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Court delays charges against Sharif for another week

KARACHI, Nov 26: A special anti-terrorist court judge agreed today to wait another one week before filing charges of treason and hijacking against deposed prime minister Nawaz Sharif, who was ordered to return to jail, reports AP.

Sharif will return to court on Dec 4 when charges are expected to be filed.

The prosecution sought the one-week delay to prepare its case against the seven accused, including Sharif's younger brother, Shahbaz, said provincial Attorney General Raja Qureshi.

The legal process against the men began on Nov 11 when the army filed a complaint with the police accusing the ex-prime minister and his co-accused of treason, hijacking physical endangerment and conspiracy to murder. The next step is for the court to file formal charges.

"We need more time to assess all the witnesses and the evidence," Qureshi told the court. Sharif's lawyers protested the delay.

American, German and Dutch diplomats witnessed the court proceedings.

"We are here to observe," said Bruce Nelson, a political counselor at the US Consulate in Karachi.

Security around the court was tight. Sharif left the walled compound in an armoured personnel carrier. Rangers formed a human chain around him as he left the courtroom, some ran alongside the vehicle with their weapons visible.

On the rooftops of nearby buildings, policemen in helmets, stood guard. Neighbourhood houses were forced to remain closed and the street outside the court building in this southern port city was blocked to traffic.

Sharif has steadfastly denied the army charges against him.

According to witnesses inside the courtroom, a reunion between Sharif and his younger brother, whom he had not seen since the Oct 12 military coup, was emotional.

The two men hugged. Sharif showered his younger brother with kisses.

As tears welled up in his eyes, he offered his younger

brother encouragement.

"Be strong," the ex-prime minister told Shahbaz. "Keep your chin up. We are innocent. We have not done anything wrong."

The ex-prime minister accused Pakistan's military ruler, Gen Pervez Musharraf of waging a vendetta against the Sharif family.

"Gen Musharraf is making us a target of his personal vendetta because he has done something unconstitutional," Sharif said while waiting for the judge to arrive. "If Gen Musharraf is going to stand in the way of justice, God is watching."

"My conscience is clear," he said.

Outside the court building several women carrying poster-size pictures of Sharif shouted "long live Nawaz Sharif" and "Down with the police."

Ijaz Batalvi, one of several lawyers representing the ex-prime minister, earlier had hoped to hear the charges and did not immediately comment on the delay.

'Press enjoying absolute freedom'

Chairman of Bangladesh Press Council and Press Appellate Board Justice Habibur Rahman Khan yesterday said the press in the country is enjoying absolute freedom, reports BSS.

"At present there is no control over the press from the government, so the newspapers can publish anything which is newsworthy without any fear and intervention," he said while addressing the Fourth Annual Conference of Dhaka Reporters' Unity (DRU) at the Jatiya Press Club auditorium in the city.

Chaired by DRU President and senior reporter of the Daily Ittefaq Shajahan Sardar, the inaugural session of the conference was addressed by General Secretary Mohidul Islam Raju.

Rahman said the press, which is considered as the fourth estate of a country, was fully controlled by the then Pakistan government when journalists had to work under a lot of restrictions.

"Such restriction no more exists in the newspaper industry at present and journalists are working in a free, fair and neutral atmosphere both in and outside of their offices while gathering and compiling news," he said.

The Press Council Chairman mentioned the role of newspaper in a civil society for flourishing democracy by creating awareness among the people.

"It can also play an important role in curbing terrorism and removing all sorts of evil things from society," he said.

Rahman urged the members of the organisation to publish objective news with courage and responsibility upholding the country's interest above all.

Later, he handed over crests and cheques to the journalists who won "Reporters' Unity '99" award in different fields of journalism.

10 hurt as AL, BNP clash at Rangamati

RANGAMATI, Nov 26: Ten persons were injured, three of them critically, at Reservebazar in the town this evening in a clash between activists of two rival political parties, reports BSS.

A dozen of shops and the office of a local vernacular daily were ransacked during the clash.

