

Inflation: Govt step worries MCCI

By Staff Correspondent

The Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) has expressed concern at the government's attempt to curb inflation through monetary measures alone saying that a narrow monetary approach may adversely affect investment without having any impact on inflation.

This observation was made in a write-up in the latest issue of the Chamber News, the MCCI's monthly review letter.

Pointing out that a narrow monetary approach has serious limitations in countries like Bangladesh, it said fiscal rather than monetary policies can yield a more effective curb on inflation in such a situation.

"Immediate steps should be taken in the realm of fiscal policies to check budgetary deficits and remove supply bottlenecks so as to encourage private investments to work in tandem for bringing about a downward movement of prices," MCCI suggested.

The MCCI observed that the present inflationary pressures have been created by direct and indirect effects of budgetary deficits, combined with supply bottlenecks and inadequate growth in productive sectors of the economy.

The budget deficit as a percentage of GDP increased

from five per cent in 1992 to 5.5 in 1993, 5.9 per cent in 1994 and above six per cent in 1995.

"There is a strong empirical support to the view that one per cent increase in budgetary deficit may lead to as much as six to seven per cent increase in the general price level," the Chamber pointed out.

The situation has been aggravated by the decline in output, particularly the agricultural sector, due to natural calamities and lower capacity utilisation in the manufacturing sector, due to political unrest, energy disruptions, tariff anomalies, MCCI said.

CEC visits injured presiding officers

Chief Election Commissioner Justice AKM Sadeque yesterday visited the Suhrawardi Hospital to see the two presiding officers who were injured in bomb attacks in the city. He expressed sympathy for the two officers and asked the physicians to ensure their proper treatment. Mohammad Sirajul Islam and Mohammad Mizanur Rahman, both Senior Assistant Secretaries at the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, were injured in bomb explosions at Mohammadpur on Sunday.

Polls: Govt officials

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Secretary the members of the civil administration urged him to advise the Chief Election Commissioner to immediately cancel the "farical election."

The administrative officials also urged him to request the President to convene a round-table conference between the government and Opposition leaders to reach an acceptable solution.

In the open letter, they also urged the Cabinet Secretary to immediately resign from his post.

Cabinet Secretary Ayubur Rahman later went to the Election Commission and had a meeting with the EC Secretary, Ershadul Huq.

A delegation of the BCS (Admn) Association also met with Chief Election Commissioner Justice AKM Sadeque and conveyed the anxiety of the members of their association.

The CEC assured the association leaders that the authorities had taken all measures to ensure security and safety of the officials engaged in election duties.

He also asked the presiding officers and assistant presiding officers to contact

their respective returning officers in matters relating to their movement and security.

The delegation included BCS (Admn) Association members Ataul Huq, Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, Abdul Mueed Chowdhury, Nuruz-zaman Mia and AHM Mofazzal Karim.

UNB adds from Chittagong: Some 300 government officials and teachers, assigned to conduct Thursday's general election, urged the authorities yesterday to relieve them of election duties because of "widespread violence."

They also submitted a memorandum to the Deputy Commissioner who is also the Returning Officer, urging him to relieve them of election duties.

Submission of memorandum followed an attack on an election training camp at the Muslim Hall in the city in the morning. Most of the presiding and polling officers of the district, and the returning officer himself could not attend the training programme due to the clashes. At a press conference at the local press club, the officials said they would not join election duty on security grounds.

Cast votes: Khaleda

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said, three opposition parties in an unholy alliance are out to disrupt the elections," she said in her 32-minute speech as part of her party's scheduled radio-TV projection of election campaign.

Pointing to the opposition's violent move against the polls, she questioned whether resisting others from participating in elections by resorting to violence is a democratic practice.

"Physical assault, threat to life, ransacking election camps and offices, blasting bombs, setting ablaze banks and petrol pumps, looting people's wealth, attacking the law-enforcing agencies and killing them and above all taking the law in one's own hands are these signs of democracy?"

In a veiled reference to the Awami League, the BNP chairperson said a particular party politicised the War of Liberation and threw the country into the pit of terrorism, corruption, famine and one-party rule.

