Against all odds, a school thrives in the middle of the haor

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As water surrounds Kishoreganj’s Bajitpur union for nearly nine months A year, over 300 students depend on two boats to reach Baherbali SESDP Model High School, the only secondary school within reach



Water stretches in every direction, with A three-storey building standing in its midst: Baherbali SESDP Model High School. Photos: Mohsin Islam Tanvir

It was around 7am. A girl walked from Baherbali village to the edge of the haor and stood there wearing A sky-blue kameez, white pajama, and A school bag on her shoulder. Her father stood beside her, holding her hand firmly in one hand, using A stick in the other to gauge the depth of the water ahead. The boat was late. Behind her stood five or six more students, all waiting for the same single boat to arrive.

Only half an hour remained before school started. But there were only two boats for nearly 300 students. For children from Baherbali and the surrounding villages, this is the only secondary school

within reach.

A school surrounded by water

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From A distance, it looks like some kind of disaster relief shelter. Water stretches in every direction, and in the middle of it stands A three-storey building, its head held high. The entire ground floor sits empty — for most of the year, it remains submerged in the haor's water. Classes run only on the second and third floors, so that the whole building seems to float on the water. There is no road to the school; the only way to reach it is by boat.

This is Baherbali SESDP Model High School, located in Maijchar Union of Bajitpur Upazila, Kishoreganj. Classes run here regularly every day, and attendance among both teachers and students is higher than at any nearby school. For nearly nine months of the year, the school's surroundings remain underwater, so the authorities themselves have arranged two boats for transport. This is how, day by day, in this remote haor region surrounded by water, the school keeps spreading the light of education.

Ripa Das, A seventh-grade student, said, "We have to wake up early to catch the boat. If someone misses the boat, they miss class that day too."

Over 300 boys and girls from five villages — Baherbali, Purakanda, Aynargop, Shibpur and Boyali — now study at the school. Since its founding, people in the surrounding villages seem to have found an opportunity — A chance to give their children A shot at A better future through education.

Ripa's father, Rafiq Uddin, said, "Since the school was built, interest among people here in educating their children has grown A great deal."

The school building was constructed under A Ministry of Education project then known as SESDP, now called the Secondary Education Sector Investment Programme (SESIP). Construction of the school building began in 2007 under this project and was completed in 2011. Classes formally began in 2013.

The project was aimed at expanding secondary education in disadvantaged and underdeveloped areas. A total of 83 schools were established across Bangladesh under the project, with the process covering construction, the launch of classes and government recognition.