

**BANGLADESH
UPDATE**



2,293
New cases in 24hrs



4,67,225
Total cases



6,675
Deaths



3,83,224
Recoveries

**GLOBAL
UPDATE**



1,477,777
Deaths



63,777,845
Total cases

SC yet to settle CHT regional council issue

ASHUTOSH SARKAR

Nine years have passed after two separate appeals were filed with the Supreme Court's Appellate Division challenging the High Court verdict that declared the Chattogram Hill Tracts Regional Council illegal and unconstitutional.

But the apex court could not settle the issue regarding the legality of CHT Regional Council as the parties concerned of the case have not apparently taken any extensive move for hearing the appeals for their disposal.

A long hearing is needed for the Appellate Division to settle the issue of CHT Regional Council as the matter is related with historical, political and constitutional aspects, Belayet Hossain, a lawyer concerned of the case, told The Daily Star on November 29.

Therefore, there is no possibility of quick settlement of this issue, as the apex

court is now running judicial functions through the virtual system due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, he added.

Belayet is one of the counsels for the writ petitioners who had challenged the legality of the CHT Regional Council at the HC.

The lawyer said Abdur Razzaq, the principal counsel for the petitioners, was not in the country.

Razzaq, who is set to place arguments on behalf of the writ petitioners, is now in London on personal business. But it could not be known when he will come back to the country, he said.

The CHT Regional Council has been functioning under the leadership of Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Lama, popularly known as Santu Lama, since its formation in 1999 after the signing of the historic CHT Peace Accord 1997.

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Some officials

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If anyone goes to any country on these visas, they should have a return ticket. But no one took the return ticket which is a fault on part of the airlines, and their officers are involved, the CID boss added.

"Most of the trafficked people travelled with the two airlines. We also spoke to senior officials of the two airlines," Mahbubur said.

About taking people on tourist visas or on visas for attending different conferences without return tickets, the CID chief said they interrogated the airlines staffers, but they failed to give any "satisfactory answer" in this regard.

"We talked to members of the senior management of the airlines who said some of their colleagues admitted to them that they had links [with human traffickers]."

During departure, the trafficked people showed return tickets which were fake. Immigration officials cannot see whether those were issued, but airlines can see whether the return tickets were issued or not, he added.

A CID official, wishing anonymity, said an employee of one of the airlines had already been arrested and sent to jail.

On November 27, Interpol issued red notices against six Bangladeshi fugitives

involved in human trafficking in various countries in the Middle East and Europe after Bangladesh police on October 18 sought its help in arresting them.

The move came following the killing of 26 Bangladeshi migrant workers in a Libyan desert town Mezda on May 26 this year.

The traffickers are Minto Mia, 41, Shapan, 28, Tanzirul, 35, and Jafar Ekbal, 38, from Kishoreganj, Molla Nazrul Islam, 43, from Madaripur, and Shahadat Hossain, 28, from Dhaka. Tanzirul is currently in Italy.

The CID chief said 38 Bangladeshi nationals had been trafficked to Libya on different times since May 2019. They were taken to Benghazi, Libya, though they were promised to be sent to Italy and Spain.

Twenty-six of them were shot dead for ransom, and in connection with the incident, 26 cases were filed across the country against 299 people on charge of human trafficking. The CID filed three of the cases and the rest were lodged by the victims' families.

The CID is investigating 25 of the cases and has so far arrested 171 people. In one of the cases filed in Habiganj, a charge sheet was submitted.

Of the arrested accused, 42 have already given confessional statements before courts, he said.

Life sentence means 30 yrs

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Crimes Tribunal under International Crimes Tribunals Act, 1973, the convict will not be entitled to get the benefit of section 35A of the Code of Criminal Procedure, the apex court said.

A seven-member bench of the Appellate Division, headed by Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain, delivered the verdict by a majority decision following a review petition filed by a convict, Ataur Mridha.

The SC did not disclose the names of its judges who gave their consent to the decision and who differed.

