

Polythene plight

A photo-essay by Zahedul I Khan



An onslaught called polythene waste



Day in and day out with the waste



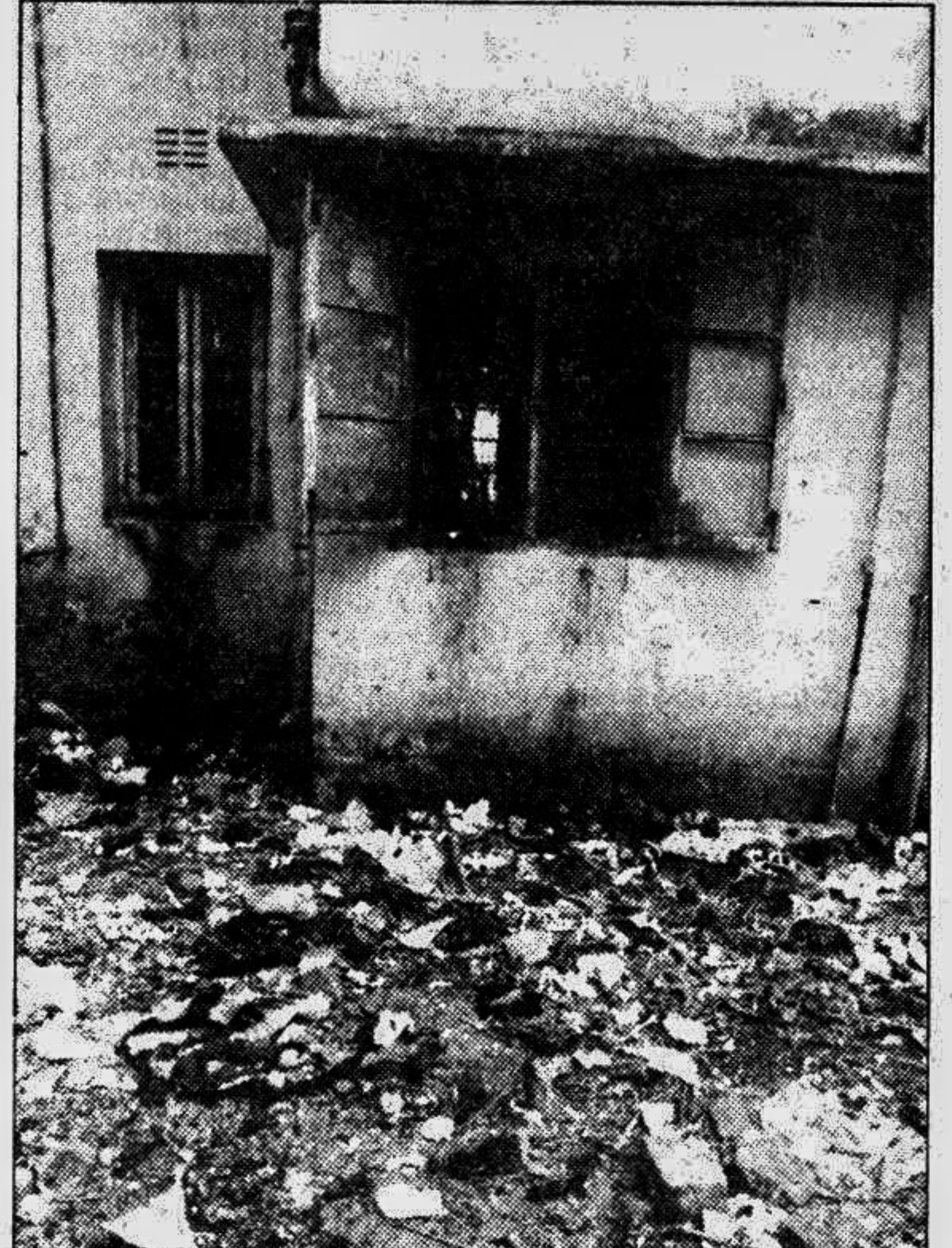
A familiar sight



A reminder that these are bio-degradable



Polythene bags reign in dumping sites



Dumping the polythene bags on our own backyard

Queen Bhawani's Palace en route to destruction

From Anwar Ali

NATORE: Remnants of the largest zamindari in the Indian subcontinent — the Palace of Queen Bhawani at the outskirts of Natore town — is

The nearly three-century old magnificent palace on 50.42 acres of land, now being controlled and looked after by local administration and the archaeology department, is fast losing its lustre due to lack of maintenance.

