

No school in sight in isolated Char Kashem

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

While she had no access to formal education, Saleha Begum, a resident of Char Kashem and a mother of six, dreams of sending her children to school. But that dream is yet to be fulfilled since not a single school exists in the char.

With no options in sight, she has no idea what to do to ensure education for her children.

Char Kashem is an isolated char of Rangabali, which in itself is an isolated upazila of Patuakhali.

Saleha's husband Alam Ghazi is a fisherman, and their family survives on whatever he is able to catch in a day. Living hand to mouth and with no education, it seemed like their fates were already written for them.

So, Saleha married off her three daughters, and her only son helps her husband catch fish.

All the families living in the area have similar woes.

Although about 600 people live in Char Kashem, there's no primary school or any other educational institution for that matter. So, the children there remain illiterate.

Rezaul Howlader was only able to send one of his three sons to a primary school, that too in another nearby char. The other two have to help their father catch fish. The younger son, Deen Islam, is now studying in second grade.

Deen has to cross an entire five kilometres over a river to attend classes. That's why his father can't take him to school every day.

Amid the rainy season, Deen can't go to school for about six months, owing to turbulent waters. His father said if there were a school in Char Kashem, these troubles would go away and all children would get the opportunity to study.

"We got colourful tin houses through the government's Ashrayan project. Even though we have a roof over our heads, our future is grim as we can't educate our children," said Rezaul.

Contacted, Assistant Primary Education Officer of Rangabali Sagir Hossain said a proposal was sent to the Directorate of Primary Education six months ago to set up a school in Char Kashem.

"If the department approves, a school will be set up there," he said.



MISCHIEVOUS CHILDHOOD... Some children were trying to pluck amra (hog plums) from a tree in their locality using handmade slingshots. This photo was taken from Jhalakathi yesterday.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

The launch ride from hell

FROM PAGE 5

Hakim Sharif and his family after a long time. Hakim and his family had boarded MV Abhijan-10 to visit her in Barguna. But they never met.

Hakim, his wife Pakhi Begum, and their 16-month-old child Nasrullah were killed in the launch fire. Their bodies were buried in a mass grave in Barguna Sadar upazila's Potkakhali area.

Hakim's three children -- Hafsa Begum, 18, Sumaiya, 16, and Fazlur Rahman, 9 -- became orphans that night. Ratan is now raising them, or rather is struggling to do so.

"We are running on loans and donations from relatives and neighbours. Hafsa is in college, Sumaiya has passed SSC, and Fazlur Rahman is a third-grader. It's difficult to manage their educational expenses," said Ratan while breaking down in tears.

"We have applied to the shipping ministry for financial assistance allocated for the victims' families. It will be handed over to them soon," said Barguna DC Habibur.

SON STILL LOOKING FOR HIS FATHER

Visually-impaired Hafez Mirazul Islam and his father Idris Khan were returning to Barguna on that launch following the latter's treatment in Dhaka. They were accompanied by Mirazul's mother, his wife and his only daughter. Although all of them were rescued after they jumped off the vessel, his father Idris has not been found.

"I'm the only child of my parents. Even if I had found my father's body, I would've gotten some closure," he told this correspondent.

Jannatul Ferdowsi,

daughter of one Razia Sultana, is also waiting for the bodies of her mother and baby sister.

Razia and her eight-year-old child Nusrat of Barguna Sadar's Parikhal area went missing following the tragic incident.

"I pass my days waiting to see their dead bodies. If I had found my mother's grave or even a bone of her body, I would've brought it home and buried it. The DNA of 14 people matched but my mother and sister were not among them," she said.

FIRST RESPONDERS' TRAUMA

"I rushed to the river after hearing the screams of the victims. When I reached the launch with a trawler, I saw a little girl being burnt to ashes right in front of my eyes," said Md Humayun Kabir Sagar, councillor of ward 9 of Jhalakathi municipality.

Others living by the riverside shared similar stories of how the night still haunts them till this day.

"Before reaching the place, we didn't have any idea how devastating the incident was. It was the most tragic incident I've ever covered in my entire career," said Al Amin Talukder, a journalist working for a private satellite television.

Trawler driver Md Shohel Akan said, "After I came to know of the incident, I rushed to the spot amidst the thick fog, recovered many burning victims from the river and took them to the shore."

"I still shiver when I recall the night," he said.

Md Safikul Islam, station officer of Jhalakathi fire station, said, "It was the most challenging

incident of my service life. There were no riverside fire stations; our rescue operations were disrupted frequently due to the thick fog."

Md Belal Uddin, assistant director of Barishal fire service station, said a proposal for establishing a river fire station in Jhalakathi has been sent to the higher authorities.

NO CHARGE SHEET YET

Manir Hossain, relative of a victim, filed a case with Jhalakathi police station over the incident, accusing eight men, including four owners of the launch. The case is currently under trial at Dhaka's marine court.