Interpreting the short verdict, Attorney General AM Amin Uddin told reporters that if the court concerned sentences a convict only to life imprisonment and does not say imprisonment until death, he or she will have to serve in jail for 30 years and will get remission besides.

If the court sentences a convict to an imprisonment until death, he or she will have to serve in jail for the rest of natural life, the AG added.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Ataur's lawyer Mohammad Shishir Manir said there are more than 5,000 prisoners who have been convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment by courts. The prisoners will have to serve in jail for 30 years and they will get remission of seven and a half years. Also, the tenures already served by them in jail will be deducted

from the 30-year jail sentence, he added.

He said the SC in its short verdict did not disclose whether his client Ataur would have to serve in jail until his natural death.

This issue will be cleared once the SC releases the full text of the verdict, Shishir added.

Ataur had filed the review petition challenging an apex court verdict that on February 14, 2017 commuted his death penalty to life imprisonment in a murder case.

The Appellate Division bench, headed by the then chief justice Surendra Kumar Sinha, had said life imprisonment means jail sentence until natural death of the convict.

Ataur submitted the petition to the SC seeking review of its judgment the same year. He said in the petition that under Section 57 of the Penal Code, life sentence refers to 30 years' prison term, which becomes 22.5 years after remission of seven and a half years.

During the hearing on the review petition, the apex court had earlier heard expert opinions from four amicus curiae (friends of court) -- senior lawyers AF Hasan Arif, Rakanuddin Mahmud, Abdur Rezak Khan and AM Amin Uddin -- on the issue.

Lawyers Khandker Mahbub Hossain and Shishir appeared for the petitioner while Attorney General AM Amin Uddin argued for the state on November 24.

19 public univs to have

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under the cluster -- one each for students of science, humanities and commerce groups -- based on the HSC syllabus. "It was also discussed that these tests will be held when the intensity of the Covid-19 reduces," said the VC.

The universities are: Islamic University, Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Khulna University, Hajee Mohammad Danesh Science and Technology University, Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University, Noakhali Science and Technology University, Jagannath University, Comilla University, Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University, Jessore University of Science and Technology, Pabna University of Science and Technology, Begum Rokeya University, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Science and Technology University, University of Barisal, Rangamati Science and Technology University, Rabindra University, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Digital University, Sheikh Hasina University, and Bangamata Sheikh Fojilatunnesa Mujib Science and Technology University.

On January 23, the UGC announced that it would go for a uniform admission test for the 2020-2021 academic year. Later in February it was decided in principal that universities would hold the admission test following a cluster system.

Five leading universities -- Dhaka University, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet), Rajshahi University, Jahangirnagar University and Chittagong University -- have showed reservations about the system.

While attending the virtual meeting yesterday, UGC Chairman Prof Kazi Shahidullah said there was no scope

for moving away from the decision of holding the cluster admission test considering the hassles of students and their guardians amid the pandemic.

Jagannath University VC Prof Mizanur Rahman said they would form a central admission committee, which would finalise the procedures of holding the test.

UGC officials said they would sit with VCs of all agricultural and engineering universities to know their current stance on the cluster admission test. They hope that all universities would join the new system.

Till last year, 32 of the 39 public universities held separate admission tests, as seven agricultural universities held a "uniform admission test".

When it comes to higher education, public universities remain students' top choice. But the number of seats is way lower than that of students seeking admission.

The public universities enrol around 65,000 students in a year.

The students' hassle begin after their Higher Secondary School Certificate (HSC) exams.

Many of them turn to coaching centres to prepare for admission tests. They buy admission forms for different units of multiple universities and spend a lot of time and money on travel and accommodation.

They often travel with parents or guardians, and sometimes have to check into hotels for overnight stay. There are cases when a candidate has to take separate tests for seats in separate faculties, even separate departments, in one university.

The UGC has long been suggesting modifying the existing admission process, saying it is too expensive and coaching-oriented.