A sanctuary or an archaeological research museum and a botanical garden can be established in the palace areas to save its historical and archaeological importance, experts say. The government can also earn handsome revenue by developing the palace into a tourist spot.

Queen Bhawani ruled half of Bengal for nearly five decades between 1748 and 1802. She had an area of 13,000 square miles encompassing greater Rajshahi, Rangpur, Pabna, Bogra, Dinajpur, Kushtia and Jessore districts of Bangladesh, and Nadia, Birbhum and Maldah of India.

Her father-in-law Maharaja Ran Jiban ordered construction of the palace some time between 1706 and 1710. After the queen's death in 1802, the large palace was divided into two parts, royalty of which went to her two sons — Vishwa Nath (Boro Tara) and Shiv Nath (Chhoto Tara). The two brothers renovated their respective sections of the palace.

During the regime of King Yogendranath Roy and Kuma Virendranath Roy, the fifth generation of Queen Bhawani's

successors, the zamindari system was abolished in 1952, and the royal family moved out to India.

During the Pakistan period, the palace was used as an agricultural training institute, an orphanage and a family planning development centre. After the War of Liberation, the palace housed the offices of police superintendent, police line, district and sessions judge's court and assistant district commissioner's (Revenue) office. These offices were shifted to their own buildings in 1990. From then on, the palace has been neglected and virtually doomed to ruin.

Despite repeated appeals from different corners, inexplicable indifference on the part of local authorities as well as the government department concerned may lead to complete destruction of the palace.

There are more than ten large buildings and five ponds in the palace areas. A large lake called *Inner Ber Chowki* surrounds the palace.

The *rant mahal* (queen's residence), some temples, guest-house, kitchen, arsenal and many other buildings have already dilapidated beyond repair. A portion of the guard-house crumbled down a few months back. Over the years, in absence of guards, valuable marble stones have been dug out of stairs and floors in the palaces of Boro and Chhoto Taras. The statue of a woman atop the Chhoto Tara's palace has partially been broken and left uncared while paintings and artistic images of women and lions on walls have been dislodged. Local gangsters are alleged to have sold out valuable stones and ornamental

pieces to private collectors at home and abroad. Authorities have been blamed and accused of negligence for which floors, roofs, walls and engravings of the palace are deteriorating fast. After sunset, locals claim that the damaged buildings and obscure corners of the palace turn into the den of gamblers and drunkards, although there is a police outpost housed in the Kachari Bari of Chhoto Tara at the entrance of the palace.

Besides being known as a place for anti-social activities, the palace is nowadays used by government employees as a picnic spot.

Maintaining it has always been the government's job and it is a mystery as to why they have failed when as much as Tk 1.22 lakh is spent every year for its maintenance. There are 13 government employees including two of the archaeology department to look after the palace.

Once, during the Ershad regime, following an instruction by the visiting president, a Tk 4.55 crore project of restoration was mooted. But, somehow, it did not work out.

The present district commissioner of Natore last year planned a Tk 1.68 crore scheme for restoration. Following the proposal, the government has, however, approved a Tk 73 lakh scheme recently and the archaeology department started restoration work on May 2 with a sanctioned amount of Tk 5 lakh.

Some government and non-government experts feel that an ambitious project like restoration of Queen Bhawani Palace would cost a huge amount of money. To handle the project



Victim of greed and sheer negligence. — Star photo

with Tk one crore or two will definitely be meaningless.

The DC, M Ishaq Bhuiyan, when contacted, told The Daily Star that restoration work

would take a few years, and that his office would try to utilise maximum amount of money that can be managed for the project.

"Once the project is implemented," Ishaq said, "local residents along with the government will thoroughly be benefited."

Revamping the Silk Industry

SAMIRAN Bibi, a 45-year-old woman, is regarded by her neighbours as a skilled silk farmer. She had been in the business for a decade until she quit it two years ago for lack of quality silkworms. Thanks to a government-sponsored programme she has changed her mind and hoped to return to silk farming, a job close to her heart.

