



Used for grazing a large number of buffaloes only a couple of weeks ago, this area of Dhalchar union in Bhola's Charfashion upazila remains flooded under sea water, following the onslaught of Cyclone Bulbul on November 10. Inset, the natural canal flowing through the coastal island, also serving as shelter for trawlers during natural calamities, needs excavation for restoration of its navigability.

PHOTO: MJAHIRUL ISLAM JEWEL

## Dhalchar exposed to the elements

*The coastal island with 16,000 people lacks cyclone shelter, safety for trawlers, cattle*

M JAHIRUL ISLAM JEWEL, from Bhola

The hapless people of the remote island of Dhalchar union, 35 kilometres from Kossopia on the mainland, have found an innovative way of facing cyclones -- they go deep into the mangrove forest and hold trees to hang on for saving life.

The union under Charfashion upazila in Bhola has no cyclone shelter or brick building where people can take cover to shield themselves from storms and tidal surges.

The island faces almost all the storms generating in the Bay of Bengal, which often wash away their buffaloes and damage fishing boats, their only means of livelihood.

There was a shelter for the island inhabited by 16,000 people, including 1,500 children, but that was lost to erosion by the river about five years ago. No initiative has been taken since to rebuild the shelter.

The 25-square kilometre island is surrounded by the ocean on all sides except one, which faces erosion by the Meghna river.

The island currently has no mobile network as the lone mobile tower belonging to Grameenphone was lost to erosion last month, said Abdus Salam, chairman of Dhalchar union parishad (UP).

The mobile operator is currently working to rebuild it.

Before any storm hits, the administration warns the people and gives promise of arranging coast guard ships to rescue them but such promises are hardly kept, said locals.

No ship came to evacuate the people from the exposed island prior to Cyclone Bulbul that

struck on November 10, said the UP chairman.

The people of the island can usually commute to the mainland once a day with small trawlers. However, they are unable to do so for rough waters prior to any approaching storm. The boats are moored in canals in the mainland to reduce damage.

When Cyclone Bulbul hit, about 4,000 people and children took shelter in the forest, along with their buffaloes too, as there is no highland to keep them safe.

Many others decided to stay back in their corrugated iron-made homes for fear of loss of valuables or other belongings.

It is possible to make the 40-50 minute journey inland to Kossopia on speedboat, but the people of the island cannot afford it.

"We are left with no other option but to pass the night frightened inside the forest under the open sky," said Sathi Aktar, who took shelter inside the mangrove forest.

The population mostly relies on rearing about 6,000 buffaloes and selling the milk. Cyclone Bulbul washed most livestock out to sea, said the chairman.

The fishermen also pass anxious nights as there are at least 1,000 small, medium and large boats in the island.

While some affluent fishermen may spend about Tk 60 lakh to purchase a large boat or Tk 40 lakh for a medium sized one, it is usually the small boat fishermen who are gravely affected. They purchase small boats for about Tk 10 lakh to Tk 25 lakh by borrowing money at high interest rates from individuals.

The marginal fishermen fall deeper in debt

when they have to repair their boats battered by the storms.

The onslaught of Bulbul damaged at least 100 boats and washed five boats away to sea this time, said Shahid Alam, a fisherman.

The island has a long canal linked to the sea, but they cannot anchor their boats in the shallow water for a lack of excavation, he added.

This correspondent saw six buffalo carcasses floating in the water during his visit to the island a few days ago.

The buffaloes would survive if there was a "killa" or raised land for them to stand during the storm, fishermen said.

While the poorest groups of people usually receive relief materials such as 30 kg of rice, dry foods, and corrugated iron sheets to rebuild their homes after any severe cyclone, this time the authorities deemed the damage to be negligible and so, no relief materials were handed out, they said.

"Demanding a cyclone shelter, highland for the buffaloes, re-excavation of the canal to moor the boats, and an embankment around the island, I have approached different authorities, including the local MP. But there is no response," said UP Chairman Abdus Salam.

