

IS cap came from jail

FROM PAGE 20
café attack case on Wednesday, Regan, who was in the dock, wore the cap emblazoned with the emblem of the Islamic State, a global militant outfit.

He still had the cap on when police brought him out of the courtroom and took him to a prison van parked on the court premises. Inside the van, another death row convict Jahangir Alam alias Rajib Gandhi was seen wearing a similar cap.

The court sentenced Regan, Jahangir, and five other militants to death for their involvement in the 2016 attack in the capital’s Gulshan, which left 22 people, including 17 foreigners, dead.

But from where did the cap come from? This question dominated

everyone’s conversation both in court and on social media.

On Wednesday, Mahbubul Islam, jailer of the Dhaka Central Jail in Keraniganj, said they handed over the accused to the representative of detectives and Special Branch of police after searching them.

“We have all the video footage which show that they left without having any such caps on them,” he said, claiming that there was no scope of collecting the cap from within the prison.

On the day, the jail authorities also formed a three-member committee, led by the additional IG prisons, to probe whether the jail authorities had any involvement in this matter.

The committee has been asked to submit its report within five days.

‘We no longer have dreams’

FROM PAGE 20
The three bodies landed in Dhaka yesterday morning in a chartered flight.

Some 152 Bangladeshis were brought back by the government from Libya in the flight, reported UNB.

International Organization for Migration (IOM) supported Bangladesh government for safe return of the migrants.

In a statement, International Organization for Migration (IOM) Bangladesh Chief of Mission Giorgi Gigauri said, “These migrants found themselves in perilous conditions in Libya and were desperate to get back home. We supported their voluntary return, ensuring their safety and dignity. We are also extending our support for them to achieve sustainable reintegration, in full respect for human rights.”

Another official of IOM Bangladesh

told The Daily Star that 10 of the 152 Bangladeshis who were injured received treatment in Bangladesh.

He said the Bangladeshis were kept at a safe home in Libya. They were brought back after they gave consent for return home.

Despite such situation, many Bangladeshis opted to stay in the country hoping to change their fortunes, either by pursuing jobs there or seeking opportunity to go to Europe across the Mediterranean via illegal routes, said the IOM official, seeking anonymity.

Tripoli has been under attack since early April from forces loyal to east Libya-based commander Khalifa Haftar, according to Reuters.

His Libyan National Army (LNA) have used drones and fighter jets to carry out air strikes amid sporadic fighting.

Onion prices

FROM PAGE 20
Some 39 containers of onions from China and Egypt imported by Khatunganj-based BSM Group arrived on three vessels, according to data available at the port.

MCC Taipei, which carried 20 containers with around 580 tonnes of onions, berthed at a port jetty on Monday and started delivering onions on Wednesday.

One of the two other vessels carrying 19 containers loaded with around 500 tonnes of onions berthed yesterday.

Another vessel OEL Straits carrying 30 containers loaded with about 850 tonnes of onions imported by Meghna Group arrived at the outer anchorage on Tuesday.

Besides the 69 containers, 35 more containers, carrying around 980 tonnes of onion, were imported by some traders on separate vessels. These would get berths within a few days, said Omar Faruk, secretary of Chattogram Port Authority.

BSM Group Chairman Abul Bashar Chowdhury said for the first time, they were importing onions following a request of the government and that they imported around 1,100 tonnes in the first phase from China and Egypt.

The onion market will be stable if small or large importers start importing onions, he said.

He added that around 1,000 tonnes more of his imported onion consignments were on the way and would reach the port by next week.

Mohamad Idris, general secretary of Hamidullah Mia Market Traders Association, said prices of all varieties of onion gradually dropped in the last three days following news of import of good quantity through Chattogram port.

Onion import from Myanmar through Teknaf land port was steady in the last one week. Twenty to 25 truck-loads were arriving in Khatunganj every day, he said.

According to data from Teknaf customs, about 6,327.52 tonnes of onions were delivered from the port in the last seven days until Wednesday.

However, the latest price drop in the wholesale market was yet to impact retail.

While visiting two kitchen markets in the port city yesterday, retailers were seen selling Myanmar’s onions from Tk 190 to Tk 200 a kg, Egypt’s variety for Tk 160 to Tk 180 a kg, and the Chinese ones for Tk 140 a kg.



People hold up lights from their mobile phones as they take part in a gathering of thanks at Edinburgh Place in Hong Kong’s Central district yesterday, after US President Donald Trump signed legislation requiring an annual review of freedoms in Hong Kong.

