



RISE OF THE GREAT FORT

It's red, it's massive and it's being brought back to life 200 years after it's been blown to pieces. Ready or not, the Malacca Fort is being restored to its former glory, writes **TAN CHOE CHOE**

THE soldier's eyes carelessly scanned the horizon as he stood half-baked and sweaty under the punishing sun on top of the bastion; rifle at the ready, cannon positioned seaward.

Below him, just at the edge of the Malacca River, traders and locals were noisily touting their wares, haggling prices and strolling around checking out goods, girls and food.

A scene from *Pirates of the Caribbean*? Nope.

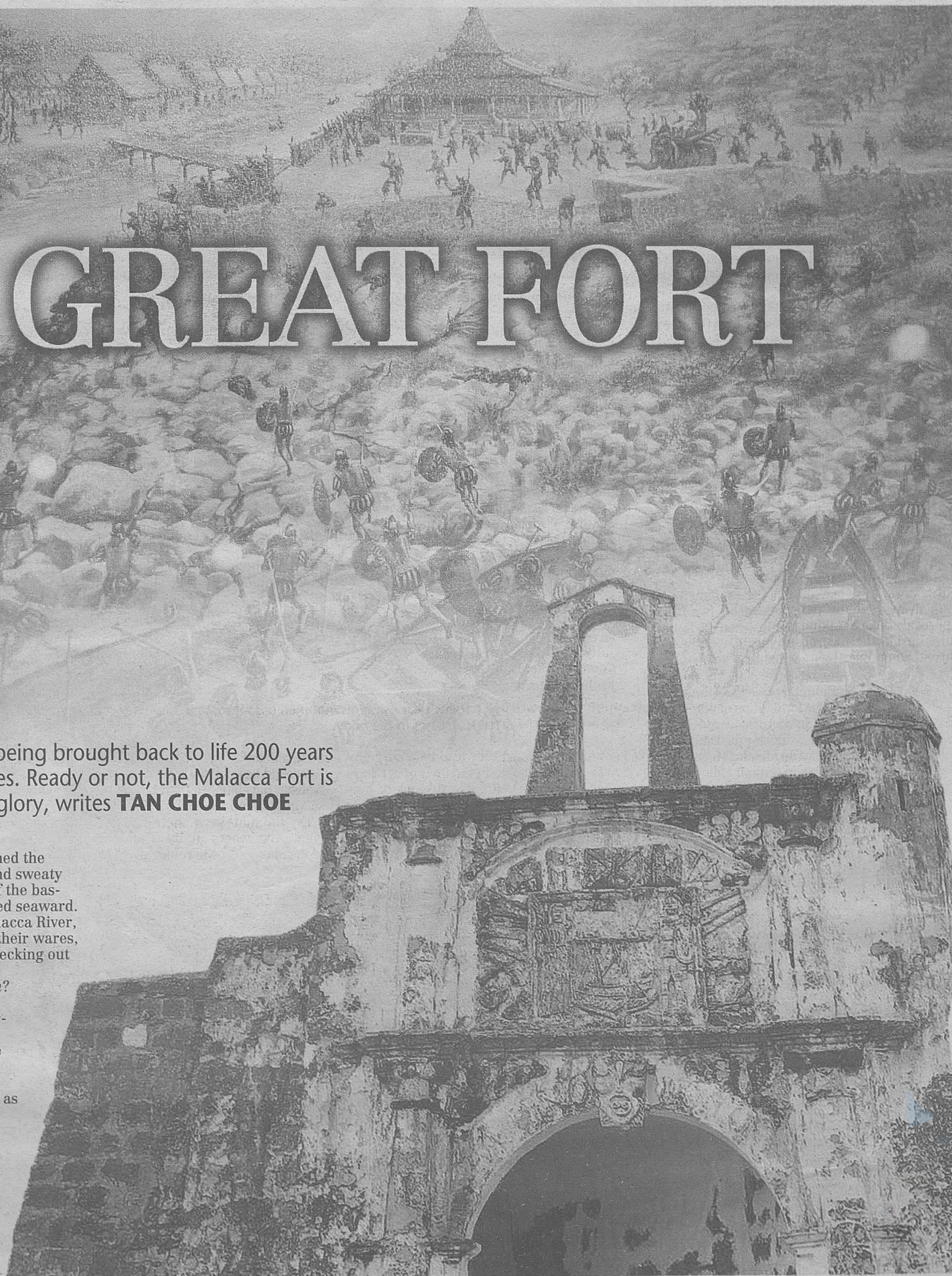
It's 16th century Malacca and the Portuguese were in town, with a huge pentagonal fort built around the core of the entreport town.