"The proposal to construct a shelter, re-excavate the canal and build a killa was sent to the respective ministries a few months ago. It is in the final stages to call for tenders," said Masud Alam Siddique, deputy commissioner of Bhola.

Despite repeated attempts, this reporter could not reach Abdullah Al Islam Jakob, the local MP, for his comment.

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unit for two previous terms.

The other council meeting of the Ziaul faction was held in Lichutala area of the town. The meeting was presided over by Jasim Uddin Farajee, former general secretary of AL's Baufal upazila unit.

Although Ziaul's name was announced as the chief guest, he was not present in the programme.

When the meeting concluded in the evening, Jasim Uddin Farajee was declared president while Jahangir Hossain, who was joint general secretary of the upazila unit, was declared general secretary of the unit.

On November 19, two different committees were also declared for Baufal municipality unit of AL.

Contacted, Kazi Alamgir Hossain, acting general secretary of AL's district unit, said the immediate past committee of the party's Baufal upazila unit, led by ASM Feroz and Motaleb Hawlader, was the legitimate one as they were re-elected in a council meeting.

He, however, said he was not aware of whether two different committees of the upazila unit were formed yesterday.

### AL's Baufal Upazila Council

## Two factions declare separate committees

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Two rivalling factions of Awami League's Baufal upazila unit yesterday declared two separate committees of the unit from separate council meetings held in the upazila town.

One of the factions is led by ASM Feroz, Patuakhali-2 lawmaker and also former chief whip in the parliament, while the other by Ziaul Haq Juwel, the mayor of Baufal municipality and also organising secretary of the party's district unit.

The council meeting of the Feroz faction was held in Court Building ground near the office of AL's Baufal upazila unit. With Feroz in the chair, the chief guest of the programme was Advocate Shahjahan Mia, the president of AL's district unit. Kazi Alamgir Hossain, acting secretary of the district unit, was the special guest.

In the evening, ASM Feroz was declared president and Motaleb Hawlader general secretary of Baufal upazila unit of AL. Feroz has been the unit's president since 1980. Motaleb served as general secretary of the



Children cross the bamboo bridge on the Mongoleswari river in Kharozi union of Netrakona's Kalmakanda upazila.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

## Bamboo bridge their only means

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A large number of villagers on the western side of the Mongoleswari river at Kharozi union under Kalmakanda upazila of Netrakona have to cross a risky bamboo bridge to reach their destinations.

The people of Biswanathpur, Nayapara, Boithkhali, Kaichapur, Sreepur, Bausam, Senpara, Gojarmari, Laxmipur, Kandapara and Beelpur villages are suffering due to bad communication with the main land for decades, said Md Wahidul Hoque, chairman of Kharozi union parishad (UP).

"It is difficult and risky to cross the bridge, especially in the rainy season when the river gets strong current. We approached different quarters including the local lawmaker for construction of a 50-metre-long concrete bridge across the river but no step has been taken yet," he said.

There are seven educational institutions including two primary schools, two high schools and a college on two sides of the bridge, said Md Abu Bakar Siddique, former chairman of Kharozi UP.

chairman of Kharozi UP.

Parul Akter, headmaster of Bamongaon Government Primary School located on the eastern side of the river, said nearly half of 135 students of the school have to cross the bridge as they come from the western side.

"They cannot attend classes regularly due to the communication problem. A first grader boy got his hands fractured as he fell from the bridge in last rainy season," she said.

"Some 3,000 villagers including over 500 students cross the bridge daily. The bridge needs Tk 15,000 to Tk 20,000 for its repair every year. Locals arrange it, sometimes with the help of union parishad," said Abdus Samad Khan, member of Kharozi UP.

Habibur Rahman, a farmer of Biswanathpur village, said the locals are mainly dependent on cultivation of crops including rice, wheat and vegetables round the year but they have to sell the produce for low price to the middlemen due to lack of transport facilities.