Contacted, investigation officer of the case Md Nazrul Islam said as they are yet to receive all the DNA reports of the deceased, they cannot submit a charge sheet before the court.

Two other cases were filed in Dhaka and Jhalakathi over the incident.

90pc voters

FROM PAGE 5

will be held at all 229 centres on December 27 through EVM. Around 3,500 sets of EVM are ready for holding the election.

Baten said the two-day mock voting will end today.

The number of voters of Rangpur City Corporation is around 4.26 lakh.

Meanwhile, Badiul Alam Majumdar, secretary of Sushashoner Jonno Nagorik, who visited Rangpur twice since the schedule of the election was declared, said it's not possible to hold a free and fair election through EVM.

Besides, Kazi Habibul Awal, the chief election commissioner, and Rasheda Sultana, election commissioner, who visited Rangpur on December 13 and December 22, respectively, said there is no scope of vote-rigging through EVM; voting will be free and fair through the process.

Ready for a grand gathering

FROM PAGE 3

arranged in case of any emergency.

Asked about the expectation from the council, he said the PM has been leading the party for 42 years and she knows the most about the party members from all the areas, including the villages.

She will take the final decision on relevant issues by considering all the aspects, added Nanak.

Nanak also said the PM will give instructions about the upcoming national polls and the vision of "Smart Bangladesh".

Wishing anonymity, a Jubo League leader, who was a former top leader of Bangladesh Chhatra League, told The Daily Star that none of the councillors and delegates will have any say about the second top leadership post.

"All will be done by the

PM herself," he said.

During yesterday's visit to Suhrawardy Udyan, this correspondent found hundreds of placards, containing greetings from city leaders, displayed around the venue. While entering the site from the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh, several photos of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Sheikh Hasina, her sister Sheikh Rehana, son Sajib Wazed Joy and daughter Saima Wazed Putul were found displayed.

The AL council venue remembered the four national leaders -- wartime acting president Syed Nazrul Islam, prime minister Tajuddin Ahmed and cabinet ministers M Mansur Ali and AHM Qamruzzaman.

The main stage were adorned with photos of AL's four top founding



leaders -- Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, Shamsul Huq, Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy and Abdur Rashid Tarkabagish.

The 22nd national council will be held with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina as its longest-serving president. The party has had eight chiefs and nine secretaries since its founding on June 23, 1949.

Hasina has served the party for the highest time -- nine consecutive terms for the last four decades since her election to the position on February 16, 1981.

The venue also

incorporated the government's development activities, including the metro rail, Padma Bridge, Bangabandhu satellite, Karnaphuli tunnel, and nuclear power plants. The lake inside the venue was cleaned and some boats (electoral symbol of AL) were floating with slogans written on them.

AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader, also the road transport and bridges minister, said the party wants to give a message to the country's people that AL is standing by them and will continue to do so in the future, by holding the

national council.

He also said Awami League is the only political party in the country that practices democracy within the party.

"I don't know of any other party holding regular councils in line with its constitution," he said at a press conference at AL's Bangabandhu Avenue central office.

Responding to a question, Quader said, "I am not a perfect leader. There may be mistakes on my part while performing my duties. Big parties have failures too, along with their successes."

Youth held on rape charges

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police have arrested a youth on charge of raping a 12-year-old girl in Langadu upazila of Rangamati.

Nazmul Hossain Rana, 20, was arrested in Kakparia area of Gulshakhali union on Thursday afternoon after the girl's father filed a case in this regard, said Mohammad Iqbal, officer-in-charge of Langadu Police Station, yesterday.

Quoting locals, the OC said on Wednesday the accused abducted the girl and raped her in a mango orchard. She was later rescued by her family and locals.

Emdad Hoque

FROM PAGE 3

and he was buried at the graveyard of Chawkbazar Shahi Jame Masjid.

Born in Urdu Road area of Old Dhaka, Emdad was diagnosed with renal disease several years ago, after which he was forced to take a break in his career.

In his career spanning more than two decades, the designer represented Bangladeshi fashion around the world, and had also served as founder of Studio Emdad and director of Banglar Mela.

Save Rohingyas adrift at sea

FROM PAGE 3

and children. We need to see the states in the region help save lives and not let people die," said Indrika Ratwatte, UNHCR's Asia-Pacific director.

Since first reports of the boat being sighted in Thai waters, UNHCR has received unverified information of the vessel being spotted

near Indonesia and then subsequently off the coast of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands of India.

The boat's current location is reportedly once more back eastwards, in the Andaman Sea north of Aceh, reads the statement.

UNHCR has repeatedly asked all countries in the region to make saving lives

a priority.

The agency had alerted the Indian marine rescue centre earlier this week, requesting immediate action to save lives and allow for disembarkations.

"It is devastating to learn that many people have already lost their lives, including children," added Ratwatte.

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