



Even with the absence of a proper playground, the spirited youths of Khulna couldn't be stopped in their quest of playing a lively match of football -- be it in open spaces or on the bank of Bhairab river. This photo was taken recently from Ghat-7.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

ENCROACHMENT, pollution ruin Sundari's charm

MIRZA SHAKIL, Tangail

Once aptly named for its beauty, the Sundari canal at Karatia in Tangail Sadar upazila has now lost its beauty, after bearing witness to mindless pollution and widespread encroachment.

Also known as Katakhali Khal to locals, Sundari flows through Sadar and Basail upazilas of the district, although it is slowly drying up throughout the route.

The canal originates from Louhajang river at Karatia in Sadar upazila and ends five kilometres away at Jhenai river in Nothkhola under Basail upazila.

Karatia's zamindar Wazed Ali Khan Pannee Chand Miah, locally known as "Atiyar Chand", dug the canal at the beginning of 1900 to facilitate communication in the area, said several elderly citizens.

The canal was named Sundari because of the beauty it brought to the natural environment at both of its sides.

Water used to flow through the canal throughout the year, including during the dry season, said elderly locals, adding that wholesalers from different parts of the country would come to the Karatia Market, one of the biggest weekly markets in the country, on large boats.

Students from different parts of the district came to Government Saadat College through the canal, said Alim Mahmud, former principal of the institution. But today, the canal has been filled up and water flow has stopped at different places. The water has also become polluted, posing a health hazard for locals, he said.

Students and teachers of the college, especially those who live at its hostels, are the worst sufferers of the smell that emits from the garbage dumped into the canal, he added.

While taking to The Daily Star, Khalekuzzaman Chowdhury Maznu, chairman of Karatia Union Parishad, said all the garbage of Karatia Bazar is dumped into the canal.

The waterbody needs to be excavated to revive its flow, he said, adding that the union parishad can not do it due to lack of funds.

Meanwhile, under the Flood Action Plan (FAP)-20 Project in 1992, the Water Development Board constructed a sluice gate near the source of Louhajang river at Jugni in Sadar upazila. Following this, navigation in the river was completely stopped. As a result,

The canal was named Sundari because of the beauty it brought to the natural environment at both of its sides.

the water flow of the Sundari canal also decreased.

During a recent visit, this correspondent saw different structures, including commercial ones, erected at different places including near the Karatia Bazar, while waste remained piled up near the Karatia Bridge. Although an eviction drive was initiated by

the district administration in December 2015, it discontinued for unknown reasons, locals said.

Asked about the matter, Shahjahan Ansary, chairman of upazila parishad in Tangail Sadar, said even though it's true that the Sundari canal remains polluted, it hasn't been encroached. Previously the canal was partially cleaned through a project but later, it returned to its previous state, he said.

"The canal is the lifeline of Karatia union. I have already raised the matter at the District Development Coordination Committee meetings," Shahjahan added.

Contacted, Khairul Islam, assistant commissioner (land) of Tangail Sadar upazila, said they have resisted a recent bid to construct a concrete structure by grabbing the canal.

"Necessary steps will be taken to free the canal from encroachment soon," the official added.



Sundari, the canal that once vivaciously welcomed visitors with its grace, is presently a victim of mindless pollution and encroachment. Waste dumping in the canal by people and nearby markets has blocked its natural flow, plaguing the canal's surroundings with a putrid smell. Continued inaction by authorities is worsening the water body's state, the greatest sufferers being those who live near it.

PHOTO: STAR



First from Kora community to enter university

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

The Kora community. A small ethnic group living in Dinaipur's Biral upazila. Before Bangladesh's independence, around 200 Kora families used to inhabit the upazila. But faced with persecution, land grabbing and discrimination, the number has now come down to a mere 21 families.

According to a The Daily Star report published on January 6, 2020, the impoverished community has been living in constant fear of persecution by local influentials, who like to call the Kora "outsiders", despite their legacy stretching back to the British period at least.

British land records of 1943 say they used to own 55 acres of land. Today, they only have 15.

But the community has recently earned itself a reason to be proud of, as one of their own made it into a university for the first time.

On Thursday, Lapol Kora got admitted to Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University in Mymensingh, etching his name in the community's history. He chose theatre and performance studies as his subject.

Hailing from Rangon village in Biral upazila, the journey wasn't easy for Lapol, who lost his father Ratan Kora as a fifth grader. Following the tragedy, his mother Swatol Kora took the helm of the family by farming on their homestead. Lapol studied at Rangon Primary School and Haljay High School, before completing HSC from Board College.

Lapol, who is also a multi-instrumentalist musician, said he was supported with a scholarship for small ethnic community members.

Ismat Ara Bhuiya Ela, an associate professor of Lapol's department, said they are proud of him for his achievements.

Before Bangladesh's independence, around 200 Kora families used to inhabit the upazila. But faced with persecution, land grabbing and discrimination, the number has now come down to a mere 21 families.

“After my brother had to dropout due to financial constraints, I took it upon myself to further my education.”

LAPOL KORA



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