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Rice under OMS in every thana soon, says Matia

The upward trend in prices of foodgrains has been arrested following the open market sale of rice (OMS) at subsidised rate by the government from the last week.

The coarse variety was now selling in the city markets at Tk 13 to Tk 14 while the fine rice at Tk 18 to Tk 19 per kg.

"We have a stock of eight lakh metric tons of foodgrains. We will extend OMS in every thana and continue the programme for next three months to keep the price down," Food Minister Begum Matia Chowdhury told UNB yesterday.

The minister attributed the higher shortfall of foodgrains during the current fiscal year to "hidden drought at the time of flowering of aman paddy."

She said the government had

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Gunshot at PM's office: CID takes up case

By Staff Correspondent

No arrest has been made in connection with the gunshot fired at the Prime Minister's Office on Wednesday.

A case was filed with Tejgaon thana on Thursday. Tejgaon police said, AKM Rezaul Karim, private secretary of the Prime Minister's political advisor, filed the case.

The lone gunshot shattered the window panes of the first floor of the office room of Dr S A Malek, political advisor to the PM.

Investigation of the case was taken up by the Criminal Investigation Department.

When contacted, Dr SA Malek refused to talk to The Daily Star last night.

UNB adds: The Prime Minister's political advisor, Dr SA

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DCC starts spl anti-mosquito drive today

As the mosquito menace has increased the sufferings of city dwellers over the last few days, the Dhaka City Corporation starts a special anti-mosquito drive in the metropolis today, reports UNB.

"It's true that mosquitoes have increased at some pockets in the city...we are launching the special drive with fogging and larvicidal programme to combat the menace," said Dr Ashraf, the Chief Health Officer of Dhaka City Corporation.

The Corporation's health department will engage eight fogger machines and spray medicine named Sycholying in each ward every alternate day to destroy mosquito larvae.

Besides, they would undertake cleaning of hyacinth, drains and ditches, which are the breeding grounds of mosquito.

The Corporation allocated Tk 8 crore so far during the cur-

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FM leaves for Lanka today

Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad leaves Dhaka today for Singapore en route to Colombo to attend the celebration of the 50th anniversary of Independence Day of Sri Lanka, reports UNB.

Samad Azad and his delegation members will attend the programme at the invitation of the Sri Lankan government, said an official handout yesterday.

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Over 300 LTTE men killed in major Lankan attack

COLOMBO, Feb 1: More than 300 Tamil Tiger rebels were killed in a battle in northern Sri Lanka just days before planned celebrations for the country's 50th anniversary of independence, the defence ministry said today, reports Reuter.

The fighting, the first major battle with separatist rebels since December, came one week after a bomb blast at a Buddhist shrine in central Kandy town forced the government to change the venue for the anniversary festivities.

The ministry said a large rebel force launched an attack in northern Kilinochchi district late on Saturday and fighting continued until the early hours of today.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) guerrillas attacked troops manning defences east of Paranthan in the district, which lies just south of the former rebel stronghold of Jaffna peninsula, the ministry said.

So far 218 bodies of terrorists have been recovered. According to ground troops over 300 terrorists have been killed and a large number injured dur-

ing the confrontation," the statement said.

Twenty government soldiers were killed and 86 wounded in the fighting as troops successfully repulsed the attack, it said. Troops were backed by artillery and air strikes.

"The army is now in complete control of the situation and a clearing operation is on," a military spokesman said.

The government outlawed the LTTE last week after blaming the guerrillas for the Kandy bomb blast that damaged Sri Lanka's holiest Buddhist shrine and killed 16 people. The ban on the LTTE was condemned by opposition leaders as closing the door to talks and restricting the government to the military option.

The bomb blast forced the government to shift the anniversary celebrations to Colombo, where foreign ministers have begun arriving for the festivities due to take place on Wednesday.

Armed soldiers patrol the capital's streets and new checkpoints have been set up amid tight security ahead of the celebrations, which Prince Charles

of Britain, the former colonial power, was also due to attend.

