

Suspension criticised

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attempts from the bourses to pressurise the government to allow public employees to invest in stockmarket," said Toufic Ahmad Choudhury, general secretary of Bangladesh Economic Association.

Stock exchanges had earlier exerted pressure on the government to allow undisclosed money into the market, said Toufic Ahmad, also a member of Ibrahim Khaled-led probe team that suggested a bar on government employees' investment in stocks.

The cabinet on Monday decided to remind public employees about service rules that prohibit involvement in profit-making activities, including stock business, without prior permission.

The Dhaka Stock Exchange halted trading, fearing a negative impact of the decision on the market. Later, Chittagong Stock Exchange (CSE) followed suit.

One hour after the suspension, DSE Chief Executive Musharraf M Hussain at a press briefing demanded the government allow public employees' investment in share business.

The bourses plea comes at a time when many government employees already have investments in stockmarket either in their own name or proxy names. The DSE could not provide any detail of how much investment or how many Beneficiary Owners (BOs) are linked with public servants.

Mirza Azizul Islam, a former finance adviser, said the bar on investment by govern-

ment officials is not new. "The government has just given a reminder to officials about the bar."

Azizul said the cabinet also took a number of decisions favourable for capital market. These include a 10 percent tax rebate facility for stock investment, reduction of tax on brokerage commission and withdrawal of 10 percent tax on income by mutual funds.

"So there should not be any impact on the stockmarket," he said.

He opposed the plea of DSE for allowing investment of government officials in stockmarket. "I don't support it. The government should not bow down to such pressure." Faruq Ahmad Siddiqi, a former chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission, did not find any logic behind the trade suspension.

"May be it was a means of creating pressure on the government," he said, "But the trade suspension may cause panic among the investors and destabilise the market further."

Mahmood Osman Imam, who teaches finance at Dhaka University, said as per law the bourse cannot suspend trading.

"If the trading was suspended with share prices nosediving, then it's good. But if it was taken as a weapon to put pressure on the government, it's not right," he said.

He, however, said the trading halt offered investors some time to think before taking any investment decision. "Trading suspension

may provide scope to heal the market."

The DU professor said the government employees, who do not work in positions and agencies where conflict of interests can arise, should be allowed investing in the share market.

"If the government does not want to allow investment [from its staff], it could have issued the directive internally instead of making it public," he said.

Khondaker Golam Moazzem, senior research fellow of Centre for Policy Dialogue, said as per the 1979 service rules government employees are not allowed to engage in speculative investment.

"The initiative is good to ensure transparency in stockmarket," he said. "Stock exchanges should cooperate with the government in this regard."

"The government should offer time, say for six months, so that they can gradually withdraw their investments," he said.

Reaz Islam, chief executive of LR Global Bangladesh, said public servants may be allowed to invest via an intermediary such as merchant bank that has discretion over the account.

"It is not constructive to discourage participation from such a large segment since our market is still small and lacks depth. However, controls can be put in place to avoid conflicts similar to practices in more developed countries," he said.

Wikipedia goes offline today

Protest against anti-piracy laws

BBC ONLINE

Wikipedia plans to take its English-language site offline today as part of protests against proposed anti-piracy laws in the US.

The user-generated news site Reddit and the blog Boing Boing have also said they will take part in the "blackout".

The sites' webmasters are opposed to the Stop Online Piracy Act (Sopa) and Protect Intellectual Property Act (Pipa) being debated by Congress.

However, Twitter has declined to take part in the shutdown.

Wikipedia's founder, Jimmy Wales, told the BBC: "Proponents of Sopa have characterised the opposition as being people who want to enable piracy or defend piracy."

"But that's not really the point. The point is the bill is so over broad and so badly written that it's going to impact all kinds of things that, you know, don't have anything to do with stopping piracy."

Sopa's supporters in the House of Representatives say the legislation is designed to stop revenue flowing to "rogue websites". A similar law, Pipa, is making its way through the US Senate.

On Saturday, the White House issued a statement that appeared to side with critics of the Acts.

It said: "While we believe that online piracy by foreign websites is a serious problem that requires a serious legislative response, we will not support legislation that reduces freedom of expression, increases cybersecurity risk, or undermines the dynamic, innovative global internet."

Despite the hint of a presidential veto, Wikipedia said that the English site's administrators had decided to stage its first ever public protest because the bills "would be devastating to the free and open web."

It added: "We don't think Sopa is going away, and Pipa is still quite active. Moreover, Sopa and Pipa are just indicators of a much broader problem. All around the world, we're seeing the development of legislation intended to fight online piracy, and regulate the internet in other ways, that hurt online freedoms."

However, when asked whether Twitter would join the blackout, its chief executive, Dick Costolo, tweeted: "Closing a global business in reaction to single-issue national politics is foolish."

In a Twitter conversation with Wikipedia's founder Jimmy Wales, Costolo later clarified that his comment was not meant to be read as a "value judgement" about other organisations involvement in the action.

Rooppur nuke

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Sheikh Hasina would visit Russia in November when some memorandums of understanding (MoUs) would be signed in this regard.

