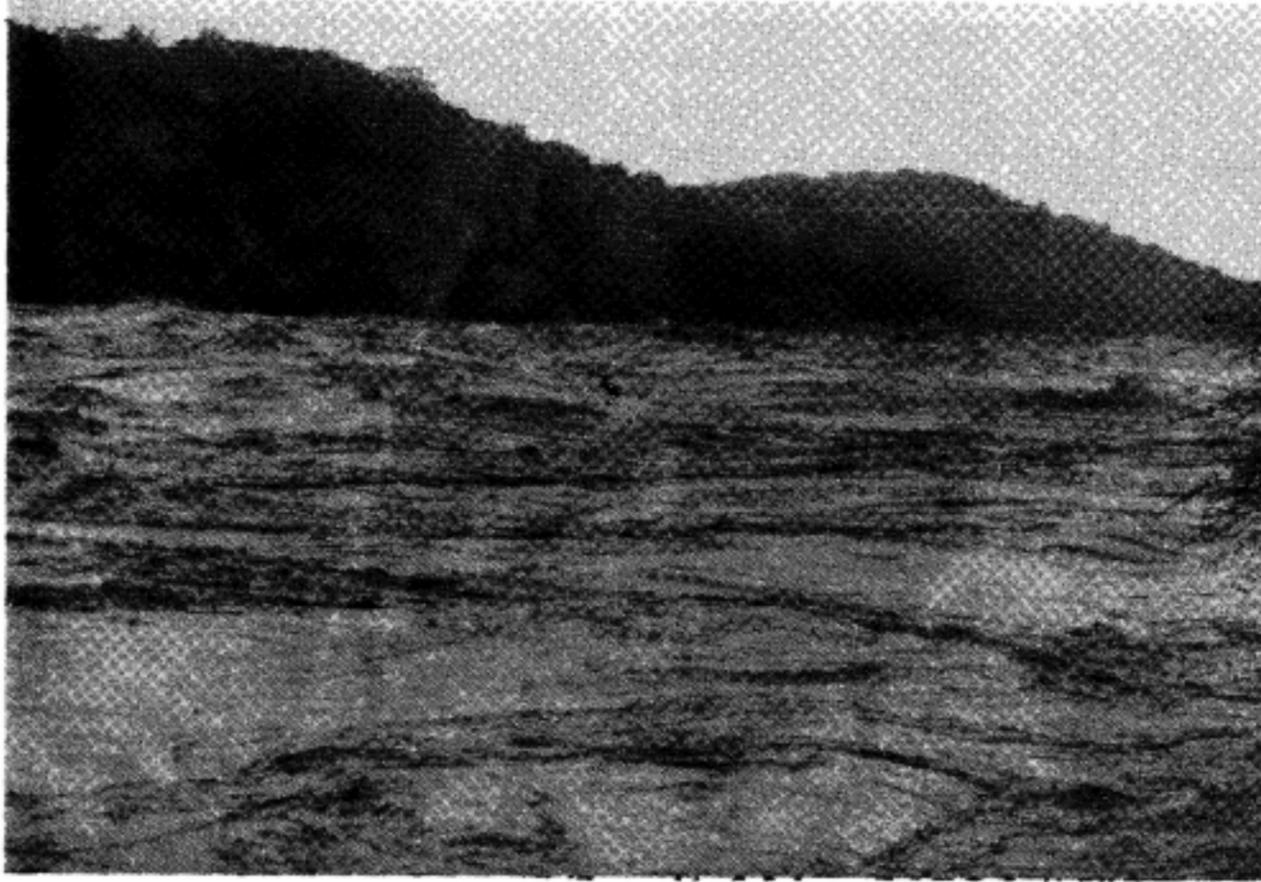


# CYCLONE DEMOINA CAUSED DISASTER



Umfoloji River on its heights.

*Photo by Bongani Majola*

## REPORTER

As if God is tempering wind on a shorn lamb, the ravaging floods have come at a worse time. They followed years of severe and devastating drought in which the human dilemmas were compounded by a prolonged downturn of the economy and the lack of jobs. There were virtually no crops last year in a great many areas; people could not find work and they were heartened by the rains in the latter part of last year. The droughts which persisted year after year demanded drought relief measures which retarded development programmes in the agriculture sector.