Senior military officials said by phone from Jaffna the rebels had breached the army's defences in some places in the latest fighting and had managed to get close to artillery positions.

"We were expecting the attack and our counterattack plans were in place," a top military official said.

The ministry statement said artillery and airforce jets were continuing to pound the retreating rebels.

A spokesman for LTTE in London was not immediately available for comment.

Today's fighting was the first major battle between the rebels and government troops reported since December, when 146 soldiers were killed near Mankulam, which lies on the highway the military has been trying to capture in a nine-month campaign.

Government troops launched an offensive codenamed operation Jayasikuru (sure of victory) in May last year and thousands of soldiers

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743 Shantibahinimen to lay down arms Feb 10, 11

A total of 743 members of Shantibahini, the military wing of the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS), will lay down their arms at Khagrachhari Stadium on February 10 and 11.

The new schedule has been proposed by Shantibahini field commander Ushatan Talukder through a letter to Hongsadhaj Chakma, convenor of the Liaison Committee on January 28, our Khagrachhari correspondent Shuvro Jyoti Chakma reports yesterday.

Officials in Dhaka acknowledged the proposed change in programme.

By Shehab Ahmed

They said two top ranking functionaries from the PCJSS arrived in Khagrachhari yesterday to coordinate the arms surrender programme with Kalparanj Chakma, a minister without portfolio.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will be present at the arms surrender by the first batch of tribal guerrillas at a gala ceremony at the newly built stadium on the outskirts of the Khagrachhari town, marking the beginning of implementation of the peace accord signed with the PCJSS on December 2 last year.

PCJSS supremo Jy-

otirindriyo Bodhipriyo Larma alias Shantu Larma will lead the first group of 400 'regulars' and 200 'irregulars' on February 10. Of them, 193 will come from Gilachari High School ground, 131 from Gamarichala (Machari High School), 276 from Dudukchhari, according to Ushatan Talukder.

On the second day, 143 Shantibahini members, 69 from Gilachari High School ground and 74 from Gamarichala, will surrender their arms.

Shantibahini 'regulars' and 'irregulars' have already started

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The fire ravaged slum at Postagola in the city. — Star photo

Conspiracy behind Rajiv murder still not solved: Sonia

AMETHI, Feb 1: The Italian-born widow of slain premier Rajiv Gandhi today told an election rally in her husband's former constituency that the conspiracy behind his 1991 murder had not been fully revealed, reports AFP.

Sonia Gandhi, joined by her Britain-based son for the first time in her current election campaign, as well as her daughter and son-in-law, made the remarks to a crowd of more than 100,000 people here.

Referring to last week's death sentences handed out to 13 Indians and 13 Sri Lankans in connection with Gandhi's May 21, 1991 killing blamed on

Sri Lankan Tamil rebels, she said: "The conspiracy behind the murder has still not been solved."

"There are some people in today's politics who made my husband's murder easy. There are some people who even today are embracing those who made the murder possible."

"I urge the government to fully probe the murder. This is a basic necessity."

Sonia Gandhi this month decided to campaign for the 112-year-old Congress, in decline after ruling India for around 40 years under such leaders as Rajiv, his mother Indira Gandhi and her father

Jawaharlal Nehru.

Many Congress members want her to stand in the February-March elections and take over as party leader, but she has refused such offers 'for now'.

The current elections are linked to Gandhi's murder as the Congress withdrew its key support to the outgoing minority coalition government over its refusal to drop a member party implicated in the killing.

Welcomed by thunderous applause and lusty cheers as she got off a helicopter to address the rally in a heavily-guarded ground, the 51-year-old widow paid an emotional tribute to

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Pet shops at Katabon main conduit

Using pet animals as a window business, the pet shops at the city's Katabon area are working as one of the main points for illegal trade in wildlife.

These shops, 17 in number and operating without any licence, have a wide network across the country to procure wild animals and birds.

Some of these wildlife are enlisted in the 'red book' or endangered species as labelled by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and are also protected by the Bangladesh Wildlife (Preservation) (Amendment) act, 1974.

