

Migrants on offshore islands of Bangladesh

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Riverbank erosion and the consequent formation of new islands in the Bay of Bengal cause frequent changes in the shape and size of the delta, forcing the inhabitants to migrate frequently. This kind of migration is as old as the history of people living in this region but when the new islands get overpopulated or start to erode, people have to move out to yet more remote islands. With insufficient resources to enable them to move to a better place, they migrate to worse or more vulnerable places — where they become even more vulnerable economically, socially and environmentally than they were before. Cyclones, storm and tidal surges and increased salinity exacerbate their hardships.

Char Nizam Kalkini is a remote offshore island with an area of 3.57 sq km, discovered in the mid-1980s, since which time people started to live there. This island does not even exist on the administrative map. At present around 250 families live on Char Nizam Kalkini, and every year a further 10 to 15 families move to the island. The island is regularly flooded and is extremely vulnerable to cyclones and associated storm surges; there is only one fragile shelter to provide protection. These people are trapped

within a circle of bad fortune by their poverty and the natural hazards of the region. The people living on Char Nizam Kalkini are landless families who have lost their houses and lands to riverbank erosion and other natural disasters. Families living here are so poor that they even do not have sufficient assets to move towards towns or cities to better their livelihoods.

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A family has gathered all its household materials in preparation for moving to a more remote island. The household head said that none of his family wanted to go as the island is frequently flooded and the threat of cyclone and storm surge is greater there.