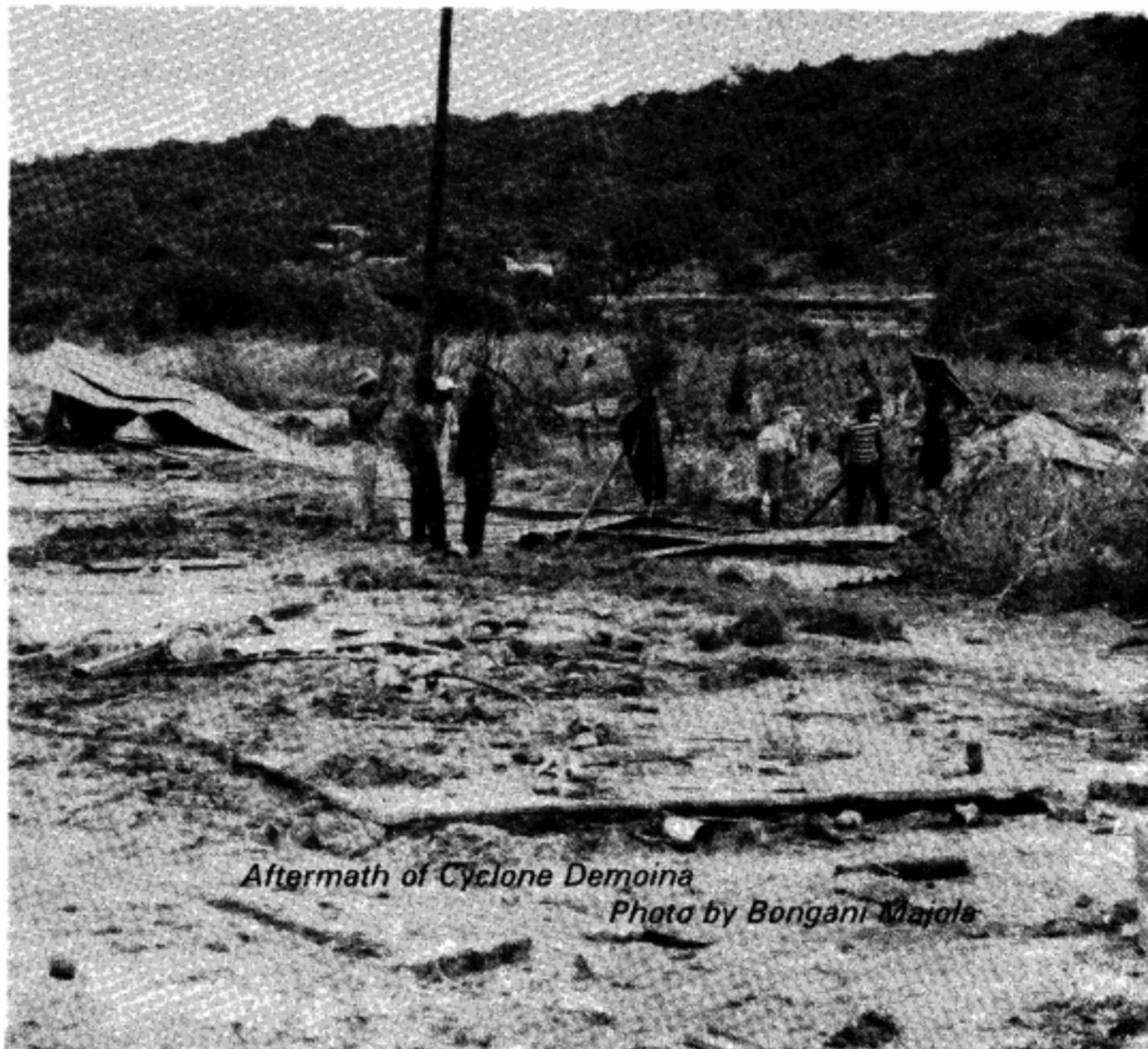
A prolonged economic down-turn, in this country has hit Africans more than any other race group and in the circumstances the application of influx control regulations and pass laws minimised the options of our peasants. In the midst of the drought instead of being able to relieve pressure on agriculture and grazing resources, workers who were retrenched in the cities returned home only to find that there was nothing there

to fall back on. Returning workers last year found that their foothold in rural areas as some kind of insurance against joblessness was paying no dividend on food and succour.