The clash broke out when the activists of the ruling Awami League and its front organisations brought out a procession at Reservebazar this evening in protest against shooting at a Chhatra League activist during the opposition-called hartal yesterday.

When the procession reached near a shop belonging to the secretary of Rangamati town unit of Juba Dal, Akbar Ali, a few people from the procession attacked the shop and injured the owner critically in presence of the police posted there from yesterday, the eyewitnesses and BNP sources said.

When the news of the attack on Akbar Ali spread, the activists of both Awami League and BNP clashed violently ransacking shops in the area.

Army personnel rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control as the police failed to do it.

Shops in the commercial area of Reservebazar have remained closed. No modes of vehicle were plying in the area till the filing of this report tonight.

Critically injured leaders of Juba Dal and Zia Parishad, Akbar Ali and Jasimuddin, and a passer-by, Utpal Chowdhury, have been admitted to Rangamati Sadar Hospital, hospital sources said.

None was arrested in this connection.

Mirza Abbas

From page 1

The body of Nasu Mian was handed over to leaders of Truck Drivers' Association yesterday afternoon after autopsy at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

Meanwhile, hospital sources quoting doctors at DMCH said about 80 per cent of Zakir's body was burnt and that "Zakir is not out of danger".

Mugger

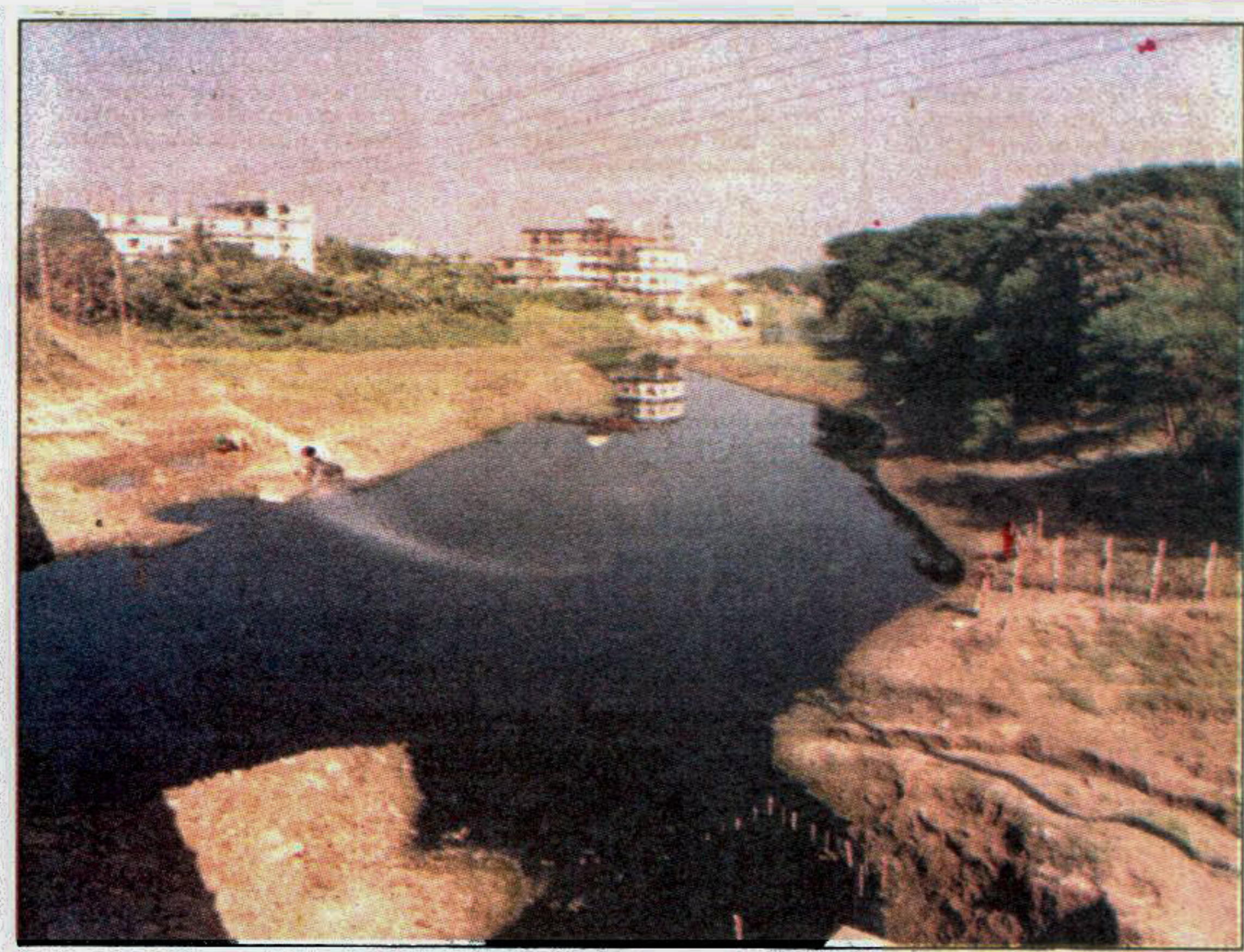
From page 1

after being hit by a bullet in his right ankle. However, he shot down Hemayet. Hemayet was wanted in three criminal cases, police said quoting the FIR in which four alleged muggers have been named as accused.

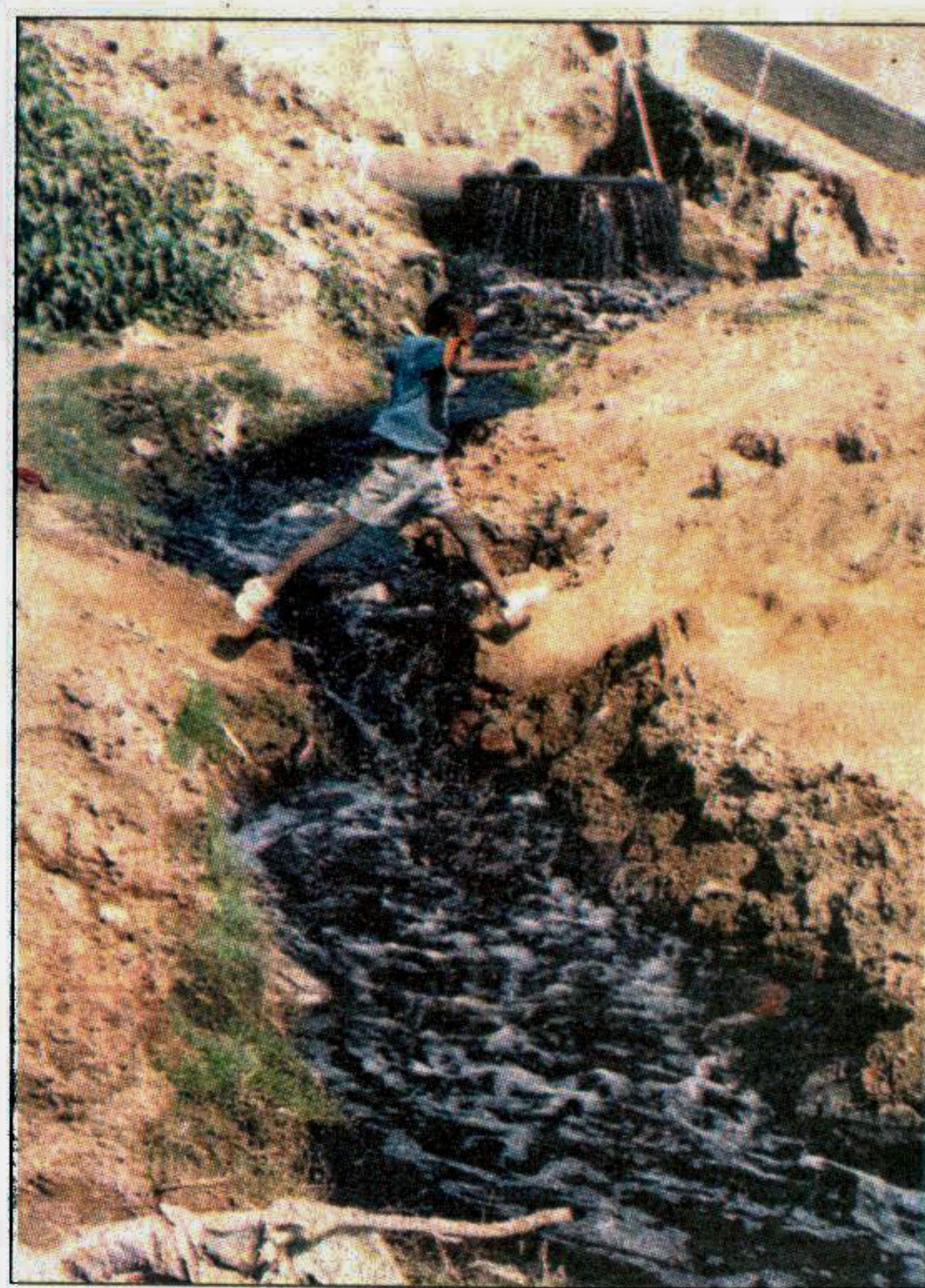
According to eyewitnesses, police fired several shots during the half-an-hour long encounter with the alleged muggers.