The other party, she said without naming the Jatiya party, snatched democracy by grabbing power by overthrowing an elected government.

She also alerted into the Jamaat-e-Islami, another party in the trio. "They collaborated with the occupation forces during the War of Liberation," said Begum Zia.

"They want to capture power by any means, and that is why they are evading democratic norms and practices," she said.

The Prime Minister gave a resume on the success story of her government during the last five years. On the 1991 election pledges, Begum Zia said 80 per cent of those had been implemented.

She said in 1990-91 the volume of development budget was Tk 5,001 crore which was entirely foreign debt and aid-dependent. But it shot up to Tk 1,201 crore in 1995-96 and 43 per cent of the amount is being met from own resources.

Soon after the takeover, she said, the government waived the land tax upto 25 per cent and farm loan upto Tk 5,000. She also mentioned various other measures taken for the

weavers, fishermen and retired government employees.

The Prime Minister said during the last few years innumerable small and medium "ze industries like pisciculture, poultry and dairy farms had been set up for creating jobs in rural areas."

"We would have advanced further in the fields of development, production and investment, and achieving self-reliance, if the opposition parties had not created obstruction through their negative and destructive activities," she said.

Begum Zia said her government attached top priority to developing education and infrastructure for ensuring a prosperous future of the next generation.

She mentioned that the allocation in education sector was raised to Tk 1,596 crore in 1995-96 fiscal from Tk 304 crore in 1989-90.

On the list of achievements she mentioned the introduction of "revolutionary" food for education and stipend programmes which helped in increasing the literacy rate fast.

Dwelling on her party's election manifesto, Begum Zia said if voted to power, her party would establish a people-oriented and more transparent administration. It will ensure health service for all and also full freedom of the press.

The BNP would not renew the 25-year treaty with India and make all-out efforts to get due share of the Ganges waters.

On economic scenario, she said the trend of free market economy would be continued and the scope of more foreign investment expanded for flourishing the domestic industries.

The BNP chief pledged priority would be given to eradication of poverty, elimination of illiteracy, guaranteeing primary health care, construction of houses and increasing employment opportunity.

She expressed her conviction that the people would again vote for her party on its symbol — sheaf of paddy — in the coming election for the welfare, progress and continuation of constitutional rule and democracy.



Awami League president Sheikh Hasina addressing a meeting of some professional groups in front of the Jatiya Press Club yesterday.

Hasina

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meeting, expressed their solidarity with the ongoing opposition movement and said they would boycott and resist the elections.

Teachers Association president Principal Mohammad Qamruzzaman, Mohila Samity President Dr. Neleema Ibrahim, College-University Teachers' Association president Dr. M. Akhtaruzzaman, Mukti Joddha Command Council chairman Principal Abdul Ahad Chowdhury, Hindu-Buddha-Christian

Okkya Parishad chairman Maj Gen (ret'd) CR Dutta, Group Theatre Federation chairman Nasiruddin Yusuf Bacchu, Nirml Samannay Committee member secretary Prof Abdul Mannan Chowdhury, BFUJ president Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury, Ainjibi Samannay Parishad convenor advocate Shamsul Huq Chowdhury, SKOP leader Abul Basheer, Engineer Golam Mostafa, dramatist Ataur Rahman, Samilmita Sangkritik Jote general secretary Golam Qudus and agriculturist Monirul Islam, among others, addressed the meeting.

JN Hall incident HC decision on bail prayers of 16 today

By SC Correspondent

The High Court Division today will pass orders on the prayers for ad-interim bail of the 16 students of Jagannath Hall, Dhaka University who have been detained since January 31.

They were arrested prior to the inauguration of the Bangla Academy Book Fair by the Prime Minister on February 1.

A division bench of the HC comprising Justice Bimalendu Bikash Roy Chowdhury and Justice Muhammad Abdul Mannan upon hearing both the prosecution and the defence yesterday fixed today for order.

Dr Kamal Hossain, on behalf of the detenus, submitted that they are examinees which has been certified and recommended by the Provost

of Jagannath Hall and also by the Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka University.