Once inhabited by seven Mro families, Lulaing Mukh Mro Para in Bandarban's Lama upazila was grabbed by influential people about 20 years ago. They have now set up shops and homes here to occupy the land. Members of the Mro community, evicted from their ancestral land, can now hardly visit the Buddhist temple, left. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

I see no change in US-Bangla ties

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democracy is a struggle, ongoing and imperfect to live up to our founding principles. We will continue to do everything to promote US foreign policy for the best interests of the people of the US and of Bangladesh.

One thing that won't certainly change is the interest in the American private sector for investment in Bangladesh. During my more than two years of time here, I can see much more interest in Bangladesh. I am also encouraging American businesses and trade delegations to come to Dhaka and see what the country has to offer.

One thing that's immensely exciting here is the entrepreneurial energy among the people. In my three decades of experience in foreign service, I would put Bangladesh's business acumen and desire to expand businesses and investment at greater than any country that I have served. You have to come and feel for yourselves and talk to people, especially the young people here, to get that type of buzz here. We are going to see that more, no matter who is in the White House. In the commercial sector, our relationship is going from strength to strength.

DS: Can you specify how the US-led Indo-Pacific Strategy will benefit Bangladesh?

Miller: The US sees Bangladesh as a key partner in this region. We are committed to growing that partnership that is rooted in the development of sustainable and creative solutions to maximise the enormous potential in the region.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, during his recent visit to Sri Lanka, said this vision is not imposing America's will on any nation. It's quite the opposite. As a friend and partner, the US seeks to promote an inclusive approach to national sovereignty, independence, and sustainable development. It's more a call to rally around principles than a request to make alliances.

In a nutshell, the US is seeking to promote market-based economies and an open investment climate, fair

and reciprocal trade consistent with international law and principles of fair competition. We also support good governance, rule of law, respect for civil liberties, protection for sovereign maritime rights and the principles of the law of the sea, and most of the shared values that contributed to remarkable growth in the past decade.

We are seeking to partner with all the countries across the Indo-Pacific to support this initiative for the interest of every nation. It's not a counter to the Belt and Road Initiative of China. It's our vision for the region so that we can work for the peaceful and prosperous region. The way we do it is multifaceted. We are already well on our way to work on that vision with Bangladesh.

DS: Japanese Ambassador to Bangladesh Ito Naoki recently told this newspaper that a sustainable solution to the Rohingya crisis is part of a free and open Indo-Pacific. What does the US envision as a solution to the Rohingya refugee crisis?

Miller: The US has been the world's most vocal advocate for Myanmar to establish conditions on the ground for peaceful, sustainable and dignified repatriation of the Rohingyas [around a million Rohingya refugees who fled a military crackdown in 2017 are living in Cox's Bazar]. We need an international effort to back up that advocacy. We provide humanitarian assistance but also apply pressure on Myanmar. We need Myanmar's neighbours in the region to step up to help us in Geneva, in New York and in their capitals to ensure that Myanmar does the right things so these people in fact can return to their homes.

The Rohingya refugee crisis is one of the US Embassy's top priorities. There is enormous interest back in Washington in what we can do to help Bangladesh, working with the international community to do the right thing for the Rohingyas.

Apart from humanitarian assistance, one of the things that need to be done is to put pressure on Myanmar to take the Rohingyas back. That has to be done with the entire international community

coming together to do the right thing because it is a huge burden on the part of Bangladesh.

DS: The longer the refugee crisis continues, is there greater likelihood of a threat to regional peace?

Miller: There are so many issues involved in this crisis and you simply can't keep so many people without the potential of unsettling regional security. There is the risk of increased criminality, increased radicalisation, with the number of young people -- how do they plan for their future? That's a burden that should not be solely on the shoulders of Bangladesh.

DS: How can the US and Bangladesh better collaborate on vaccine accessibility and Covid-19 management?

Miller: I cannot say specifically on vaccine cooperation, but over the last seven to eight months we have been talking to the health ministry and government officials on how to better manage Covid-19. Obviously, we have to continue to do the prudent things like wearing masks, washing hands, and maintaining social distancing, but when a proven vaccine is rolled out -- how do you do that strategically? We have the same conversation in the US -- who gets the first tranche of the vaccine? We are having this conversation now but I cannot give you any specific details on that.

