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## Arrestee is not Abdur Rahman

West Bengal police confirm

STAR REPORT

West Bengal police yesterday confirmed that they had not arrested Shaekh Abdur Rahman, the chief of banned Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), as the issue remained the talk of the country for the last two days.

The confirmation followed reports on Monday and yesterday by wire services and local media about the arrest of the supreme leader of JMB, responsible for countrywide bomb attacks on August 17 and subsequent suicide bombings.

Our Delhi correspondent reports that it was in fact a case of

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## Fuel prices set to rise again

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is going to raise the oil prices very soon in keeping with the steep oil price hike on the global market and also to get the fifth tranche of Poverty Reduction Growth Facility (PRGF) loan from the IMF.

"Many countries have adjusted their oil prices a long time now. It is our mistake not to have done the adjustment, which should have been done long ago," Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday told the press. "Buying at Tk 60 and selling at Tk 40 -- the country

simply cannot run this way," he remarked.

A finance ministry source said, due to the huge gap between import and domestic fuel prices, the state oil agency, Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation, has amassed an enormous debt burden to the tune of Tk 10,000 crore.

He said, "If the price adjustment is not made, the debt amount will grow by some Tk 3,000 crore a year. So, the government has only two options -- raising the domestic oil prices or subsidising the domestic market using the national budget."

In its July-September 2005

quarterly report released Monday, the central bank, too, has recommended further adjustment of oil prices and continuing the tight monetary policy to ease pressure on the balance of payments.

A review mission of the International Monetary Fund that visited Bangladesh in November to discuss the PRGF loan put pressure on the government to go for another upward adjustment of domestic oil prices with the global ones.

Besides the oil-price adjustment, the government also has to

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## CEC sick, his meeting with EU troika cancelled

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Aziz's meeting with the visiting European Union (EU) team has been cancelled as the CEC fell sick and was admitted to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital (BSMMUH) yesterday.

The health minister went to see Aziz at the BSMMUH, a handout said last night.

However, the CEC was not found in his cabin and it was locked at 9:00pm. The on-duty officials said he had left the hospital after receiving therapy.

When contacted at his residence over telephone, the calls

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## CREDIBLE POLLS

# EU for EC free from PMO's authority

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The visiting European Union troika yesterday strongly advocated for an Election Commission (EC) free from the "authority" of Prime Minister's Office (PMO) to ensure free, fair and credible parliamentary polls in Bangladesh, which should be acceptable to all.

Following a meeting with LGRD Minister and BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, the EU delegation told the media that they talked about creating the right atmosphere for holding free and fair elections.

"We want to see an independent and strong Election Commission that is free from the PMO's authority and there should be transparency and accountability in the works of the EC," said delegation leader Nikolaus Scherk.

Earlier after a meeting with the foreign minister, Scherk told reporters that the EU is discussing the issue of sending long- and short-term election observers to Bangladesh to monitor the next general elections.

"This is an ongoing programme...if we can make a contribution, we would be ready to

work with the government and we also have access to the civil society here," added Scherk, director for Asia Pacific at the Austrian foreign ministry.

He said the EU troika is here on its first-ever mission to address the problems of functioning democracy, find out areas of cooperation to overcome the problems and "look for a solution."

"Any manipulation in the run-up to elections should be avoided to hold credible polls," he said, adding, "I think this could be a milestone and a key step towards

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## Hasina accuses govt of faking attempt to nab militants

BDNEWS, Dhaka

Opposition Leader Sheikh Hasina has said while the Islamist militants don't get killed in crossfire, the snatchers are not being spared from such killing.

Hasina, also the president of the Awami League (AL), accused the ministers and BNP lawmakers of patronising the militants and said the government is staging drama in the name of apprehending them.

She was speaking at the Dhanmondi Community Centre yesterday prior to the countrywide organisational tour programme of

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PHOTO STAR

Workers are busy shaping an incline to give the physically challenged easier access to the Central Shaheed Minar ahead of the International Mother Language Day on February 21.

## Dollar prices on the rise

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dollar prices have started to climb once again.

In the foreign exchange market yesterday the price of a dollar rose to Tk 65.55, up by Tk 0.10 from Monday's.

In case of import bills, the nationalised commercial banks yesterday sold dollar at the rate of Tk 67.25, up by Tk 0.25 from Monday's, while the private banks' rate stood at Tk 68.90 or Tk 0.10 higher than Monday's.