They alleged that patrol inspector Abdul Aziz had left Naik Amir to face the muggers alone as he personally knows the alleged muggers being from the same ward (Ward number 22 of KCC). He was also absent during operation in that area by additional forces led by AC Bakhtiar Hossain.

Local people also alleged that the injured Naik also falls from the same ward and is one of those who harbour the alleged muggers.



An offshoot of the river Dhaleswari polluted with untreated waste from dyeing and textile factories at Karnapara, Savar. (Story on front page). — Star photo by Sheikh Enamul Huq



Waste from the factories getting into the river. — Star photo

Issuance of plastic laminated driving licence stalled

By Staff Correspondent

Issuance of plastic laminated driving licence for professional drivers has been stalled three months after its introduction, sources in Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) said.

The decision to introduce plastic laminated licence was taken jointly by the ministries of communication and finance after four year's consultation with BRTA to check issuance of fake driving licence and increase government's revenue earning.

Sources concerned alleged that 80 per cent of the paper book driving licences are fake.

Issuance of laminated licence was stalled through a BRTA circular following protests from transport owners and workers, BRTA officials said.

When contacted, BRTA

Chairman Humayun Kabir however denied issuance of such a circular. "Some vested quarter might have issued the circular forging my signature", he told The Daily Star when his attention was drawn to this.

The communication ministry had issued a circular in July for issuance of plastic laminated licences from August and urged all concerned to change their paper book licences before expiry of the time limit.

Ministry sources said BRTA stalled issuance of laminated licence without approval of the ministry.

Leaders of the Truck Owners Association and Truck Drivers Union, when contacted, also said that BRTA recently stopped issuance of laminated licences.

The BRTA also sent a proposal to the communications ministry last week explaining the grievances of truck drivers about issuance of laminated licence, officials said.

Government's revenue earning from issuance and renewal of driving licence would be three times the present amount of Tk 106 crore if issuance of fake licence can be checked, they said.

Quake damages buildings in Iranian city

TEHRAN, Nov 26: About 50 homes and buildings were damaged by an earthquake in northern Iran today, the second to hit the area in a week, reports AP.

The 4.6 magnitude quake in the city of Gorgan, capital of Golestan province, caused no death, state-run radio reported.

It said that the earthquake shook the city at 8 am.

A 5.6-magnitude earthquake hit the same region last Nov 19, killing a 9-year-old boy and injuring a 6-year-old boy, according to official reports.

In 1997, a 6.1-magnitude quake in Golestan killed nearly 1,000 people and left tens of thousands homeless.

Injured Shibir activist dies in Satkhira

From Our Correspondent

SATKHIRA, Nov 26: An Islamic Chhatra Shibir activist, who was injured in a clash during hartal at Kaligonj on Thursday, died this morning. He was on way to Dhaka for treatment.