Here in KwaZulu and other parts of Northern Natal were are face to face with a major disaster. The

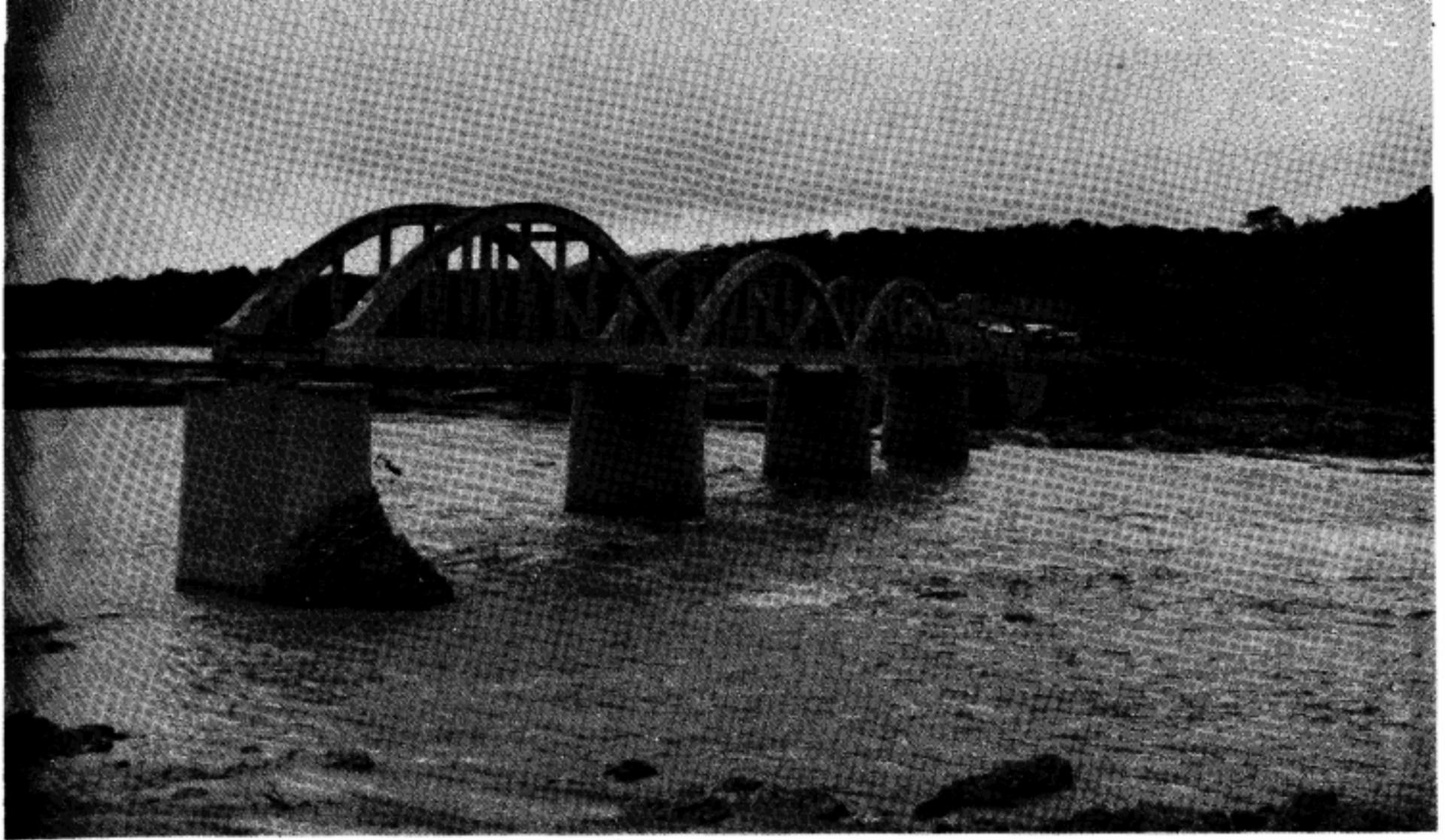
damage in KwaZulu and Natal caused by floods, because of the Cyclone Demoina is colossal. It never rained but it poured; it rained dogs and cats. It was indeed a torrential downpour, and when it dawned, we saw the land being ravaged, it was some kind of a foretaste of the coming of the end of the world. The onslaught of it was devastating.