The law prescribes a minimum of six months and a maximum of one year imprison-

ment and also a maximum fine of Tk 1,000 for anyone buying, selling or possessing the protected species.

In the last three months alone, wild animals including slow loris, Ospreys (fish eating

Star. The animal was later removed to an unknown place.

The lucrative illegal business thrives under the alleged support of a section of Forest Department officials who deliberately 'overlook' the trade.

Illegal trade in wildlife

There is no effective wing of the department to check the illegal trade. "All we do is conduct seasonal raids on vendors of guest of birds in the city," said a divisional forest official in its Mahakhal office.

He said that the forest rangers, in addition to their other duties, are supposed to crack down on these irregular-

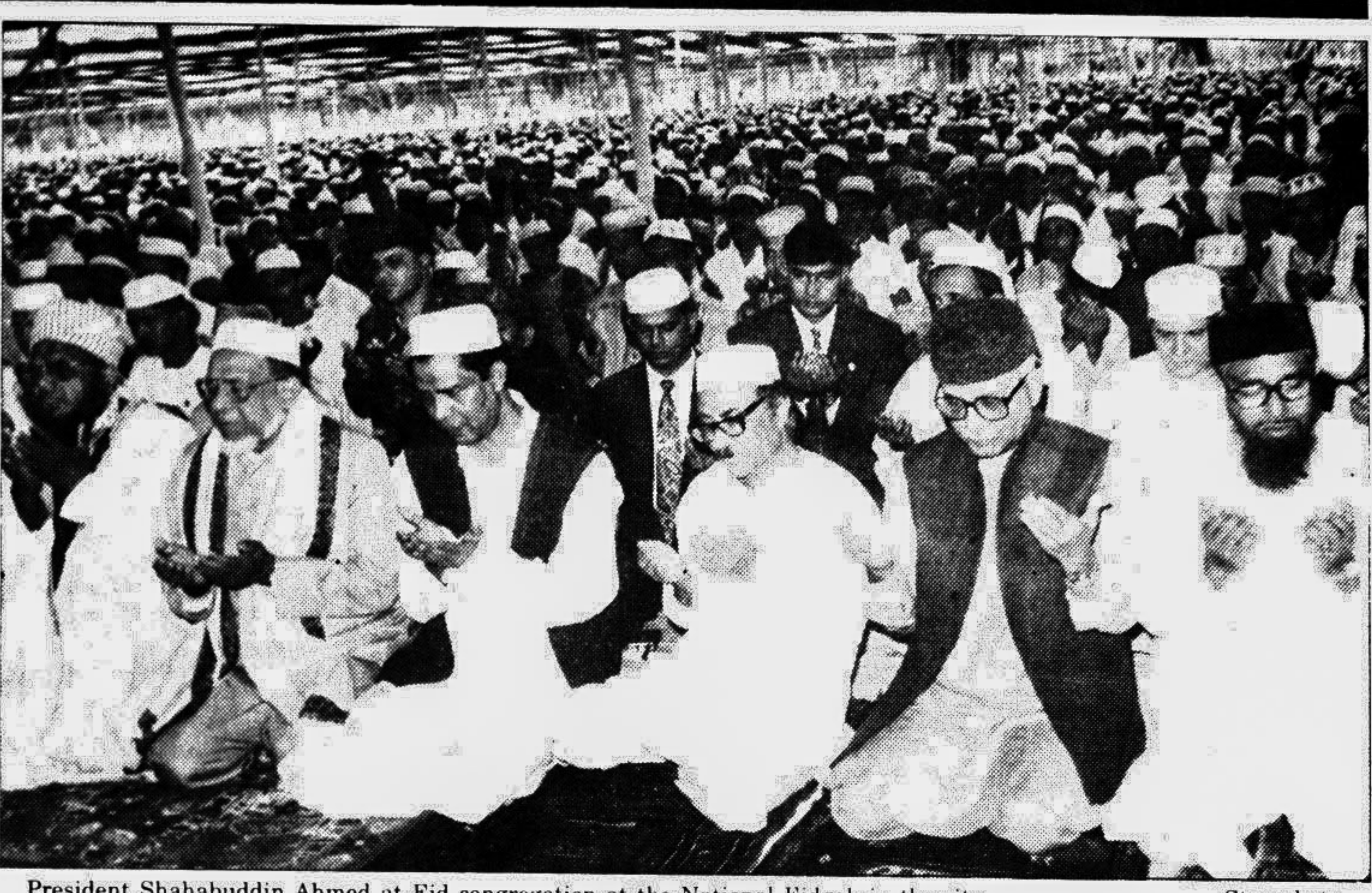
ities involving wildlife.