The body of Ali Mostafa, 20, was brought to Satkhira at 9 am and after autopsy, the first namaj-e-janaza was held at Shaheed Razzak Park. He was buried at his family graveyard at Purbo Nalta in Kaligonj thana after another namaj-e-janaza at Kaligonj Shaheed Suhrawardy Park this afternoon.

In protest against the killing, district and Kaligonj thana liaison committee in two separate meetings held at Satkhira and Kaligonj chalked out programmes including protest meeting at Kaligonj football ground on November 27, and a half-day hartal throughout the district in November 28.

A case was filed with Kaligonj police station.

One Shawkat Ali was arrested in this connection.

Dawn-to-dusk hartal in Feni on Monday

FENI, Nov 26: Newly elected commissioners of Feni municipality have called a dawn-to-dusk hartal in the town on Monday demanding gazette notification of their election results, reports UNB.

They made the announcement at a press conference here today. They also demanded reelection in Barahpur and Madhupur centres where polling was postponed due to violence.

Chairman and seven commissioners of the municipality were elected unopposed and election for the remaining posts of commissioners was held on October 28.

Earlier, they called a hartal on November 17 to press their demand.

Markets, schools remain open on Friday

By Staff Correspondent

A number of markets, business enterprises, firms, factories and educational institutions were kept open yesterday despite the weekend to make up for the loss of working hours due to Thursday's hartal.

Some private offices also remained open.

A number of educational institutions including private universities were open for examinations and classes.

Buddhadev named Deputy CM of West Bengal

CALCUTTA, Nov 26: West Bengal Home (Police) Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharjee was today named as the Deputy Chief Minister of the state to assist Jyoti Basu, the octogenarian chief minister, reports PTI.

Basu had earlier wanted to be relieved of his post on health ground but yielded to the party politburo's request to continue.

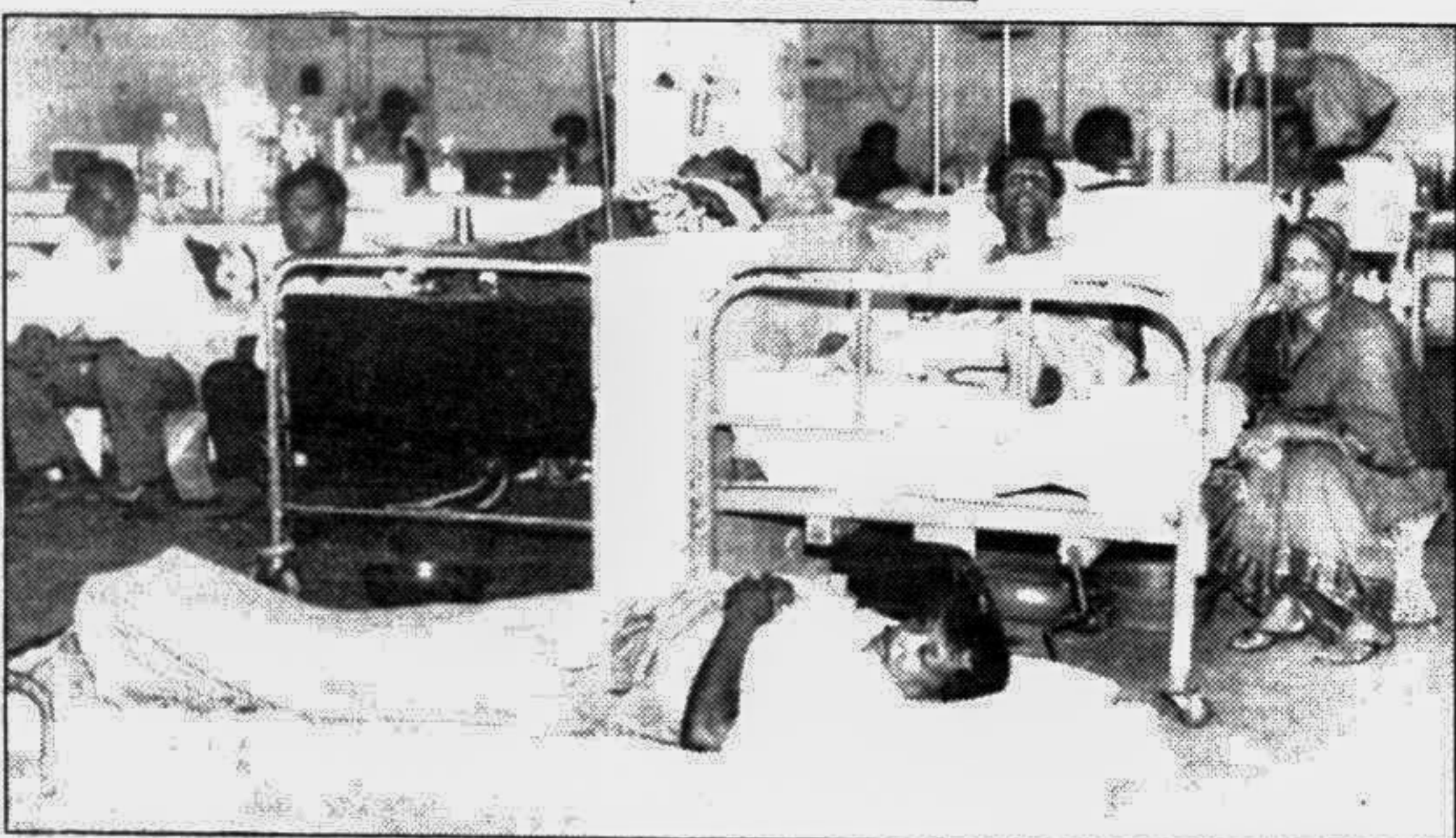
Bhattacharjee's name was proposed by Basu which was unanimously accepted by all Left Front partners, CPI-M Politburo member Biman Bose told newsmen.