Reports are flooding in of homesteads which were totally destroyed, washed away, and of homes collapsing, sometimes on the inhabitants. It has been said that about 40 blacks have died, and 32 homesteads were washed away. Great many Zulus who are today homeless as a result of the floods. Not only have people had their homes damaged and they have suffered stock losses; and as all this was happening a growing sense of being isolated in their suffering came to people as report after report of washed-away roads and destroyed bridges caved in. For the ordinary man and woman the whole of this was desolation.



*Aftermath of Cyclone Demoina*

*Photo by Bongani Majola*



White Umfolozi Bridge — broken

*Photo by Bongani Majola*

Many people were injured, and they could not receive medical care. Ceza, Thulasizwe and Nkonjeni Hospitals were cut off from every direction — from Vryheid, from Ulundi; and from Nongoma. Hospital staff were powerless to assist the people as ambulances and medical staff could not travel. These hospitals could not receive medical supplies and food for patients, staff and workers.

Shops in Mahlabathini and other areas have run short of basic foods and necessities. The shopping centre at Ulundi Township ran out of stock within a minute and shelves were empty within a short space of time. The shop owners on the other hand were confused as to how are they going to order. This is typical of circumstances which prevailed in almost all parts of KwaZulu North of the White and Black Mfolozi rivers.

During the past decade, incidents of tuberculosis were managed, but as the result of the grinding poverty experienced in recent years the incidents of tuberculosis is again rising. The incidents of children suffering from Kwashiorkor is rising. Mass poverty and the disease that accompanies it not only affects the health of individuals, but it adversely touches on

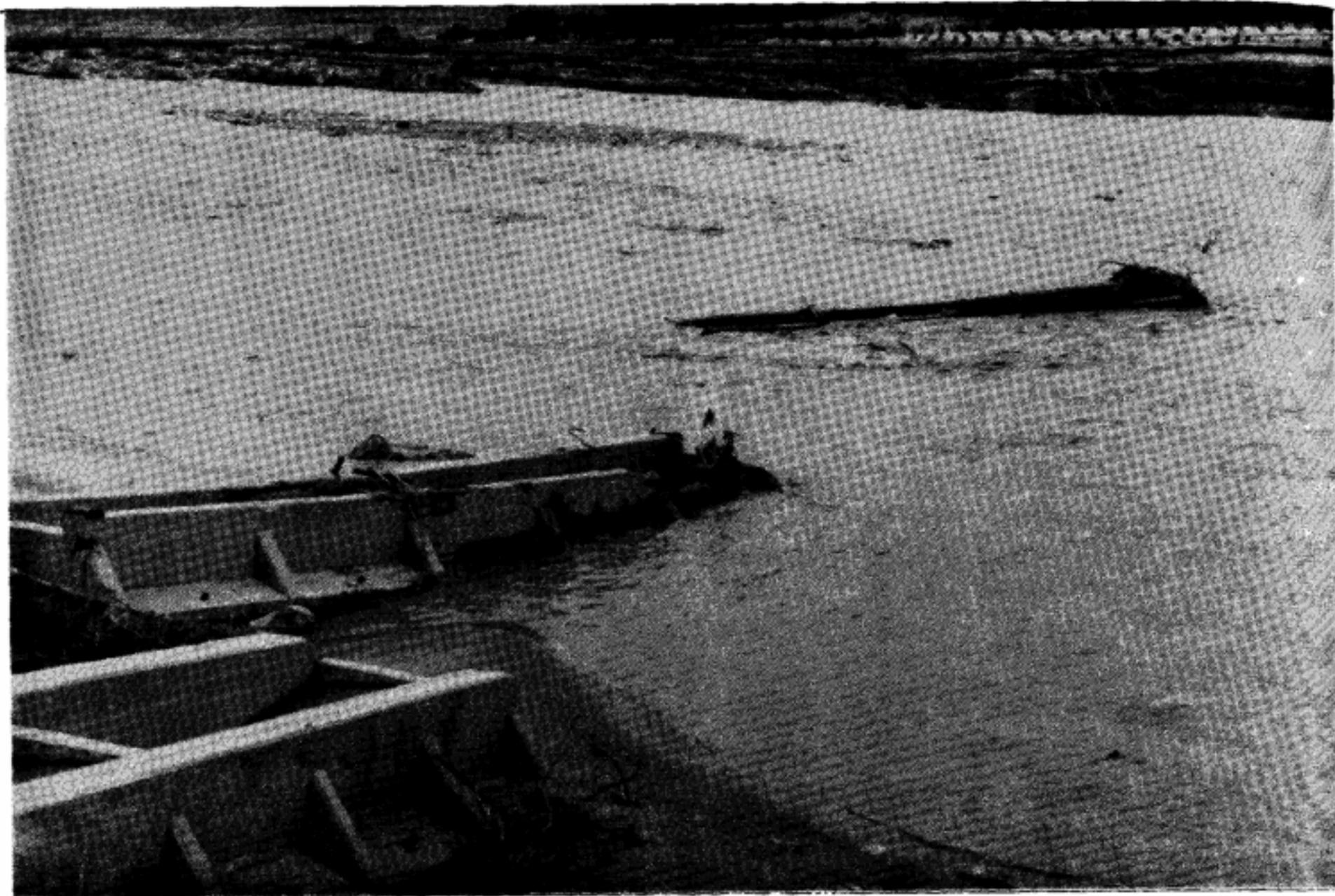
the whole tone of communities. For a number of years this part of South Africa has been facing a deteriorating situation, and the floods which we have now experienced will have a very marked effect in an escalating situation.