The demand for the greenback has remained high from the beginning of the current fiscal year, as the forex reserve has come under considerable pressure. The reserve depleted by 8.4 percent in August,

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## KANSAT TRAGEDY

# Protest on against police atrocities

Death toll rises to 8; probe body formed; hartal called in C'nawabganj today

ANWAR ALI, Rajshahi

The situation in Kansat in Chapainawabganj remained volatile yesterday as people continued to barricade Chapainawabganj-Sonamasjid road in protest against police atrocities on people demanding electricity at cheaper rate.

The death toll from Monday's police firing reached eight as Anwar Hossain Babu, 12, son of day labourer Abdul Kuddus Ali, suc-

cumbed to his bullet wounds at Rajshahi Medical College Hospital in the early hours yesterday.

The government, meanwhile, formed a three-member committee to investigate the incident and asked it to submit a report within a week.

The committee comprises Mohammad Mohsin, additional secretary of the home ministry, as its convener and Rajshahi divisional commissioner and an

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## NBR to go for survey to net more taxpayers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The National Board of Revenue (NBR) decided to conduct a survey across the country to bring more people under tax net to generate more revenue, said Khairuzzaman Chowdhury, chairman of the board yesterday.

The chairman said, "At present around 10 lakh individuals are paying taxes, but I believe taxable people in the country should be around one crore."

"That's why we decided to carry out a survey to find more taxpayers", he said, while addressing a views exchange meeting with the Dhaka Taxes Bar Association (DTBA).

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# Country down with unusual power crisis

Rise of demand, poor gas supply lead to load shedding

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The country is facing an unusual winter-time power load shedding of 300 to 500 megawatt every day mainly because of maintenance work in a large number of power generation units and also due to shortfall of gas supply.

According to the Power Development Board (PDB), load shedding was 300 MW yesterday, 476 MW on Monday and 297 MW on Sunday. Last week's load shedding records show a similar trend.

PDB records show that 17

smaller and medium sized power units remained shut yesterday due to maintenance work.

On Monday, gas supply shortage caused a power generation shortfall of 120 MW.

The country's demand for power usually decreases considerably during the winter. This is why the PDB prefers to undertake plant maintenance work in this season. But this year the winter-time demand shows an upward trend.

The PDB said yesterday's demand for 3500 MW of power is quite high and it indicates a much

higher demand in the coming summer. But the country does not have adequate new power projects to meet the higher demand, which can shoot up to 4,400 MW to 4,800 MW this year.

As in the previous years, the government is now considering some load management measures, which include shutting down shopping arcades in the evening when the peak demand for power becomes unmanageable.

"Our daily power demand fluctuates sharply. Power demand in

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## 2 burnt alive in 2 fire incidents

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two persons including a schoolboy were burnt to death in as many fire incidents in the capital and Chittagong yesterday.

Three others got injured and some 70 houses, mostly shanties, were gutted in the incidents.

A fire at a Demra slum in the capital killed a person, injured three others and gutted 60 shanties yesterday afternoon, reports our staff correspondent.

The dead was identified as Shahidul Islam, aged around 40.

Originating from the hearth of a shanty at Koratitola slum at Doyaganj in Demra at 3:45pm, the fire engulfed the adjacent 60 shanties, said fire fighters.

The locals, however, claimed the fire burnt more than 100 shanties

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# HC DIRECTIVE ON VOTER ROLL EC to appeal when listing nearly ends

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) will file an appeal against the January 4 High Court (HC) directives on voter list next week, a day or two before the deadline for completing the field-level work of the controversial fresh voter roll.

"It will take time to file the appeal. Preparations are going on and I hope it will be filed by January 29 or 30," counsel for the EC Khondakar Mahbuddin Ahmed told The Daily Star yesterday.

"We are in no hurry to file the appeal as we have enough time for it," he said, referring to the 60-day time frame allowed for filing an appeal.

The field-level work including information collection on the prospective voters and scrutiny of those is scheduled for completion by January 31. But the district election officers have already informed the EC that it will not be finished by that time.

They have been seeking directives from the EC Secretariat on the next course of action in the wake of recent developments. But the EC continues sitting on the matter as it waits for the result of the appeal that has yet to be lodged against the HC directives for revising the existing voter list.

"The Election Commission will sit and decide whether the time will

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