It is encouraging that we are close to an effective vaccine. Even when the vaccine is rolled out, we have to continue the prudent measures because it is going in the wrong direction [infections and the death toll due to coronavirus is rising] in the US. We can't simply wait for the vaccine to eliminate the problem.

That's something we are working on with Bangladesh. The US has provided \$68.7 million to Bangladesh for Covid-19 management since the outbreak. The US is one of Bangladesh's most enduring partners and we can work together in any way to ensure the health of Bangladeshi people. We are going to work together every way we can and make sure everyone has the healthcare they need.

Yaba flows in as drives lose steam

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months (August and September) compared to that in the two months before the Sinha killing.

Yaba dealers and peddlers said there has been a significant rise in smuggling of the pills from Myanmar in recent months.

"Yaba pills are entering the country in huge volumes, causing a drop in their prices in Teknaf and other areas," said a dealer in Teknaf, seeking anonymity.

DROP IN SEIZURE

Between June and July, police recovered 21.88 lakh pink pills across the country. It fell to 12.74 lakh pieces between August and September, according to the Police Headquarters (PHQ) data.

There was no seizure of large yaba consignments by police in Cox's Bazar and Chattogram in August and September.

Rab members, however, seized significant amounts of yaba pills in the port city during the period.

No policemen were seen at the four entry checkpoints in Chattogram city for around 20 days from August 1. The crazy pills enter the city from Cox's Bazar and are then transported to different areas.

From mid-September, the Chattogram Metropolitan Police started carrying out drives and recovered a small amount of yaba pills in the port city. On November 21, police seized a big consignment of 1.48 lakh pills in

Chattogram's Chandgaon area.

In Cox's Bazar, no anti-drugs activities by police have been noticed since the Sinha killing. Only the Armed Police Battalion (APBn) members, who are on duty at different Rohingya camps, seized yaba pills at several checkpoints.

Md Hasanuzzaman, the superintendent of police in Cox's Bazar, recently told journalists that they were preparing a new list of drug dealers and would launch drives after scrutinising it.

Generally, it's the police who seize the bulk of yaba consignments every month.

Statistics show that following the Sinha killing, police in August seized 4.64 lakh yaba pills against 16.85 lakh pieces seized by Rab.

In September, police seized around 8.10 lakh yaba pills and Rab 12.43 lakh pieces.

The Border Guard Bangladesh and the Department of Narcotics Control together seized 5.41 lakh yaba pills in August and 8.08 lakh pieces in September.

Those involved in yaba trade in Teknaf said the smugglers cashed in on lax monitoring and scaled up their activities.

This led to a fall in the price of good quality yaba pills by Tk 10-20 each in Teknaf in case of bulk buying. Earlier, a pill was sold for Tk 40-50, they mentioned.

Some peddlers in the capital said

the supply is now steady. Good quality pills known as "smart" are sold for Tk 150-200 each at the Geneva Camp in Mohammadpur and Karwan Bazar if one buys 10-20 pills at a time. Earlier, the price was Tk 250 each.

'ZERO TOLERANCE'

Md Sohul Rana, spokesperson for the police headquarters, said police are showing zero tolerance to those involved in narcotics trade.

Asked about the rise in yaba smuggling since August, Sohul, assistant inspector general (Media and Public Relations) at the PHQ, said, "The intensity of operations and drives may vary at different times."

Police are not the only force responsible for curbing the spread of drugs, he said.

"Once narcotics enter the country, those are transported to different areas. It then becomes very difficult for police to control. Still, we are trying," he mentioned.

Contacted, Director General of the Department of Narcotics Control Muhammed Ahsanul Jabbar did not agree that both smuggling and supply of yaba have increased in recent times.

He claimed that they are working hard to check yaba smuggling.

[Our correspondents FM Mizanur Shipon from Chattogram and Mohammad Ali Zinnat from Cox's Bazar contributed to this report.]

