

BANGLADESH UPDATE

2,293
New cases in 24hrs4,67,225
Total cases6,675
Deaths3,83,224
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE

1,477,777
Deaths63,777,845
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 Larma, popularly known as Santu Larma, since its formation in 1999 after the signing of the historic CHT Peace Accord 1997.

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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

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 Jafor 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 benefits.

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, Rokanuddin Mahmud, Abdur Rezaq 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, Jessor 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 Bangabandhu Sheikh Fojlalunnisa 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 principle 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.

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

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They said the island has been totally transformed into a clean city and that it is a much better place for the Rohingya refugees compared to their current living conditions in Cox's Bazar.

This correspondent talked to some of the representatives during a recent visit to the island.

Tuhin Sen, assistant project coordinator of Pulse Bangladesh Society, said Rohingya refugees should be shifted to Bhasan Char

as they will get more space for recreational activities and families will get privacy and safer than they are in Cox's Bazar.

Mozammel Hoque, project in-charge of Multi-Serve International, said the Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar are using temporary toilets, which often leak and are unhygienic.

But in the island, all the toilets are permanent and concrete, which is hygienic, he said.

SM Imdadul Islam, coordinator of SAWAB, said there is a risk of landslides in Cox's Bazar.

"So, it will be safer if the community starts living in the island," he observed.

Enam Ahmed, media assistant of RTM International, an NGO that deals with women's health issues, said the island has two hospitals and is also equipped with a sea ambulance and helicopter for emergencies, so it would be easier to get

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 Sohel 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, Sohel, 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 Mohammed 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 Shiron from Chattogram and Mohammad Ali Zinnat from Cox's Bazar contributed to this report.]

2,500 Rohingyas soon to be there

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"With 120 cluster villages capable of accommodating around one lakh people, the housing project in Bhasan Char is ready. We are waiting for the Rohingyas to come and start living here until they return to their country," he said.

Meanwhile, representatives of around 22 NGOs visited the island on Sunday and expressed their satisfaction about the overall arrangements in place.

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better treatment.

In the island, the authorities have also ensured security arrangements.

Last Sunday, some 213 Armed Police Battalion (APBn) members moved to the island and around 30 police members, including 10 females, have started working to maintain internal security, according to project officials.

Md Fakir, a cowboy from Noakhali district, said that he is living in the island for the last nine years.