The Portuguese called it *Fortaleza D'Malacca* but most of us today know it as the Malacca Fort.

Ironically, it was used to keep the army of the last sultan of Malacca, Sultan Mahmud Shah I — who was forced to flee to Johor — at bay.

From afar, anyone entering the waters of Malacca can see the reddish fort, the colour of which came

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from the laterite stones that were used to build it.

"The stones were cemented together with a ground limestone substance that was mixed with water and possibly some animal fat," says Portuguese historian Dr Rui Manuel Loureiro.

Old Portuguese manuscripts mentioned that the whitish powder came from a type of coral-like stone referred to as "seashells".

Interestingly, one such document detailed that these seashells "could grow again once cut".

Built by the Portuguese in 1512, the fort was taken over by the Dutch when they conquered Malacca in 1641 after a siege that lasted five months.

In 1807, when the British were the caretaker government in Malacca for the Dutch, they decided to bomb the fortress in a bid to promote Penang as a trading port.

"The British wanted to eliminate Malacca, which they saw as a competing port. Their callous act caused us to lose a formidable fort until they were stopped by Stamford Raffles," says Dutch history expert, Associate Professor Dr Nordin Hussin of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

But Raffles' intervention came too late — most of the fort was already destroyed, leaving only the Porta de Santiago (gate of Santiago) still standing.

Today, the Porta is popularly known as A'Famosa, literally 'the famous one'.

Everyone had thought the fort was lost to the pages of history until recently, when the foundations of two bastions of the fort were accidentally unearthed during construction of two developmental projects in the state.

The foundation of the Santiago bastion was discovered during piling works for the Dataran Pahlawan Melaka Megamall project in Bandar Hilir in 2003.

LOST AND FOUND



The Middleburgh bastion being excavated with care by archaeologists.

The second bastion — Middleburgh — was found by the Malacca River at Jalan Kota, on the site of a 110m revolving tower project last November, forcing it to be relocated elsewhere.

Following the discovery, the Culture, Arts and Heritage Ministry proposed to reconstruct the Malacca Fort, for which the Cabinet approved a fund of RM12.8 million three months ago.

Rui and Nordin are part of a team of local and foreign experts comprising historians, archaeologists, architects, geologists and conservationists put together by the Department of National Heritage to oversee the fort's reconstruction.

Heading the team is Heritage Commissioner Datuk Professor Zuraina Majid.



Zuraina says only about 50 per cent of the original fort will be rebuilt

"We are not aiming to rebuild the whole fort, only about 50 per cent of the original.

"What is of primary concern is the authenticity of our reconstruction," says Zuraina.

With only the foundations to work with, her team will have to rely heavily on historic documents by authors like Tome Pires and Emanuel Godinho de Eredia, drawings, paintings, as well as consultation with experts familiar with the architecture of that era.

