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PM pledges independent, neutral EC

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister (PM) Sheikh Hasina said her government would continue its all-out support for upholding the independence and neutrality of the Election Commission (EC).

She reaffirmed the government's stand when Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda called on her at the Prime Minister's Office yesterday afternoon.

Hasina observed that a strong and independent EC is an indispensable institution

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Govt's 3-yr power target may not be achieved

Muhith tells editors

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance Minister AMA Muhith yesterday said it is unlikely that Awami League would be able to fulfill its election pledge to raise electricity generation by 1,000 megawatts (MW) in the country by the next three years.

"The target of raising the generation of power in three years may or may not be achieved," Muhith said in response to questions raised by the editors of leading

dailies and news agencies about the nagging power crisis at a pre-budget meeting at finance ministry.

He expressed doubt that power generation could be increased to 5,000 MW within the next three years as promised by Awami League before the election.

AL, in its election manifesto, pledged to increase the power generation from the present 4000 MW to 7,000 MW during the government's five-year tenure.

Muhith said power is very important

for all development activities. He said Siddhirganj Power Plant would be commissioned soon and a substantial supply of power would be available from it.

Regarding Phulbari coal mine, he said a decision in this regard would be taken soon after consultations with the people of the area to improve its energy situation.

Muhith also praised some good initiatives taken by the caretaker government to increase power generation. Some

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

11 killed, 35 hurt in Bagerhat bus collision

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

A road accident left 11 people killed and 35 others critically injured at Chanderhat of Mollahat upazila in Bagerhat yesterday.

Among the dead five could be identified. They are Ziar Mia, Bilkis, Dipa Pandey, Parveen and Sudhangshu.

The injured were admitted to Mollahat Upazila Health Complex, Bagerhat General Hospital and Khulna Medical College Hospital.

According to police and eyewitnesses, the accident occurred around 3:00pm as a Rupashi Paribahan bus heading for Madaripur from Khulna collided head-on with a Sundarban Paribahan bus bound for Khulna from Dhaka.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

2 Dhaka College students held for 'abduction'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police rescued a clearance and forwarding (C&F) agency staff who was kidnapped three days ago by some Dhaka College students and held hostage in a campus dormitory. The kidnappers had demanded Tk 1.2 lakh ransom for his release.

New Market police yesterday arrested two of the alleged kidnappers, including Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) Dhaka College unit environmental affairs secretary, on charge of kidnapping

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

SHADY MANPOWER DEALS

No action taken against misdeeds of agencies

PORIMOL PALMA, back from Malaysia

Recruiting agencies took to shady deals in sending workers to Malaysia but remained unaccountable to anyone for their misdeeds that led to joblessness, exploitation and deportation of thousands of Bangladeshis.

Agencies were engaged in a rat race to 'procure' as many job approval letters as they needed from employers and outsourcing companies through Bangladeshi brokers in Malaysia using underhand transactions, businesses said.

Agencies are learnt to have spent around Tk 1 lakh to 'buy' each job approval letters from employers.

They gave no thought to the consequences. Some agencies refrained from doing manpower business with Malaysia sensing its ultimate bad impacts but most of them continued.

"Most of our recruiting agencies do not care for workers. They send jobseekers without verifying actual requirements. They neither know workers nor employers in person but send them in bulk on the basis of papers

only," said a recruiting agent. They completely ignored negotiating with employers for salaries and facilities of workers.

"As moneymaking was the ultimate goal most agencies linked to this illegal trade with Malaysia did not care about the actual labour

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SHATTERED DREAMS OF MIGRANT WORKERS -5

Lankan army 'kills 129 civilians' in safe area

Claims pro-Tigers website, military authorities deny allegation

AFP, Colombo

Heavy shelling by the Sri Lankan army of a designated safe area has left 129 civilians dead and 282 wounded, the pro-Tamil Tiger website Tamilnet.com said yesterday.

The website said government forces pounded the area on the northeast coast throughout Wednesday, hitting sites including a child nutrition centre. It said the attack was the single "most cruel carnage" by the army in months of fighting.

Sri Lanka's military, which says it is on the brink of total victory, denied the allegation.

"These are fabrications by the LITE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) to get international attention and mount pressure to have a ceasefire that will help the Tiger leadership to escape the army," military spokesman Udaya Nanayakkara said.

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British police detain 10 Pak terror suspects

Top cop quits over security blunder

ANI, AFP, London

The British Police have arrested 12 people including 10 Pakistanis, on suspicion of having links with al-Qaeda's terror network in northwest England, the police said on Wednesday.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

Prayer Timing

April 10		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-35	5-10
Juma	12-30	1-15
Asr	4-45	5-00
Maghrib	6-24	6-28
Esha	7-45	8-15

Source: Islamic Foundation

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Thai protesters threaten to stop Asian summit

PM refuses to resign despite mass rally

AFP, Bangkok

Thai protesters threatened yesterday to stop a summit of Asian leaders going ahead this weekend, opening up a new front on the second day of mass street rallies against Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva.

But embattled premier Abhisit refused to step down Thursday, defying tens of thousands of protesters who massed in Bangkok for a second day demanding his resignation.

Abhisit's four-month-old government faces its biggest challenge after more than 100,000 loyal supporters of former premier Thaksin Shinawatra gathered in Bangkok Wednesday to demand that he quit office and call fresh elections.

Police said about 25,000 protesters were left Thursday outside the house of a royal aide whom they accuse of orchestrating the 2006 coup that toppled Thaksin, as well as at Abhisit's office and Bangkok's royal plaza.

The demonstrators later vowed to target the coastal resort town of Pattaya, where leaders from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) and partners, including China and Japan, are due to meet.

"If we have to shut down the whole town then we have to and it's a warning to friendly countries that the meeting may not happen," protest leader Nattawut Saikuar told reporters in Bangkok.

Security has been beefed up in Pattaya for the April 10-12 meet since Thaksin's so-called "Red Shirts" attacked Abhisit's

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

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