"I had quit silk farming because my income was not enough to meet the cost of production. I've now decided to do it again after promise of help to get quality silkworms and eggs," says Samiran. The help for Samiran and hundreds of other poor women comes from a 5-year project the government has launched with financial assistance from World Bank. The project involves US dollars 12 million and most of the funds come from the Bank that seeks to help Bangladesh in promoting its silk industry.

One of the first steps under the project has been the establishment of Bangladesh Silk Foundations (BSF) to streamline the administration and promote the rural people's talents in silk farming.

The silk foundation, which started its operation last year, came at the right moment. This was a time when demand for

silk was growing with a decline in production. It came at a time when many traditional silk farmers like Samiran were fed up with the losses they had been suffering for lack of inputs.

According to a 1995 study on the country's silk market, the size of the local annual consumption of raw silk was about 160-200 tons while the domestic demand for silk products was growing at a rate between 6-8 per cent.

Silk experts hoped that it would create 1.23 million person days of employment from rearing and reeling activities during the five years of the project and about 80 per cent of the beneficiaries would be rural poor women. There will also be a significant increase in employment opportunities in weaving, dyeing and finishing sectors they said.

Another goal of the project is to explore international market of silk products to make the silk industry viable. There is a proposal to create an international market development programme for BSF.

Silk farming is a sensitive job as it has to be done under temperature at 25-26 degree Celsius and the humidity level at 80-85 per cent. It can be done four times a year, ensuring employment for 100 days for a per-

son throughout the year.

The leading silk-producing countries of the world also include India, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. Even though the history of Vietnam's silk production is only of a few years, its annual silk production has now reached 5,000 tons.

BSF Director General (Market & Promotion) Syed Tariqzaman observed that the country's annual consumption of raw silk ranges from 160 to 200 metric tons, of which only 6-7 per cent are met by domestic production.

He said local markets have a huge demand for raw silk and its demand for making saris ranges from 1.3 crore to 2.4 crore metric tons, which constitute 80-90 per cent of the country's total demand. And the deficit, which ranges from 90 lakh to 2.4 crore metric tons, is met by the raw silk smuggled into the country from neighbouring India.

According to Bangladesh Bank trade figures, Bangladesh imported silk products worth about Tk 93.9 crore during 1994-95 fiscal while silk products valued at Tk 4.72 crore were exported during the period.

Officials fear that the gap between export and import of silk will widen further in the current fiscal year.

— News Network

Clean Bill of Health for the THC's

THE incinerator has radically changed the face of the Thana Health Complexes (THCs) under the health sector pilot project. The introduction of this effective technology of waste disposal has made a world of difference.

"The change brought about by the incinerator to the THCs under the Thana Functional Improvement Pilot Project is very obvious," said Dr Bazlur Rahman, the Thana Health and Family Welfare Officer at Burichong, Comilla, indicating the scrupulously clean premises of the complex.

TFIPP, a project of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and funded by the European Commission (EC), provides infrastructure facilities to 55 thanas of six districts. It aims at improving the effectiveness and quality of health service at the thana and union level.

New technology like the incinerator and modern medical equipment have been supplied to the THCs under the Tk 1160 million project for which EC has provided about Tk 1000 million.

The project has given training to service providers at all levels in the THCs, from the level of the doctors down to the very sweepers in the project areas of Comilla, Rangpur, Nilphamari, Bagerhat, Barisal and Sunamganj districts of the country.

In addition to the infrastructural development of the THCs, behavioral changes of the service providers, supply of laboratory equipment and reagents, and, above all, participation of

the local community were vital features of the project.

Cleanliness has been an important aspect of TFIPP. Dr Rahman pointed out that the incinerator in Burichong was built a year ago at a cost of Taka 35,000. The building of the incinerator was carried out by an experienced contractor as it needed special skill.

The incinerators vary in form, some in the shape of a chimney or an oven, but the function is the same — easy and efficient disposal of hospital waste.