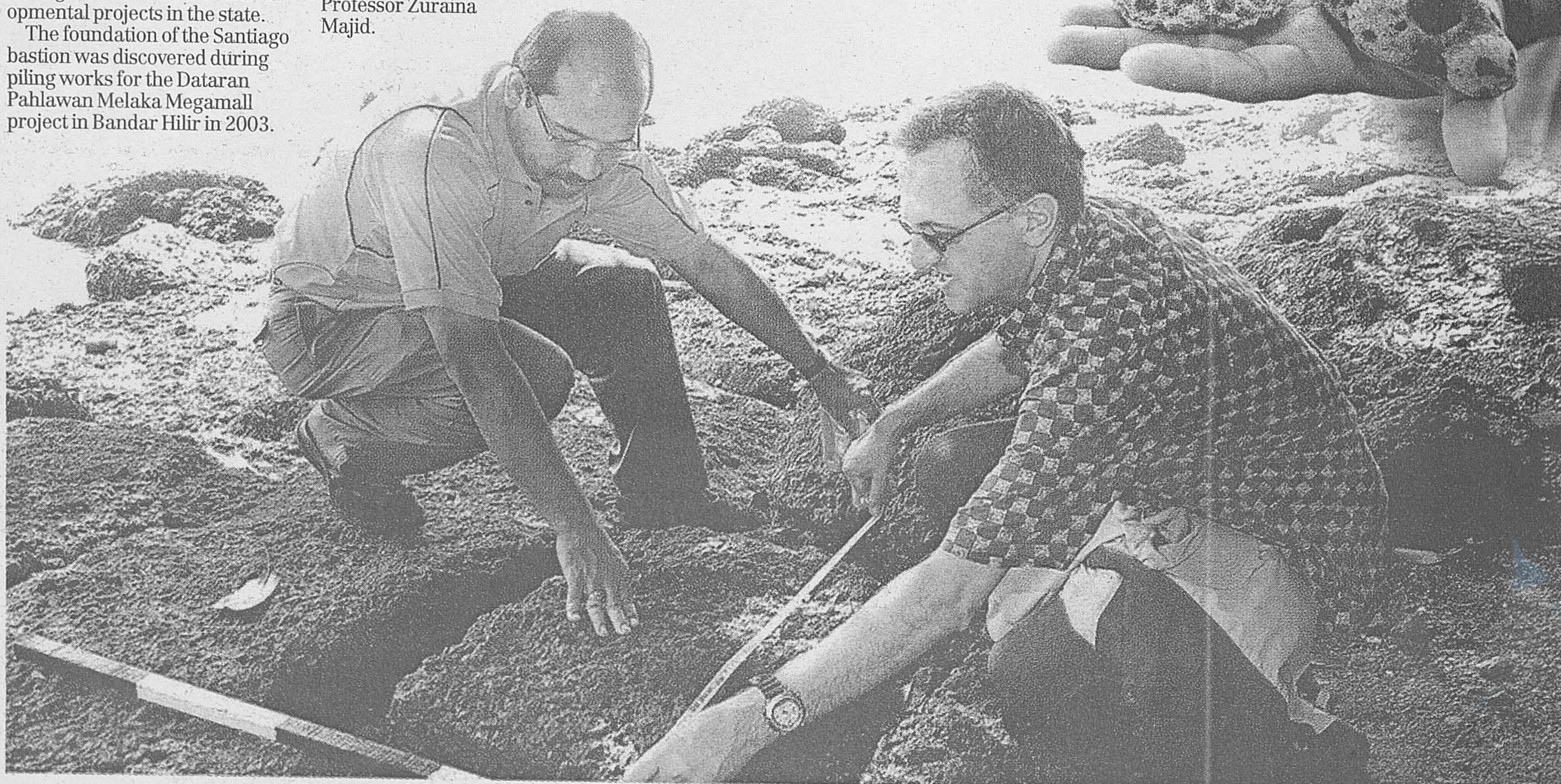
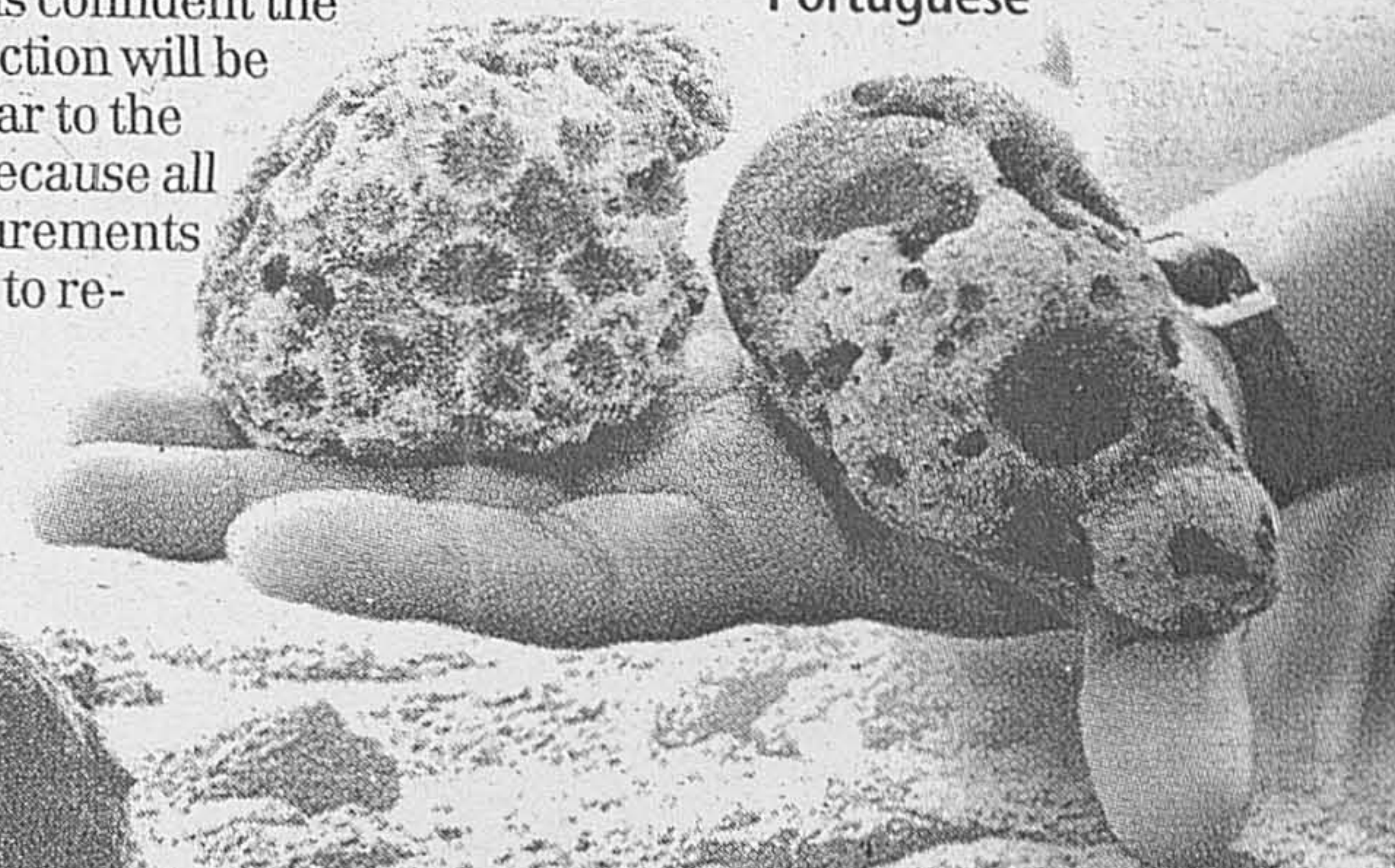
Nordin is confident the reconstruction will be very similar to the original because all the measurements they need to re-