"Firstly, there is hardly any awareness among the officials and secondly the department is desperately short of manpower and resources," said the official.

The Daily Star correspondents had been in contact with the traders in guise of customers and made a number of fictitious deals. The traders had offered the correspondents a leopard for Tk three lakh. They demanded Tk 50,000 in advance, and the rest at the time of delivery within one month.

A veterinary doctor of the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) had offered to sell a bear for Tk 30,000 to these correspondents. He claimed that he had sold

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President Shahabuddin Ahmed at Eid congregation at the National Eidgah in the city. — Star photo

City still in holiday mood

People have started returning to the capital but the city was in holiday mood yesterday, two days after the Eid-ul-Fitr, reports UNB.

Though the three-day Eid holiday ended on Saturday, attendance in the government offices yesterday was not more than 30 per cent.

The scenario was also not much different in the case of non-government organisations and other private establishments, including business houses.

A large number of government officials enjoyed the opening day as an optional holiday yesterday as they didn't want to miss another day with their near and dear ones.

Almost one-third of the

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Eid celebrated

By Staff Correspondent

Muslims across Bangladesh celebrated the holy Eid-ul-Fitr on Friday with due solemnity and religious fervour.

The greatest festival of Muslims this year came at the end of the 29th Ramadan following sighting of the Shawal moon Thursday evening.

The festival was marked by a three-day public holiday that began on Thursday and ended on Saturday.

With the onset of the Eid day, a tranquil atmosphere descended on the capital which was preceded by a mad rush by shoppers thronging every available market and scramble in bus, train and launch terminals by home-goers to celebrate the Eid with their near and dear ones outside the capi-

tal.

Eid was a day of fun, of exchanging gifts, warm embraces, calling on and visiting relatives, having delicious meals. It was a day of merry-making for children.

It was also a day to visit graves and offer *fateha* for eternal peace of the departed souls and visit sick relatives at hospitals.

The entire run-up to the Eid was for everyone, according to one's ability, a period of loosening up the purses but enriching the heart. The rich, gave away *zakat* and *fitra* money in cash and kind to the less fortunate.

The Eid day was a day for every Muslim to be rejuvenated with the Islamic ideal of brother-

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One dies, 10 fall sick due to food poisoning

By Staff Correspondent

One person died and another 10 of the same family fell seriously sick due to food poisoning at a house in the city's Tejkuani Para area on the Eid day.

Sources in the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) said that all the family members fell sick after taking *semat* in the morning. They were admitted to the DMCH where one of them, a housewife aged about 30, died on the same day. The identity of the victim could not be known.

Among the sick persons were identified as Jayda, 40, Shabuja, 22, Parul, 10, Maina, 1 and Shohel (age not known).

Police, however, could not give any information in this regard.

Young man shot dead in city

By Staff Correspondent

A young man was shot dead by an unidentified gang in the city's Kaptan Bazar area on Thursday.

Police said, the victim, identified as Ibrahim alias Michael Shohel, was shot in the lower abdomen and left thigh in front of a shop in Khandakar market at about 11:40 pm Thursday.

Police said a group of about 12 men approached Shohel and shot him. Previous enmity could have led to the murder incident.

The victim died while being shifted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

A case was filed in this connection.