During the meeting, Zillur recalled with gratitude the invaluable support of the people and government of the erstwhile Soviet Union during Bangladesh's Liberation War, including their role in the UN Security Council and in the early days of Bangladesh's reconstruction.

The president also expressed his satisfaction over the gradual expansion of bilateral relations and cooperation between the two countries.

The envoy said Russia is keen to expand trade, commerce and cooperation with Bangladesh, and hoped that the relations between the countries would be further strengthened in the days to come.

Trotsenka thanked Zillur for extending his all-out support and cooperation in discharging his professional duties during his tenure in Bangladesh.

Secretaries to the President's Office and officials of the Foreign Ministry were present at the meeting.

5 lakh more jobless

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The number of jobless people in the country rose to 26 lakh in 2010, up from 21 lakh three years ago, says a preliminary report on Labour Force Survey (LFS) 2010 of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS).

The BBS conducts a survey on the country's employment situation every three years.

"It shows that enough employment is not being created for people who have education up to SSC [Secondary School Certificate] or below SSC level," said Rushidan Islam Rahman, labour market analyst, while explaining the reasons for the rise in the unemployment rate.

Rushidan, research director at the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), said, "This group does not want to engage in agriculture. But the scope for regular non-farm employment is not expanding at a sufficient pace."

She said the unemployment growth reflects an under-utilisation of the country's human resources, and suggested that the government adopt policies that encourage labour-intensive industrialisation.

"There is scope for labour-intensive growth in many sectors," she said, mentioning the furniture and leather industry in addition to the

garment sector.

Prof Shamsul Alam, Member, Planning Commission, said, "The number of the jobless has risen because of an increase in the population."

He said the government had set a target in the Sixth Five Year Plan for creating more than one crore jobs through a promotion of small and medium enterprises and non-farm activities.

According to the BBS, the unemployment rate rose to 4.5 percent in 2010, up from 4.3 percent three years ago.

Zahid Hussain, senior economist at the World Bank, said the mentioned increase in unemployment rate is "somewhat misleading" because the survey does not include Bangladeshi workers abroad.

Nearly 75 lakh Bangladeshis work abroad and their number has gone up in the last five years, according to the expatriates' welfare and overseas employment ministry.

Zahid said the yearly inclusion of new faces in the existing labour force has to be taken into account. "If they cannot find jobs abroad, they will have to be absorbed in the domestic economy or else we will face a serious social problem," he said.

Riti Ibrahim, Secretary, Statistics Division, also recognised the need for including

migrant workers in the survey. "We will take the initiative to do that in the future," she said.

The country's labour force increased 14 percent to 5.67 crore in 2010, with 72 lakh new faces joining the labour force in three years.

Of them, 67 lakh got jobs. Three-fourths of them are women, thanks to a rise in job opportunities for women in the garment industry, the country's biggest export earner.

"A rapid expansion of the garment industry has created job opportunities for women in recent years," said Zahid.

Rushidan of BIDS, however, linked employment growth to the rise in low productive self-employment and unpaid family work.

"Self-employment alone cannot ensure a healthy growth of the economy. For this purpose, we need larger economic units that engage paid workers for more productive activities."

Referring to the expansion of the labour force, she said the rise in economically active population was obviously a positive sign, which indicated that a prospective "demographic dividend" was available in the form of labour supply.

"Now it is time to make a proper utilisation of the increased labour force to accelerate economic growth."

Prime accused

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The investigating officer of the case produced Salauddin, Amir Hossain Amu and Mamun before the court on completion of their one-day remand.

The IO sought another three days' remand for each of the three accused but the court turned him down and ordered to put them behind bars.

In the afternoon, lawyers of the trio appealed to the district and session judge's court for bail and after a brief hearing the judge granted their prayer.

The court ordered to free all five -- Salauddin, Amir Hossain Amu, Hiron Mia, Monowar Hossain Khan and Mamun -- who earlier surrendered before it.

Following the five's surrender on January 15, the court granted one-day remand to Salauddin, Amu and Mamun each and sent two other to prison.

However, yesterday's court decision drew huge flak from a cross section of people in the district.

Earlier on different dates, Narsingdi court granted bail to eleven others implicated in the murder of mayor Lokman Hossain.

Of the total accused, only Ashraf Hossain Sarkar is now in prison.

The slain mayor's family members and Narsingdi people yesterday expressed strong resentment over the bail order for Salauddin, brother of Posts and Telecommunications Minister Rajiuddin Ahmed Raju, and other accused.

They said the minister had an "influence" on freeing his brothers and others who according to the first information report (FIR) are the masterminds in Lokman killing.

Shamim Newaz, the youngest brother of the slain mayor, said, "Freed from jail, killers of my brother are threatening our family members."

Lokman, the two-time best mayor, was shot to death at the district AL office on November 1.

Stop MPs'

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different union parishads claimed local lawmakers - mainly from ruling Awami League - and upazila parishad chairmen demand shares of test relief, general relief, 'food for work' allocations and other such provisions provided by the government for the poor.