PHOTO: AFP

Trump signs HK rights act

FROM PAGE 20
internal affairs,” the city government said in a statement, warning the move would “send the wrong message to the protesters”.

POLICE COMB PROTEST SITE
Hong Kongers have protested in huge numbers over the last six months, fuelled by years of growing fears that authoritarian China is stamping out the city’s liberties.

The territory’s Beijing-backed leaders have offered few concessions and police have cracked down hard on protesters in increasingly violent confrontations.

More than 5,800 people have been arrested and nearly 1,000 charged, with detentions skyrocketing in the last two months.

Yesterday, police entered the campus of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, to which they have laid siege for days.

Most protesters have now left, some of them arrested and beaten as they tried to flee, and police were collecting evidence including Molotov cocktails and archery bows at the ransacked site.

The violence has done little to dampen public support though, with pro-democracy candidates winning a landslide victory in local council elections over the weekend.

The Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act requires the US president to annually review the city’s favourable trade status and threatens to revoke it if the semi-autonomous territory’s freedoms are quashed.

Trump also signed legislation banning the sale of tear gas, rubber bullets and other equipment used by Hong Kong security forces in putting down the protests.

Hong Kong activists said the move would help build international support.

Production on despite loss

FROM PAGE 20
The agreement had a condition that if the authorities produces any crop other than raw materials for the mills, the land would be given back to the Santals. The mill did fail and the Santals returned but they were driven out violently with their homes being looted and torched.

It has been three years since the Santals living on a sugarcane farm in Gaibandha were brutally evicted by police backed by influentials in an operation that left three Santals dead and many injured with many more missing on November 6, 2016.

Since then, around 1,200 Santal families are living in tents near the area amidst uncertainty and fear.

The mill authorities first violated the agreement when the mill shut down in 2004, and they began leasing the land out to local influential groups at a rate of Tk 2,000 per acre. The mill remained shut for three years, said Santal leaders.

These influential groups then began sub-leasing the lands to famers

to grow crops at Tk 30,000 per acre, locals said.

The farmers cultivated paddy, wheat, maize, potato, mustard, and even the environmentally harmful tobacco on the lands.

Finding local influential people cashing in on their ancestral lands, the Santal families initiated a movement by forming Shahebganj-Bagda Farm Land Restoration Movement Committee in 2013.

Learning about the movement, Bangladesh Sugar and Food Industries Corporation rebuked the mills authorities in a letter in August 2014 for creating “complexity among local people” by leasing the farm lands.

The letter, obtained by The Daily Star, mentioned that 1,460 acres of the total 1503.50 acres of cultivable lands had been leased till February 2015.

In an appeal to the government in 2015, the movement committee demanded their land rights over the violation. An investigation by the additional deputy commissioner of Gaibandha found grounds in their

claim. The Daily Star has obtained a copy of the investigation report as well.

The very next year, the mill authorities cancelled the leases and began increasing sugarcane farming.

They cultivated 7,300 tonnes of cane on 596 acres in 2016-17 raising the farm’s expenditure to Tk 5.37 crore, which was Tk 84.89 lakh in the previous year, despite no cane production then.

The authorities increased cane cultivation in the following years -- to 1,063.65 acres in 2017-18, yielding 10,045 tonnes of cane, and 1,013 acres in 2018-19, yielding 10,526 tonnes.

The managing director of the mill said the farm was dedicated to cane farming, to ensure raw materials for the sugar mill.

Average cane production at the farm stood at 10.69 tonnes an acre. However, local cane farmers could produce an average of 28 tonnes an acre in their private farms -- almost 2.5 times more.

During a visit to the farm last month, this correspondent noticed

Sir Abed

FROM PAGE 20
his successful work in alleviating poverty, especially of women and children.

Sir Abed is the lone Bangladeshi to be honoured with a knighthood by the British Crown. He was knighted in 2010.

He has been honoured with numerous national and international awards, including the Outstanding Member of the South Asian Diaspora Award this month.

Some other awards include World Food Prize (2015), Spanish Order of Civil Merit (2014), Leo Tolstoy International Gold Medal (2014), WISE Prize for Education (2011).

Artificial skin

FROM PAGE 20
University of Munich, tells CNN Business.

Robots are able to exert forces that could seriously injure a human being, so employers need to ensure they are aware of their surroundings and able to navigate around people.

“Touch enables safe robot operation, by detecting contact with unseen obstacles and giving the possibility to apply the correct force for achieving a task, without damaging objects, people and the robot itself,” Chiara Bartolozzi, a robotics expert at the Italian Institute of Technology, independent of the research, tells CNN Business.