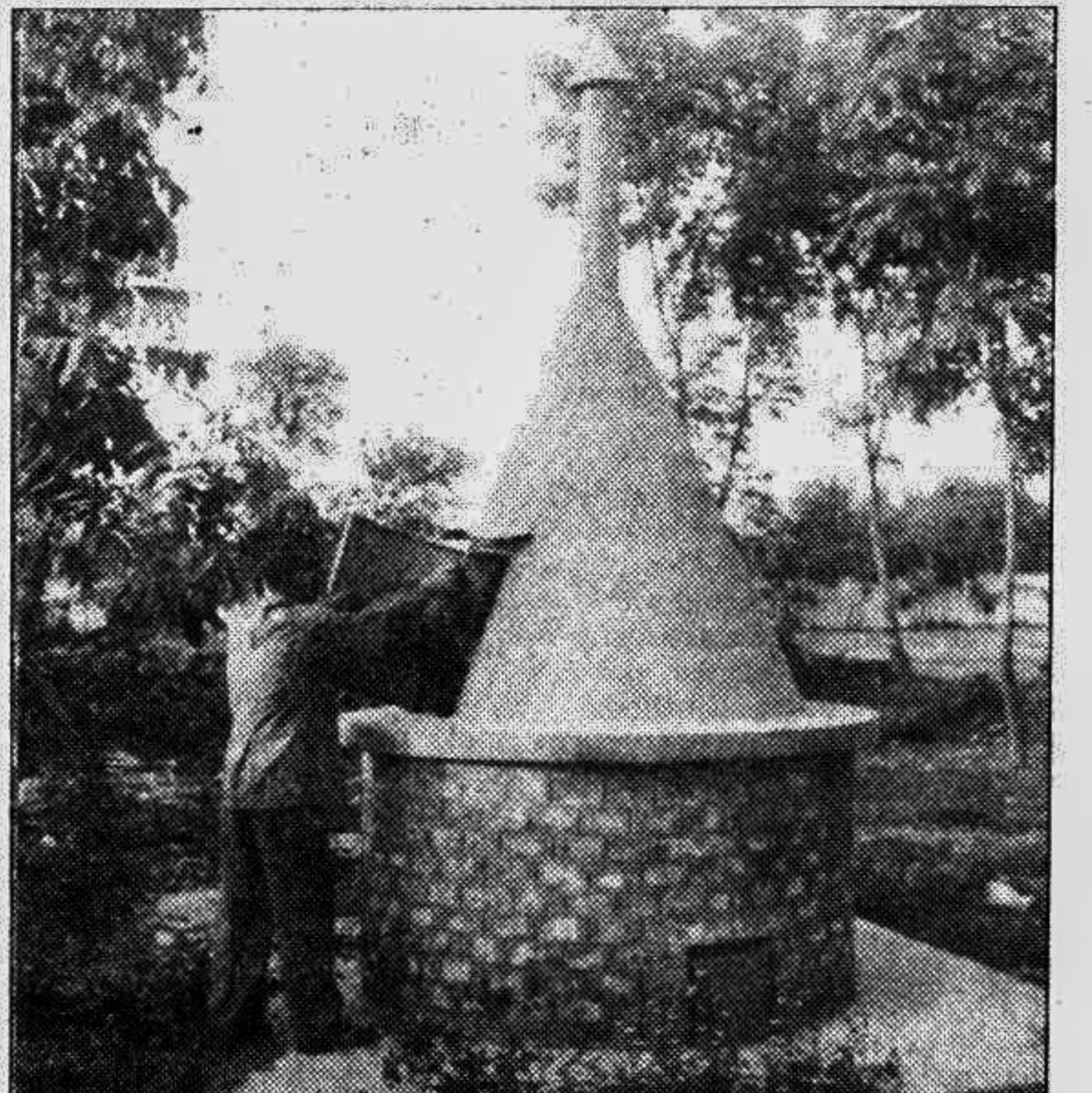
Using the incinerator for the first time in his long service was quite an interesting experience for Nuru Miah, the old sweeper of Burichong THC. Nuru Miah now faces no problem in keeping the hospital clean and disposing waste.

All he has to do is pour the waste into the upper chamber of the incinerator and set it on fire. Everything turns to ashes in a matter of minutes. Water is then poured through a hole connected to the lower chamber and the ashes are flushed into a nearby ditch.