## 120-yr-old woman murdered

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

A 120-year-old woman was brutally murdered in Bhupur upazila of the district on Tuesday.

The deceased was Ahatan Beowa of the upazila.

Police arrested one Badal alias Babu, 25, of Sarishabari in Jamalpur, in connection with the incident.

Superintendent of Police (SP) Sanjat Kumar Roy said Babu had been working at the grocery shop of one Sehab Uddin at Falda Bazar in Bhupur upazila for the last three months.

On Tuesday, Saheb insulted Babu over a trifling matter, which angered the latter.

Later, Babu entered Saheb's house in the area and slit throat of the latter's mother with a kitchen knife. She died on the spot.

Babu was later arrested, said the SP.

## Returned trafficked girl lands in victim support centre

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A trafficked girl, who returned home from India on Saturday, was handed over to police in Taraganj upazila of Rangpur on Wednesday.

Police sent the girl to a victim support centre in Rangpur after producing her before a magistrate's court the same day, said Zinnat Ali, OC of Taraganj Police Station.

NGO Adra Bangladesh with the cooperation of an Indian NGO helped her return, he said.

According to the victim's family members and police, Manik Hossain of Dohajari village and Rabby Hossain of Betgari village of Taraganj upazila abducted the 10th grader girl on November 14 last year and took her to Dhaka.

After four months, she was trafficked to India where police rescued her and kept her at a safe home in Panipat district of Haryana state.

On May 25 this year, the girl contacted with her mother over phone.

The mother filed a case with Taraganj Police Station accusing five people including Manik and Rabby, said police.

Bangladesh police and officials of home and foreign ministries sought help of their Indian counterparts to bring back the girl.

Meantime, Manik was arrested on June 20 this year.

## Playground is their classroom now

*Their madrasa building in Baufal upazila collapsed when Cyclone Bulbul wreaked havoc on coastal districts earlier this month*

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

After Cyclone Bulbul razed the madrasa's only structure, made of tin and wood, to the ground on November 10 in Baufal upazila, the madrasa authorities had no other option but to carry on academic activities out in the open.

The authorities of Purbo Khajurbaria Dakhil Madrasa, established in 1986, made the decision to prepare students of the institution for the upcoming final examinations of grades one to four, six, seven and nine.

Students of grades five and eight already took part in the annual public examinations earlier at different exam centres while students of grade ten had their test exams in October.

According to Patuakhali District Education Officer Jahangir Hossain, tropical storm Bulbul severely damaged 61 educational institutions in the district. Out of those, 41 are madrasas, 18 are high schools and 2 are colleges.

Since no government initiatives were taken till date to rebuild the structure of the madrasa in Baufal, its authorities are also making preparations to hold the final exams at the same place, in the playground next to the 105-foot-long damaged building.

Attendance rate of students are falling due to the situation, but no department of the government responded their plea of reconstructing the madrasa building, said Md Rafiqul Islam Hawlader, chairman of the madrasa's managing committee.



Ahead of their final exams, students in small groups from different grades attend their classes outside the damaged facility of Purbo Khajurbaria Dakhil Madrasa in Patuakhali's Baufal upazila. The photo was taken recently.

November 27, but they could not find any substitute facility for the students.

Urging the authorities concerned to come up with a solution for the sake of the students, he said they were making preparations to hold the exams in the playground.

Contacted, Baufal upazila Project Implementation Officer Rajib Biswas said they received a petition from the madrasa authorities, seeking repair or reconstruction of their facility that was badly damaged by Cyclone Bulbul.

The petition has been forwarded to the higher authorities concerned and his office would take necessary steps in this regard as soon as his office receives directives from them, he also said.



Ronjona Begum feeds her cows on the premises of her house at Mahishkhocha village in Lalmonirhat's Aditmari upazila. The 18-year-old dwarf girl, who left school after studying up to Class V amid ridicule by peers, took to cattle rearing for gaining self-reliance.

PHOTO: DILIP ROY