build the fort could be traced to old Dutch records.

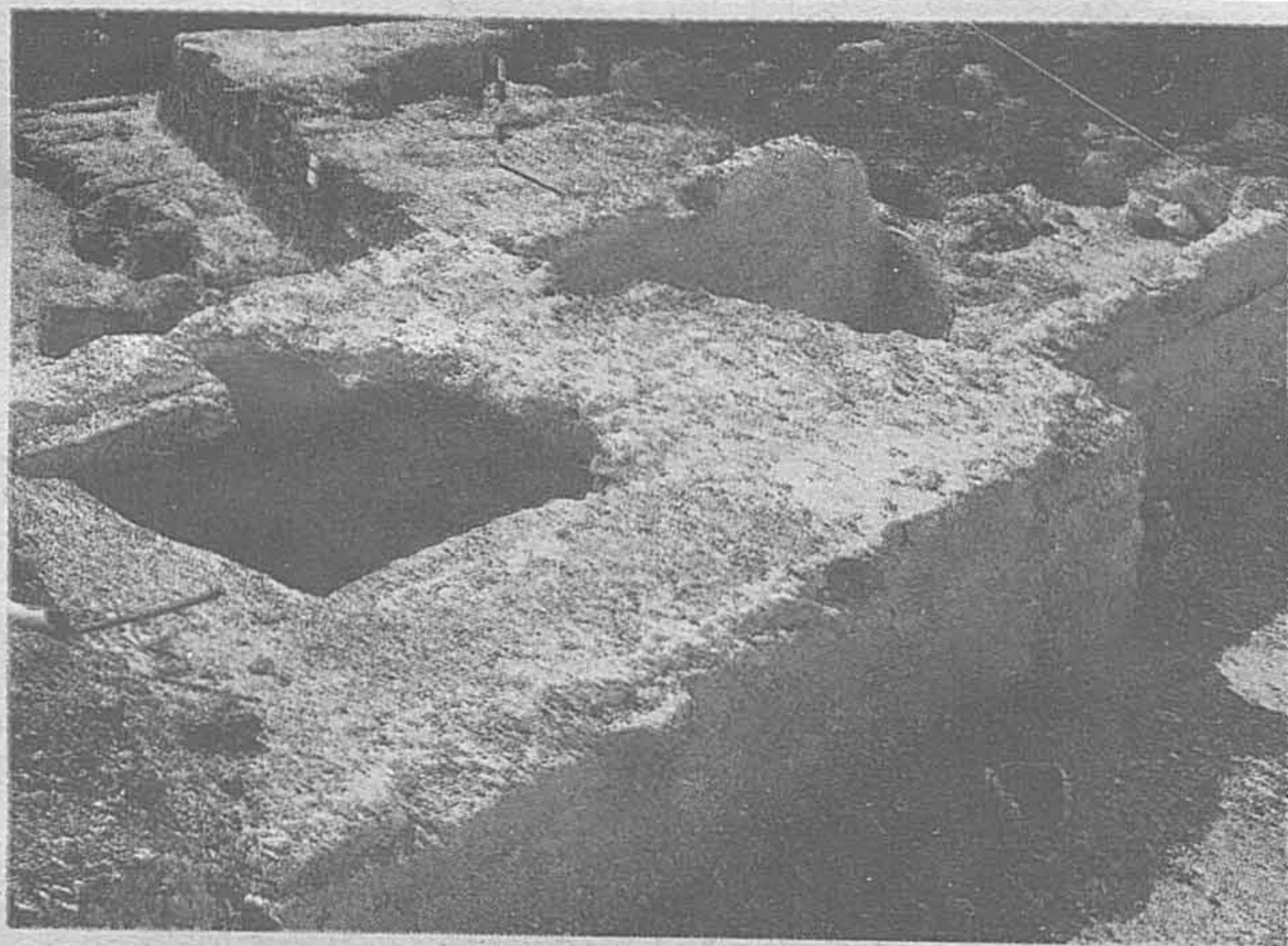
"The Dutch were very serious people and counted every single thing.

"They maintained the fort diligently during their occupation here because even though Malacca suffered from a trade deficit in the late 17th and early

Rui says these coral-like stones were referred to as 'seashells' by ancient Portuguese



Rui (right) with deputy Heritage Commissioner Dr Yahaya Ahmad measuring a piece of laterite block that was found left behind in Pulau Upeh, possibly by the original fort builders.



The reconstruction project will start from here, the excavation site of the Middleburgh bastion

18th century, it was still a very important port because of its strategic location between the East and the West," says Nordin.

The project will start with Middleburgh, as soon as excavation of the site is completed. Its design is currently being finalised.

"The experts have authenticated our drawings. We are now sourcing the raw materials — mainly the laterite blocks and ground limestone," says Zuraina.

Old Portuguese manuscripts pointed out that the original fort was built using stones from mosques, graves and other buildings in Malacca at the time.

When these options were exhausted, they started taking laterite blocks from nearby islets, like Pulau Upéh, Pulau Jawa (now Pulau Melaka) and Pulau Panjang.

"They were also paying civilians, mainly fishermen, to bring them the laterite blocks. Such transactions, were recorded in some old documents," says Rui.

On a recent trip to Malacca, the team found traces of laterite mining on Pulau Upéh, but the other islets mentioned are now nearly depleted of laterite stones.