Oil distributors

From page 1

The tank lorry owners were not lifting fuel from the Bangladesh Oil Depot since Saturday last creating serious fuel crisis in 16 northern districts.

The demands included fixing uniform price for all depots deployment of army and BDR personnel at the Baghabari depot and stoppage of 'illegal' activities of the Baghabari-based tank lorry workers' associations.



A patient lying on the floor in Post Coronary Care Unit at NICVD. — Star photo

Tandja elected Niger president

NIAMEY, Nov 26: Retired colonel Mamadou Tandja, 61, has won Niger's presidential election, according to latest incomplete results issued today by the Independent National Election Committee (CENI), reports AFP.

Kidnapping incidents Police posted at DU lack training, logistic support

By Staff Correspondent

Kidnapping for ransom around the Dhaka University campus increased recently as police deployed there lacked sufficient training and proper equipment to prevent such incidents or detect the criminals, DMP Commissioner AKM Shamsuddin has said.

The number of policemen deployed on the campus is also inadequate, he said talking to The Daily Star yesterday.

"Some students might have played an indirect role in these incidents", he said. But there is no specific evidence that university students were directly involved with the criminals, the DMP Commissioner said in response to a question.

From October 1 to November 4, seven persons were kidnapped and taken to the vicinity of Dhaka University and released after payment of ransom by their families.

Such incidents around the university increased in the last one year, police sources said. Many such incidents were not even recorded with police, they said.

Dhaka University Vice-chancellor AK Azad Chowdhury in an interview with The Daily

Star earlier also expressed his dissatisfaction over the performance of police on the campus. The criminals may have indirect links with a few students, he had said.

Three students were temporarily expelled from the university on November 10 for their indirect involvement in kidnapping.

Free access of people to the campus is one of the reasons for such incidents, the DMP Commissioner said.

The road from Palashi to Shaheed Minar on one side and those in Nil Khet, TSC and Doyel Crossing areas on the other side are public thoroughfares. Kidnappers mostly use these roads, he said.

Kidnappers mainly operate on roads on the south-west of the university in the old part of the city. Some of the gang members are very ordinary people like auto-rickshaw drivers, the commissioner said.

DMP, the criminals, after kidnapping a person, usually roam around in the university area in motor vehicles with the hostage inside, and contact his family for ransom.

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