Titumir College student stabbed to death in Tongi

GAZIPUR, Feb 1: A college student was stabbed to death at Tongi Bazar of the district on Thursday, the day before Eid, reports UNB.

Police said Zahirul Islam Zilham, 17, an HSC student of Dhaka Titumir College, was killed when a group of seven youths stabbed him indiscriminately around Thursday midnight.

Witnesses said the incident occurred over a trivial matter among his friends.

Schoolboy murdered in Ctg

CHITTAGONG, Feb 1: A school student was murdered here on Friday night, reports BSS.

According to Kotwali police, Manikur Rahman, alias Liton, 16, a student of class nine of Saleh Johur High School was called out allegedly by his friends at Kazir Bari residence at Kazir Dewri on the night of holy Eid-ul-Fitr. Since then he was missing.

The body of Liton was found in Railway Building on Saturday night. The body bore several marks of wounds.

Police sent the body for autopsy. Maliz, father of Liton, filed a case.

One shot dead in Chittagong

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Feb 1: One person was shot dead in the city on Eid day near Steel Mills bazar, police said.

The dead was identified as Anwar Ali, 42, police said.

Police said that Anwar was shot dead by his rivals while he was travelling by a car near Steel Mills under port thana.

None was arrested in this connection so far.

Taka devalued by 85 paise

By Staff Correspondent

The taka has been devalued against the US dollar by 85 paise, effective from today.

The new buying and selling rates of the dollar have been fixed at Tk 45.15 and Tk 46.45 respectively, the Bangladesh Bank announced yesterday.

The middle rate between buying and selling will be Tk 46.30 instead of Tk 45.45, the BB said adding: "The adjustment is pursuant to the continuing policy objective of maintaining incentives for exports and for inflows from expatriate Bangladeshis; keeping in view the unfolding trends of currency values of trade partners and competitors of Bangladesh."

The rates were last readjusted downward at Tk 45.30 and Tk 45.60 against the dollar on

November 24 last year from Tk 44.85 and Tk 45.15.

The taka has been devalued twelve times since the Awami League took office in June, 1996. It was devalued four times in the second six months of 1996, and seven times in 1997. There had been more than 6.3 per cent devaluation of the Taka in 1997.

BB sources said the taka had been made cheaper against the dollar mainly because of pressure from the burgeoning garments sector and other exporters, who last week reiterated their demand for devaluation of the currency.

Exporters said Bangladeshi exports had been facing uneven competition from the neigh-

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Spl police unit soon to probe 'financial crime'

By Reaz Ahmed and Mizan Ali

Police, for the first time, are preparing to investigate "financial crime" with personnel specifically trained for the purpose.

The police department has suggested formation of a special unit styled "Economic Crime Cell" (ECC), which will mainly deal with currency forgery, product counterfeiting, banking frauds, and other economic crimes, Home Ministry officials said.

It wants at least 65 personnel for the cell, to be headquartered in the capital, with one unit in each of the seven police ranges and the Railway Police.

Such cells exist in countries like the US and Thailand. Investigators of the proposed cell may be sent to those countries for training, they said.

The ECC will operate under the Criminal Investigation Department (CID). An officer of the rank of Special Superintendent will be in charge of the cell at the headquarters.

The ECC officials will investigate such crimes after receiving complaints or on their own. Immediate recruitment is "highly unlikely". Officials say they are planning "internal reshuffle" to find officers for