"Similar stones can be found in Thailand and Indonesia. There are some available in the peninsula but not in large quantities that we can mine.

"We will decide we to source them once our geologists complete their analysis of the original stones," says Zuraina.

Except for Middleburgh,



Everything remotely measurable was noted down by the Dutch, says Nordin

the designs and measurements for the other parts of the reconstruction project are yet to be finalised but Zuraina promises that the whole process of reconstruction would be made public.

"We plan to convert the former Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank building in Jalan Kota into an exhibition gallery to feature our project and to tell the story of the fort," she says.

The fort builders those days comprised mainly of local Malaccans who were 'hambarajas' — slaves of the sultan.

"The 'hambarajas' were paid for their hard labour — usually rice and flour," says Rui.

As much as the team would like to stick to the original material and techniques of reconstruction, even labour, there are no longer any slave around today.

Modern-day contractors, with their army of Indonesian workers, will have to make do and they'll not be asking for foodstuff, but cold hard cash.



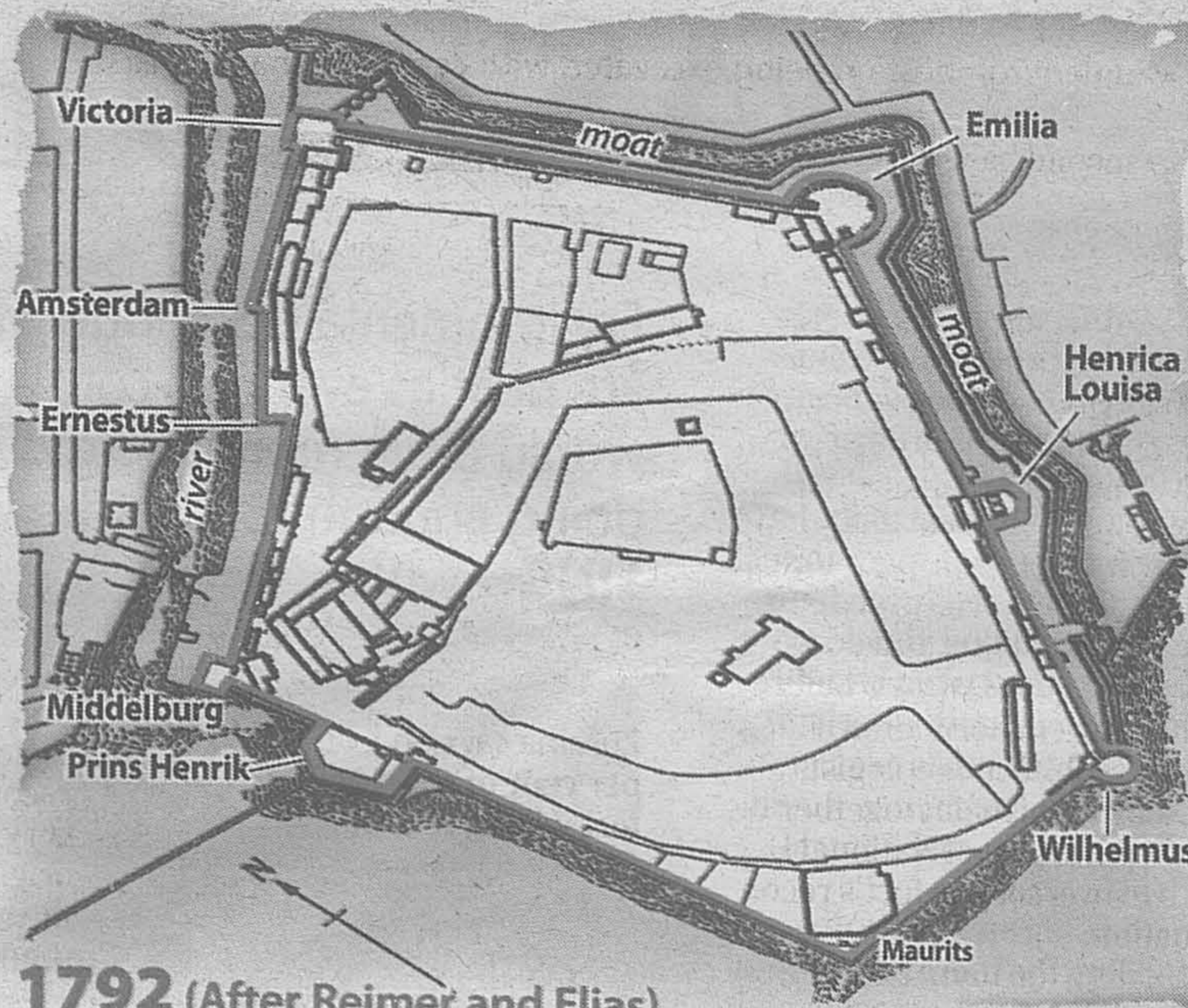
Cavities like this are found all over Pulau Upéh