Crux of the crisis

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could not formulate the necessary rules for this and that's why it remained ineffective."

Contacted, Md Shafiqul Ahammad, secretary of CHT affairs ministry, said "We hope we will get the rules from the land ministry within December."

CHT Land Dispute Resolution Commission Chairman Justice Anwar-ul Haque, in a meeting held in Bandarban in February, said, "We are still waiting for the formulation of the rules of business to settle the fate of more than 24,000 petitions on land disputes."

Nipon Tripura, organising secretary of Parbatya Chattogram Pahari Chhatra Parishad, said, "Of the 72 clauses of the peace accord, only 25 clauses have been implemented fully, 12 partially, and the remaining 35 are not implemented yet."

The issues that need to be fully resolved include returning of grabbed land to indigenous owners by ending disputes through the Land Commission, rehabilitation of returning refugees and internally displaced indigenous families, and cancellation of land leases given to non-residents, he observed.

CHINESE DAM UPSTREAM

India plans dam on Brahmaputra to offset impact

REUTERS, New Delhi

India is considering a plan to build a 10 gigawatts (GW) hydropower project in a remote eastern state, an Indian official said yesterday, following reports that China could construct dams on a section of the Brahmaputra river.

The river, also known as the Yarlung Tsangpo in China, flows from Tibet into India's Arunachal Pradesh state and down through Assam to Bangladesh. Indian authorities are concerned Chinese projects could trigger flash floods or create water scarcity.

Bangladesh could

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Of the four, all but the third submarine cable project are revised schemes.

Talking about the third submarine cable project, Planning Commission Member Shamsul Alam said the demand for internet bandwidth is increasing by 60 to 70 percent a year in the country.

A major reason for taking up another submarine cable project is that the operational life of the country's first submarine cable will end soon, he added.

"Bhutan have already officially contacted us to import internet bandwidth. Besides, Saudi Arabia has also expressed its eagerness to procure internet bandwidth from Bangladesh," Shamsul said.

Another Planning Commission Member Mamun-Al-Rashid said Bangladesh Submarine Cable Company Limited (BSCCL) under the Ministry of Post, Telecommunications and ICT will implement the project by June 2024.

Under the project, Bangladesh will be connected to the undersea cable SEA-ME-WE 6 (South East Asia-Middle East-Western Europe), an optical fibre submarine communications cable system, officials said.

Bangladesh got connected to its first undersea cable, SEA-ME-WE 4, in 2006 and to the second one, SEA-ME-WE 5, in 2017.

The country now has a bandwidth capacity of 2,600 Gbps from two submarine cables. The third undersea cable will add another 7,200 Gbps, said BSCCL sources.

Yesterday, the Ecne meeting gave the go-ahead to a proposal for extending the tenure of the project titled "Modernisation of Telecommunication Network for Digital Connectivity" by two years.

The three-year project was supposed to be completed by June this year. Following the extension of the project, its cost will go up by Tk 742 crore to Tk 3,315 crore.

At the meeting, the prime minister instructed the Bangladesh Telecommunications Company Limited (BTCL) to expand its services to all remote areas, including Haor, Beel and Char.

The Ecne also approved the second revision of the Municipal Governance and Services Project and a first revision of a project to re-excavate different rivers in Narsingdi.

Pledge-bound

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the assassination of Bangabandhu) had created divisions between the Bangalees and the people in the hills for their self-interest instead of maintaining social stability there.

Killings, tortures and injustice, grabbing of lands and wealth and misuse of the state resources had made the region more unstable, she added.

Hasina said that in 2001 the then BNP-Jamaat alliance government had opposed the historic peace agreement and wanted to destabilise the hilly region again. But their ill efforts went in vain, she added.

"We are pledge-bound to maintain peace across the country, including in the CHT," she said during her speech.

The PM said CHT was no more a backward locality because of the timely steps taken by the government.

On December 2 in 1997, the historic CHT Peace Accord was signed without the mediation of any third party, with a view to stopping bloody conflicts in the CHT, the premier said.