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10 hurt in N' ganj gunfight

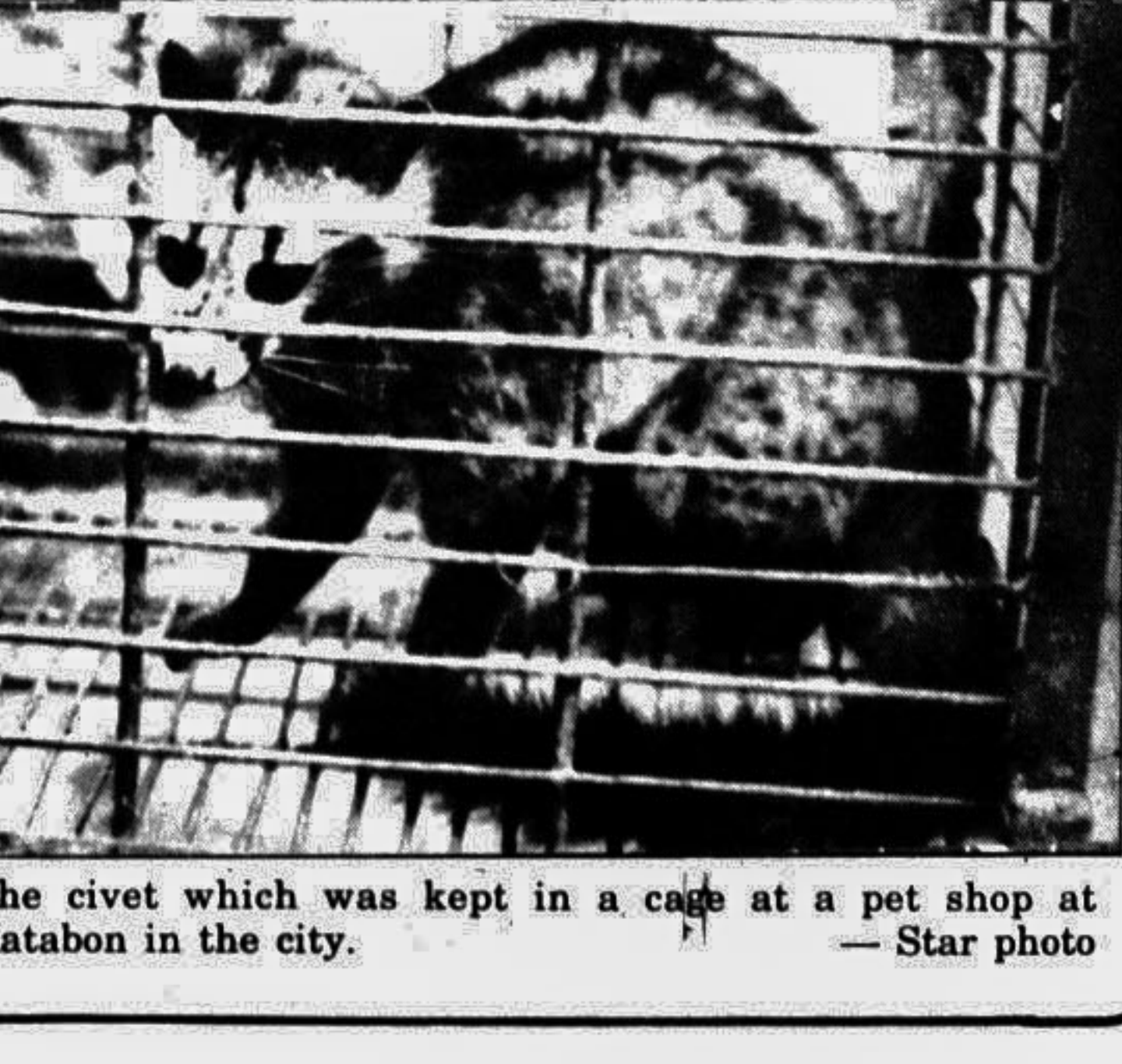
NARAYANGANJ, Feb 1: Ten people received bullet injuries, two of them seriously, in a gunfight between two groups of alleged toll collectors at Fatullah this noon, reports BSS.

The clash ensued when one group of extortionists intercepted another group while demanding toll from a passer-by near a brickfield at gun point at Dapa Idrakpur, police said.

Two shops and several houses were damaged during gunfight, eyewitnesses said.

The injured included, Mintu Mia, 20, Abdur Rahim, 18, Abdur Rahman, 20, Shahidul, 13, Sumon, 12, and Nazrul, 25.

Most of the injured are brickfield workers and slum dwellers.



The civet which was kept in a cage at a pet shop at Katabon in the city. — Star photo