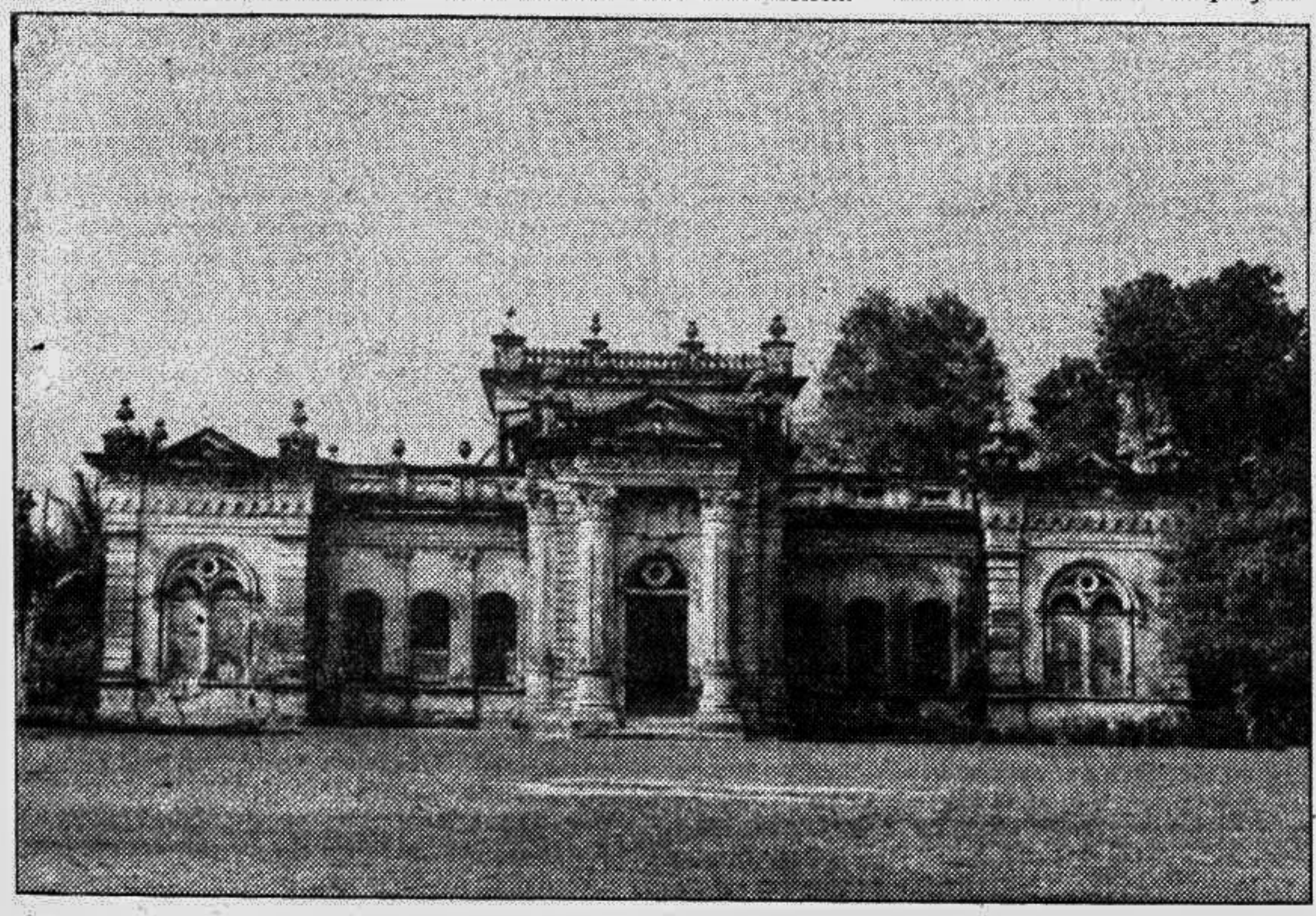
According to Nuru Miah who carries out this process once or twice a week, a simple incinerator has changed the entire environment of the hospital. "Such cleanliness had not been possible before," he said.

"This technology is easy and environment friendly and we have benefited by it," THFPO Dr Bazlur Rahman said, adding that such incinerators could be built in all the hospitals of the country.

— Probe News Agency



The incinerator has brought about a healthy change.



Silent witness of a glorious past. — Star photo