PROPOSED RECONSTRUCTION OF MALACCA FORT



2007 3D plan: This is an aerial view of the city of Malacca today and the structures in red are the proposed parts of the fort that would be reconstructed. Inset is the Porta de Santiago today.

Source: National Heritage Department



1792 (After Reimer and Elias)

A touch of Dutch: A map of the Malacca Fort according to Reimer and Elias circa 1792, after the Dutch reinforced it. While Middleburgh and Wilhelmus (Santiago) have been excavated, the other seven bastions are still underground. Ernestus and Amsterdam are now below a row of shophouses facing the Malacca River. Victoria is below the Padang Nyiru car park, in front of the Church of St Francis Xavier. Emilia is somewhere below the Tenaga Nasional Building off Jalan Banda Kaba. Henrica Louisa is located in front of the Museum Sultan in Taman Sejarah. Maurits is in front of Museum Rakyat in Taman Merdeka. And Prins Henrik is now below the present building that was formerly the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank.



1588 (After Eredia)

The original Malacca fort: As depicted by Emanuel Godinho de Eredia circa 1588 during the Portuguese occupation.

THE FORT FACTOR

AFTER Alfonso de Albuquerque took hold of Malacca in 1511, the Portuguese knew they had to do something to beef up the defence of Malacca to ensure the entrepot's safety from attackers.

So in 1512, the Portuguese built a fortress around Bukit Melaka (presently St Paul's Hill).

According to the free dictionary Wikipedia, it was known as A'Famosa and played a pivotal role in helping the Portuguese secure the safety of Malacca and control the spice trade.

About 1586, the fort was expanded to cope with the port's growing population and importance and was known as the Fortaleza D'Malacca.

It was a pentagonal structure that stretched inland from the mouth of the Malacca River, enclosing an area about 11.44ha, with the total fort wall's perimeter at 1.3km.

In 1641, the Dutch drove out the Portuguese and they reinforced the fort immediately after.

It was reinforced again between 1660 and 1678 and during Dutch Governor Balthasar Bort's rule, the fort was at its strongest and most impregnable, with nine bastions, six half and three half, and surrounded by a moat.

The bastions or watchtowers were all named after names of towns and places in the Nether-

lands, as well as famous Dutch royalty.

They were Middleburgh, Ernestus, Amsterdam and Victoria on the side of the Malacca River, and Emilia, Henrica Louisa, Wilhelmus (known as Santiago in the Portuguese time), Maurits and Prins Henrik. (Refer to map of Reimer and Elias).

In 1670, they also changed the coat of arms on the fort, which is why the only surviving remnant of the great fort, the Porta de Santiago, has "Anno 1670" inscribed on its arch, above which is the "VOC" logo of the Dutch East India Company.

In 1806-07, the British took

over the fort and began blowing it up in stages with large amounts of gunpowder. The entire fort would have been blown up if not for Sir Stamford Raffles, the founder of Singapore, who visited Malacca in 1810.

One of the towers was a four-storey keep, while the others held an ammunition storage room, the residence of the chief sentry and his officers' quarters.

In Munshi Abdullah's Hikayat Abdullah, the walls of the fort were said to be about 4.5m thick and 18m high.

But UKM Associate Professor Dr Nordin Hussin says Dutch records showed that the height of the fort was only between 6m and 9m.