"If we don't comply, they don't okay the release of provisions to us," Mahbubur Rahman, president of Bupf claimed.

"We demand that the government send different types of relief directly to us so that we can distribute these among their correct recipients in our unions, Rahman said.

"Lawmakers and upazila parishad chairmen interfere in development works, they do not permit us to do any work unless it has been determined by them," said Nusrat Jahan, chairman of number 15 Burir Char union parishad under Hathazari upazila, Chittagong.

"We don't have a proper status in the local government," said Hasnat Jaman, chairman of number 2 Shaldanga union parishad. UP officials demanded decentralisation and policy reforms of the local government.

"We want to carry out our duties independently and without any interference. This is our prime demand," they said.

Many also pointed out that the remuneration of Tk 1400 they receive from the government each month is too small an amount for their work.

The meet was organised with the support of US Agency for International Development (USAID). A new committee of Bupf was formed at the convention.

After its formation in 2003 as the only unified association of Union Parishads of Bangladesh, Bupf has reformed all 64 of its district committees over the last six months after the UP elections held nationwide in July 2009.

HR boss

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question of international standard," Mizanur Rahman recalled.

"This shows the double standard the western countries are playing. And this is being done because a lot of money is being spent to engage lobbyists in Washington DC, New York, London and Paris, and they are doing their job."

These lobbyists are making all efforts to create pressure or confusion that international standard is not being followed in the war crimes trial in Bangladesh, Mizanur added.

He noted that the tribunal trying war crimes is named International Crimes Tribunal but that does not mean it is an international tribunal. "It is a national tribunal which is very much a national institution. And this tribunal will try those crimes which are defined as international crimes," he headed.

He stressed that there is no scope of ambiguity about the tribunal, its standard and its dispensation of justice. But

many people, including a section of politicians, are dishing out wrong information about it, he alleged.

The NHRC chairman demanded increasing the number of tribunals to complete the trial of war crimes quickly.

He urged the prosecutors of the tribunal not to waste time by producing 70 to 80 witnesses in the cases of the accused about whose crimes the entire country knows. It is possible to prove their guilt by producing a small number of witnesses, he said.

Mizanur said the war crimes trial is not trial of only some people since the nation's future is linked with it. He warned the liberation forces, "If you fail to complete the trial, darkness will never end and nobody will come to protect you."

Turning to the media, he said, "If you show the pictures of those accused of crimes against humanity for the sake of neutrality, please show the pictures of also those people who were tortured or killed by

them."

Parishad President Justice AFM Mesbahuddin chaired the roundtable while Vice Chancellor of Dhaka University AAMS Refin Siddiqi and Prof Anwar Hossain, among others, spoke.

KL extends

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the irregular foreign workers to get new passports from their local embassies and submit applications to the Malaysian immigration department for regularisation ended on January 10.

By that time, around 17,000 irregular Bangladeshi workers out of 2.68 lakh, who earlier got registered with the Malaysian authorities, did not apply to the Bangladesh embassy for their new passports.

A sense of fear arose in the mind of the workers that it might lead to their deportation.

But they soon felt relief when the Malaysian authorities informally communicated their new decision of time extension to the foreign missions concerned in Kuala Lumpur.

"We hope, we can issue passports to the rest of the registered workers within two weeks," Biswas said.

Indonesia is yet to issue 3 lakh passports for its registered workers, while Myanmar over one lakh passports. Such time extension for the irregular workers of these two countries is like a blessing, he added.

Gilani

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came in the backdrop of the National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO) implementation case, Dawn News reported.

Barrister Zafarullah in his petition argued that under the Article 248-1 of the constitution, the premier also enjoyed immunity as did the president.

The petition further said that writing a letter to Swiss authorities was not the job of the prime minister.

It said that the court should have summoned the law secretary and the law minister before calling the prime minister before it on Jan 19.

Bokhari will make the "final decision whether to continue looking the other way or to move against the Prime Minister", The News reported.

Bokhari told the daily that action will be taken in cases of alleged illegal appointments made on the orders of the premier under the law and rules.

Ershad's

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rallies on his way to Rangpur. He urged people to vote for his party nominees in the next general elections and introduced several party men as candidates in different constituencies.

"We have made all the preparations for contesting the next parliamentary polls separately. We have already picked 200 candidates and are looking for 100 more eligible aspirants," he told at a rally in Alengal of Tangail.

The former military ruler also introduced the party candidates in Mirzapur of Tangail and Mokamtala of Bogra.

Hinting at quitting the ruling Awami League-led grand alliance, he said announcement in this regard will be made on time.

At a rally in Hatikumrul of Sirajganj he said, "Give me another chance to rule the country. I promise you to make Bangladesh corruption-free. I will prove my capability by showing how to develop the country and maintain peace and stability."

"The main reason for people's sufferings is the misrule of all the post 1990 governments," Ershad pointed out at a rally in Sherpur of Bogra adding, the country's development has been at a halt since the JP left power and that is why people want it returns to power.

"People don't want to see