meant the sea. RAFFIQUE ENAYTH guides the goomaj out to deep water.