

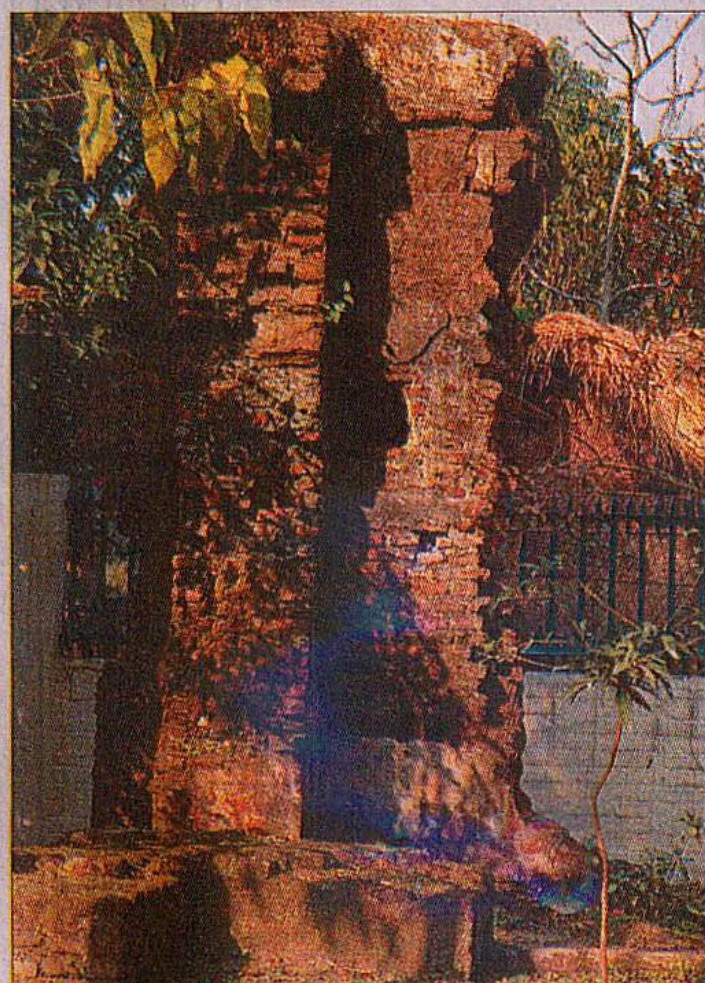
DHAKA MONDAY FEBRUARY 28, 2005



Pairaband, Rangpur



A salute to Begum Rokeya's birth place



EVERYDAY a large number of people from home and abroad visit Pairaband in Rangpur, the birthplace of Begum Rokeya, to pay respects to the pioneer of woman emancipation in Bangladesh as well as South-East Asia.

Begum Rokeya was born in 1882 to a noble family at Pairaband in a village along a small river, Ghagot, eight kilometers off the town of Rangpur. Her father, Zahir Muhammed Abu Ali Haider Saber, was the last of the Pairaband zamindars.

Historians say that Rokeya's grandfather, Zahir Uddin Abul Sobur Saber received Pairaband state from the East India Company after Meer

Kashim killed Raja Rajbollov in 1763. Rokeya's father ran the state after his father's death in 1870.

Pairaband was a very small state compared to all other states in the northern part of Bangladesh, its palace too was very small. The 150-year old Pairaband Zamindar palace is falling in pieces and has almost collapsed. But its historical value will exist as long as the people remember the valuable contribution made by Begum Rokeya who was born in this place.

The authorities have taken steps to preserve whatever that has been left of the Pairaband palace, as a mark of honour to the birth palace of Begum Rokeya. Yet some parts of the

main building stretching across an acre of land are in deplorable conditions.

Begum Rokeya's father built a mosque towards the south about 100 yards away from the main palace. A pair part of the mosque, too, has collapsed, and the only remains now stand as historical ruins.

The cultural affairs ministry has undertaken a major project at Pairaband to bring back a little of its past glory to light and it hopes that once the project is complete, more people will flock to visit the place where this great Bangladeshi woman was born.

With the Bangla Academy handling the responsibilities of the Tk.10 crore project -- Begum Rokeya Smriti Kendra --

a modern complex has already been built on approximately 10 acres of land to the southwest of the main Pairaband palace.

A museum to preserve and put on display household and other items and accessories used by Begum Rokeya, is also a part of the project the cultural affairs ministry proposes to implement. The work on the museum is yet to begin.

The Bangla Academy hopes to collect all personal items that belonged to Begum Rokeya, which are lying with her relatives, and put them together at the museum of the Begum Rokeya Smriti Kendra.

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Photo: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