Analysing the situation, Dr M G Buthelezi, Chief Minister of KwaZulu and President of Inkatha, said: "I am focussing attention on a very fundamental issue and I am pointing to the fact that we cannot grapple with the real problems involved unless we stand back and look at them wholistically and globally. The problems of poverty, hunger and malnutrition are not confined to rural areas. Around Durban alone, we have hundred of Black people who have been forced by escalating poverty in rural areas to move into squatter areas around our cities . . . The flight to towns by Africans must be seen in the same light as the flight of Afrikaners to town and cities which followed the poverty of the 1930's. Afrikaners then had no choice in the matter and Africans today have no choice in the matter. Looking at our problems globally demands that we make reappraisals of the urbanisation problem".

Lamenting on the effects of the

floods, Dr M G Buthelezi: "Our people lost almost all they had during the drought in the rural areas and it is a matter of deep concern that even the little that remained in stock and cattle has been eliminated by these floods. This means that the problems of Black poverty have thus been more than compounded. The effects of the economic recession which has caused the loss of so many jobs in the midst of so much unemployment, particularly amongst blacks, has been worsened by first the severe drought in 1983 and has now been further worsened by the effects of the current floods. It is a matter of deep concern to us that the general sales tax has been increased by one percent (1%) in the midst of all this. It is clear to us that the position in which Black people will find themselves will be extremely untenable in 1984, and the following years."

Looking around for suitable word to describe the situation of Ulundi being isolated, I quickly thought of the word 'maroon'. The Bridge across White Umfolozi between Melmoth and Ulundi has been washed away. Road to Ulundi via



Debris of White Umfolozi Bridge

*Photo by Bongani Majola*

Nhlazatshe is impassable. There was no vehicular communication with Ulundi. At the time of writing, the only access to Ulundi is by air, depending on loud ceiling. As it is at Ulundi there is no water, but it is delivered by water tanks. Electric power was out of order for a couple of days. Postal services came to a standstill.

Expressing his concern, Hon. Dr P.G. Koornhof, Minister of Co-operation & Development sent a telex to the Hon. the Chief Minister, Chief Buthelezi, to the Effect that: "It is with sincere regret that I have learned of loss of life and possessions suffered by people of KwaZulu during recent flood disaster. On behalf of the Government I wish to express my

sympathy to the Paramount Chief of the Zulus, the Government and the people of KwaZulu who have lost beloved ones and possessions.

I wish to give the assurance that the Government will do everything within its power to assist wherever possible in order to ease the sorrow and plight of those who suffered."