Not only could this special skin make collaboration between humans and robots safer, it could also enable the future of robots as caregivers, health workers and companions.

To develop the synthetic skin, the researchers began by studying humans.

Each person has about 5 million skin receptors that register what’s happening on the body’s surface and send signals to the brain. But the brain can’t digest information from each one at the same time. Instead, the nervous system prioritizes new sensations.

Mimicking this, the team covered a human-size autonomous robot (known as H-1) with more than 13,000 sensors from shoulder to toe, that are able to detect temperature, acceleration, proximity and pressure.

Use of ports is linked to transit

FROM PAGE 1
Mongla Port. It gives greater flexibility in operations if both ports are used. Say, if one port is congested for the time being, the other may be used. We took into consideration the need of Nepal and Bhutan, for whom Mongla is more convenient. Later, the two countries finalised the standard operating procedures on use of the two ports. You see, both the ports are used by foreign ships for trade with Bangladesh. In case of India, use of the ports is linked to transit through Bangladesh -- agreements in this regard had existed since the partition of the subcontinent. Multimodality is a new dimension to transportation around the world. Indian goods will be carried across Bangladesh using road, rail, and inland water routes, whichever is convenient. They also need to store up the goods for some time. That needs warehouses. We are now not planning the whole thing together, but bit by bit, one after another. We are now improving roads for our own needs. India is also investing in improvement of the rail links. The Akhaura-Agartala train link is being established with Indian finance. Our benefit is that India will give us fees or charges for using our ports, inland water routes, roads and railways.

TDS: A committee was formed to fix fees for transporting Indian goods through Bangladesh. However, its recommendations were not accepted. Why?

Mashiur: The committee was set up by the commerce ministry. If the ministry had felt that the recommendations should have been made rules, it could have sought approval from the appropriate level, the cabinet perhaps. But that didn’t happen. The committee had some fancy notions. For instance, India would compensate for erosion of river banks, pollution, etc. caused by the Indian vessels. It is difficult to measure

erosion and pollution caused by our own vessels and the Indian ones. These recommendations were not based on empirical evidence. Besides, almost hundred percent Indian cargo was carried by vessels of Bangladesh. The fees for pollution, erosion, etc. would be proxy for taxing Indian goods, which is contrary to GATT/ WTO principles.

The WTO says landlocked countries should be granted access to the sea. The rules should be easier. If any country incurs additional costs for providing access to the sea, recovery of the cost with a reasonable profit is allowed. I am in favour of applying WTO rules, which are agreed by all parties engaged in global trade and are based on good economics. Economics supports marginal cost pricing; deviations requires you to invent your own economics. If our waterways and roads are not used, they won’t benefit us. Earnings from these fees are receipts from service export which is much like foreign earnings by hotels in a country.

TDS: The committee observed that we are developing our roads, ports with public money. Why shouldn’t we charge VAT or make a profit?

Mashiur: I have already explained that charges, fees etc. are realised from Indian vessels, and also pointed out that GATT/ WTO rules allow recovery of cost with a reasonable profit. The basic economics of VAT is trade neutrality i.e. it is applied without discrimination to both domestic and imported goods or services. Those who use the services also have a calculation. If they don’t find it cheaper, they won’t use transit and trans-shipment facilities. Although India is allowed to use Ashuganj inland port, Indian operators are not using it as expected. It is more expensive than using an internal route of India.

There are two parts of transit operation, or transport operation for that matter. The one is infrastructure, and the other is private operators or

service users. The government provides the infrastructure and the private operators pay the government for the services they get. The government of India pays a fixed amount as its share of the cost for maintaining the transit routes. The amount is revised periodically. The operators pay at market price for whatever goods or services they use in Bangladesh. The regulations are specified by the BIWTA. The river protocol has been there since 1947. It was the same region where ships used to ply. The protocol was re-established with Bangladesh in 1971, and it is renewed periodically. They will buy fuel or other products at the port of calls at local cost.

TDS: What will be the ports of call? There are some rivers on the routes which don’t have navigability.

Mashiur: The routes are agreed by the shipping ministries of the two countries and notified. Some routes may not be used at the moment because they are not navigable, or trade has shifted to some other routes. However, they may be retained if there is potential for use at a future date and that would not require renegotiation. We now look at the mutual gains of both the countries. As the trade volume increases, more infrastructural facilities will be needed. The demand for related services also will grow. The Bangladesh government has already taken up a large programme for dredging of rivers and rehabilitation of the navigation routes, which we need for ourselves. Transportation by river is much cheaper.

