



Two young Kora children in Korapara of Dinajpur's Biral upazila. The small impoverished community, on the verge of extinction, awaits government protection against encroachers and necessary coverage under the government's social security programmes.

PHOTO: STAR

# The last of the Koras

Only 21 surviving Kora families are being driven into extinction for their ancestral land

KONGKON KARMAKER WITH FIROZ A MUZAHID

They took part in laying rail tracks -- one of the primary infrastructural backbones of the country. Several of them fought for the country's independence in 1971.

Yet their properties, livelihood and life are threatened by influential locals, who prefer to identify them as "outsiders".

These "outsiders" are in fact citizens of our country. They are called the Koras.

Brought from Jharkhand to Dinajpur region during the last half of the 19th century by the British Raj to lay rail tracks, a good number of the timid but hardworking Koras settled in a remote area in Jhainakuri village under Haljaj mouza of Biral upazila, according to Saleq Khokon, a writer and researcher of small ethnic communities in the country.

There used to be a vibrant locality, now known as Korapara, where thousands of Koras used to live. Before Bangladesh won Independence in 1971, around 200 Kora families lived in Korapara.

Then began the sharpest decline in the Kora population and as of date, only 21 of Kora families still live in the area.

Asked about the factors that are contributing to the decline in the Kora population, Saleq said a few of the factors

include their simple and ordinary lifestyle, inaccessible locality as well as failure of different governments in disseminating education and other basic services among the community.

Their unique language, faith and custom are other factors that alienated them from the mainstream societies. Especially, their custom of marrying only within their own caste refrained them from achieving financial security through integration into the mainstream Hindu societies in the country. However, this custom might have ultimately saved the community from disappearing from the face of the earth.

Deprived of any coverage under the social security programmes of the government, the uneducated and jobless Koras are now a marginalised community that is on the brink of extinction for the remainder of the inherited land they still possess, said Saleq.

Three Kora youths -- Kina Kora, Thopal Kora and Satal Kora -- fought for this land during the Liberation War in 1971, but the entire community of the Koras is now fighting for the own passed down land in this sovereign country, lamented a few elderly Koras.

Urging the government to create jobs

for the Koras' survival, freedom fighter Kina Kora said they now live from hand to mouth, working as day labourers for less than the standard minimum wage at agricultural farms surrounding Korapara. "The members of family go unfed when there's no work."

A young resident named Krishna Kora said persecuted and intimidated by "the powerful", around 30 Kora families left for India in the last 15 years. "Influential locals including Kamruzzaman of Haljaj village and nine others forcefully occupied 40 acres our land years ago."

According to British land records of 1943, the Koras owned 55 acres of land, but the community now possesses only 15 acres.

They are still being persecuted for this meagre amount of land, Krishna said, alleging that Kamruzzaman has created an atmosphere of intimidation by filing two cases against 25 Koras and on March 6 last year, he and his goons in an attack injured 10 Koras. "Of them, six had to be hospitalised. The attackers didn't even spare the children."

Sonia Kora, an elderly resident of Korapara, said the Kora population is falling fast due to intimidation of the

influential encroachers of their land.

Since the attack on them last year, four more Kora families left the country, she also said.

During a recent visit to Korapara, 21 Kora families were found living in thatched shanties, without any toilet facility, on nearly 50 decimals of land. For drinking water, they now rely on a tube well that was installed only recently by a non-governmental organisation.

On November 23, 2019, when asked about the March 6 attack on the Koras, allegedly under his leadership, Kamruzzaman claimed that he was not aware of any such attack on them.

He further claimed that in 1987, his father purchased 65 decimals of land in Korapara.

Golam Rasul, who was recently transferred from his officer-in-charge post at Biral Police Station, said following filing of a case by Krishna Kora over the March 6 attack, police submitted charge sheet with a local court, accusing Kamruzzaman and three others.

Rabindranath Soren, president of Jatiya Adivasi Parishad, urged the government to take immediate steps for saving the Koras of Dinajpur from going extinct.

## Dinajpur to recall 'mine blast tragedy' today

Over 200 FFs killed on this day in 1972

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Today the people of Dinajpur recall the horrific memory of mine blast tragedy in the town in 1972, leaving at least 235 freedom fighters (FFs) dead.

The FFs had been staying at a transit camp in Balubari area of the town.

According to the freedom fighters, the Pakistani troops planted hundreds of ground mines at different places in the district as they sensed their defeat after the nine-month-long fierce fight against the valiant FFs.

The freedom fighters collected the mines and stored those at Dinajpur Moharaja Girijanath High School compound after the victory.

According to witnesses and survivors, around 800 freedom fighters from different districts, including Dinajpur, Thakurgaon, Panchagarh, Joypurhat, Naogaon and Rangpur, started residing at the transit camp soon after the independence of Bangladesh was declared.

The freedom fighters of the camp engaged themselves to collect the landmines and gather those on the camp premises.

Besides the landmines, the transit camp was full of other explosives like tank mine, antipersonnel-mine and mortars.