Let us think over a question: Would Bangladesh have allowed the rivers to silt up if transit was not given to India? “No” is the only sensible answer. What would be the marginal cost for another vessel to ply on a river which have been dredged in our own interest? The economic rational is clear.

TDS: What is the progress of our ports and roads to be used by India?

Mashiur: We have to invest in developing these infrastructures for our own needs. When we will provide services to India, we will invest more. For example, Ashuganj Port is important for us. We are doubling the road lanes and a rail link to Agartala is also being established. To the extent the expanded road and the rail link is used by India, we would recover the investment through appropriate charges. Transportation of Indian goods by our transport companies will create jobs for our people. This means we are exporting our services. We also need to increase exportable products, but establishing new factories and access to new markets take time.

A railway protocol has been effective since 1947, and re-established with Bangladesh after the country’s independence. The railway wagons carry goods to both the countries; the charges for wagons are paid by the customers. When Indian railway wagons enter our territory, we take the responsibility for their maintenance. It’s a reciprocal arrangement. Periodically, calculation is made to determine which side has used more wagons than the other. Payment is made for the excess use by the customers. Normally, we use Indian wagons more because our import is higher than that of India.

TDS: What about the Coastal Shipping Agreement?

Mashiur: We had suggested this agreement to India on the consideration that our vessels will have access to more ports, and they would not entirely depend on Chattogram and Mongla. We now transport our products in small ships to Singapore where we load the stuff on to mother vessels. Indian West Coast has a number of ports and if we can use those, our dependence on Singapore port would reduce. According to the WTO, a cargo can be exported to third countries. Absence of its explicit statement might have

caused some confusion that would be removed by amending the agreement.

TDS: Many say Bangladesh is giving India more than what it gets. What’s your view on this?

Mashiur: I fail to understand the meaning of such expressions. The geographical location of Bangladesh makes it for transit by nature. Bangladesh provides such facilities to other sub-regional countries, including Bhutan and Nepal. Bangladesh gets fees for providing such services. How does India get more if we get those fees from India? I am afraid that certain prejudices prevent those people from recognising the economic benefit from geographical locations. First, Lord Radcliff divided a geographically integrated area into different states. Second, the two-nation theory of Muhammad Ali Jinnah created the false idea that religion divides people. It is time we say good bye to the double legacies of colonialism!

The Feni is a common river shared by India and Bangladesh. It is convenient to withdraw water within the Bangladesh territory. To deny anyone to drink water is inhuman. And the volume is too little to have any effect (less than 2 percent or so). Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina’s principled diplomacy has deepened India’s dependence on Bangladesh.

TDS: The long-awaited Teesta deal is not being signed. There is frustration among the people.

Mashiur: Everybody is concerned over the Teesta deal, but let us not be too pessimistic. Bangladesh and India had a land boundary agreement in 1974, but its implementation began after 2010. This was a new turn in the relationship between the two countries. The draft agreement on Teesta had been reached when the Congress was in office; BJP has owned up to the agreement. Till today, the union government of India has not suggested any change to the agreement.

The distance between Gazaldoba and the border is too short to raise any structure for diversion of water, nor is Sikkim hospitable for any major water control structure. An agreement on Teesta is required because of the barrage already constructed; a deal should have preceded construction of the barrage. The current complaint is due to putting the cart before the horse.

Sharing of the Ganges/ Padma water is more crucial. The southern part below Kushtia would experience water shortage and salinity intrusion. Bangladesh got the guaranteed minimum water all through, barring some problems in the initial years. The Ganges Water Sharing Treaty comes to an end in 2026. The two governments have formed a joint technical committee which will recommend measures for better conservation and use of the Ganges water, which has been put on the fast-track.

TDS: There are concerns that Bangladesh-China relations may be affected as Bangladesh allowed India to install a radar system by the Bay of Bengal. What’s your view?

Mashiur: Our sea border with China is far away; but the sea border with India overlaps. A lot of ships ply the sea and it will take time, may be five to six years, for us to develop a radar system. But monitoring cannot wait. The agreement with India allows commencement of monitoring without unnecessary delay. I don’t see that there is reason for the agreement to affect Bangladesh-China relations.

TDS: What are the road or rail routes to be used for transportation of Indian goods when Chattogram and Mongla ports will be used?

Mashiur: I have already said that use of ports by India is linked with transit across Bangladesh, for which multimodal transportation will be needed. This means rail, road and river routes shall be used, whichever is convenient.