On January 6 in 1972, the recovered mines were brought to the transit camp in two trucks from Ghoraghat upazila when the freedom fighters in the transit camp were preparing to offer their evening prayers.

Some freedom fighters were engaged to unload the mines.

The horrific incident occurred in a second, as a landmine slipped on the ground from the hands of a freedom fighter. Just in a few second, all the landmines of the area went off with loud noise and the big flame was visible from distant area in the district. The explosion rocked the entire Dinajpur town.

Around 200 freedom fighters were killed on the spot, said Forhat Hossain a freedom fighter of Dinajpur while scores of them were injured badly.

After the incident their bodies were rescued and dumped at Chehelgazi Mazaar, under Dinajpur Sadar upazila with state honour next day, he said.

All were buried without shrouds, added Forhat.

So far, 235 of the deceased freedom fighters have been identified, he said.

But after 48 years of that tragedy, the exact dead number could not be collected due to lack of proper initiatives.

## 4 held, arms, ammo, drugs seized in 3 dists

STAR COUNTRY DESK

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested four people with arms, ammunition and yaba from different places in Chapainawabganj, Dinajpur and Kurigram in the last two days.

The elite force arrested a man with four pistols, a one-shooter gun, eight magazines and 15 rounds of bullets from Chhoto Jambaria area of Bholahat upazila in Chapainawabganj on Saturday evening, reports our correspondent.

The arrestee is Soyab Ali, 38, son of Abdus Sattar of Santoshpur village under Gomostapur upazila in the district.

Our Dinajpur correspondent reports: Rab arrested a couple with a one-shooter gun, a bullet and 100 yaba pills from a border area in Birampur upazila of Dinajpur on Saturday night.

Our Kurigram correspondent adds: A team from Rab-13 in Rangpur arrested a man and seized a one-shooter gun, a bullet and five kg of ganja in Balarhat border area under Phulbari upazila on Saturday night.

## Patuakhali town to get five new drains

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Patuakhali municipality has recently started construction of drains to save townspeople from waterlogging.

The prevailing 23.75-km drainage system was built in 1892, covering about 30 square kilometres area for around 1.15 lakh residents.

Insufficient drainage system and rainwater coupled with tidal surges from rivers Lohalia in the east and Lawkathi in the north cause flooding and subsequent water stagnation in the town during the monsoon.

To ease people's sufferings, five separate drains are being constructed under a Tk 7.30 crore project titled 'Coastal Town Environment Infrastructures Project' funded by Asian Development Bank (ADB), said HM Solaiman, assistant engineer of

Patuakhali municipality.

Of them, 1.50-km-long drain is being built from Patuakhali Government College to Jainkathi Badghat, 397-metre from Patuakhali health care centre to PDSA canal, 561-metre from fire service office to SP office, 456-metre from income tax office to Muslim graveyard, and 566-metre from freedom fighters' memorial to public library office.

"We hope to complete the project by June this year," said the engineer.

All drains are linked with the two rivers, Lohalia and Lawkathi, and Bahalgachia canal through the town, he added.

After completion of the drains, most areas of the municipality would be free from water stagnation, said Md Mohiuddin Ahmed, mayor of the municipality.

"We are working to ensure equal rights for all citizens," said the mayor.



A basin without water supply, a dirty toilet, and two locked toilets adjoining the honours building of Government Rajendra College in Faridpur speak volumes about the awful sanitary conditions of the large institution.

PHOTO: STAR



GOVT RAJENDRA COLLEGE

## Thousands of students suffer as sanitation awful

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

Scanty sanitation facilities remain a nuisance for a large number of students of Government Rajendra College in Faridpur for long.

As many as 19,500 students, including 12,500 males and 7,000 females, are now enrolled with the college established on 54 acres of land in 1918.

The institution now comprises two campuses -- 'degree campus' comprising the classrooms for intermediate and degree (pass course) students at Jiltuli and 'honours campus' at Baitul Aman in Faridpur municipality.

There are only 43 toilets for the large number of students at the two campuses, 35 for males

and 8 others for females, said sources at the college office.

On an average, there is one toilet for 875 female students and one for 291 male students.

On a recent visit to the college, this correspondent learnt that there are no toilets for female students at 12 departments among 19 at the honours campus.

The two toilets adjacent to Bangla and philosophy departments at the honours building remain close most of the time, several students said.

"There is no toilet for female students in our department although we have to stay long hours for classes here," said Nadia Akter, a student of political science.

Seeking anonymity, a male student of English and a female student of accounting said they have to face odds while responding to the call of nature due to shortage of toilets and their unhygienic conditions.

"The toilets on our college campus is too inadequate for the large number of students while the existing toilets are too dirty. Despite our appeals, no step has been taken to solve the problem," said Pranta Saha, a student of marketing.

Asked about the situation, Prof Mosharrif Ali, principal of Government Rajendra College, said, "There is no problems regarding toilets at the college. None complained to us in this regard."



The under-construction drain along College Road in Patuakhali town.

PHOTO: STAR