The court desired to hear the Attorney General, Deputy Attorney General A F M. Hasan Arif, appearing on behalf of the Attorney General, submitted that they had no instruction from the government regarding bail of the detenus.

Later, Attorney General M Nurullah appeared before the court and reiterated the submission made by Hasan Arif.

But Deputy Attorney General Mujibur Rahman, who is also the Secretary for youth and students of the BNP central committee asserted that he had instructions to oppose the bail prayers.



Two presiding officers were driven to water in Fatulla, Narayanganj yesterday by some anti-election activists when they were returning home after attending a polls training programme.

One killed, 85 hurt in anti-polls violence

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hundreds of anti-polls activists started hurling bombs from different directions on the Muslim Hall at about 9.30 am and threatened the polling officers attending the meeting to leave the hall.

Following the attack, people vacated the hall and adjoining buildings and shops were closed in the nearby Rezauluddin Bazar and Biplani Bazar.

Later, Police, aided by BDR, cordoned off the entire area around the Muslim Hall and dispersed the anti-polls activists by resorting to heavy lathicharge.

Sporadic bomb blasts were heard from some other areas of the city including Andarkilla, Agrabad and Chawkbazar.

Anti-election activists also damaged a car of Farid Ahmed Chowdhury, an independent candidate from Chittagong-5 constituency, in front of the Chittagong press club while he was addressing a press conference inside the club.

UNB adds from Chittagong: Two traffic constables were injured in a bomb explosion in front of New Market in the port city in the morning.

The victims — Anwar Hossain and Ruhul Amin — were admitted to the Police Hospital at Dampara.

Several crude bombs were also hurled at the divisional election office at Jamal Khan Road in the evening. None was reported hurt.

Anti-election activists set ablaze the election campaign office of Farid Ahmed Chowdhury at Bibhrat in the afternoon.

A procession of BNP candidate Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury from Chittagong-8 was foiled by the Opposition activists at Bandarilla in the afternoon.

Meanwhile, Opposition parties called a half-day hartal at Banskhal today to foil the planned visit of Communications Minister Oli Ahmed.

SM Zahiruddin, a candidate of 7-party Alliance from Chittagong-8, withdrew from the race today expressing solidarity with the Opposition.

Two assistant presiding officers — Ataur Rahman Chowdhury and Maulana Abdul Hye — were reported kidnapped by some unidentified people yesterday but police said they have no knowledge about it.

Chowdhury, assistant presiding officer of Hasanpur Primary School centre, was picked up from his Kalurghat residence at about 6 pm, family sources said.

Maulana A Hye, assistant presiding officer of City Girls School centre, was abducted from in front of his residents at the Collegiate School premises at about 9 pm.

Our Narayanganj correspondent reported that some election officials were man-handled and forced swear in public not to join polls duty.

Witnesses said, some 50 anti-polls activists waylaid the election officials at Chandmari rail crossing at around 12:30 noon. The officials were returning from an election training meeting at Shaistapur TNO office which was also foiled by anti-election activists by hurling cock-tails earlier. None was, however, injured.

The activists pushed and dragged the officials into a pond and then forced them to hold their ears and to promise that they would not do polls duty. They were released later.

Our Staff Correspondent from Barisal reported that a shopkeeper Mosharrar Hossain (35), injured in an incident of anti-polls violence Monday evening, died at the Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital later at night.

Mosharrar was injured in a series of bomb blasts in an election-projection meeting of Brig (ret'd) Anwar Hossain Chowdhury, a BNP nominee from Bakerganj-6 constituency. About 20 people were injured in the clash.

Yesterday, crackers were hurled at Barisal Auditorium where an election training was being held. The DC and other officials were present. Two JP workers were arrested in this connection.

An independent candidate from Bhola-3 constituency was reportedly stripped in front of the Deputy Commissioner's residence at Bhola Saturday night. The candidate was going to meet the DC.

Our Correspondent reported from Comilla that at least 10 people were hurt in a clash between the Opposition and BNP activists at Dawlatganj Bazar in Laksam thana yesterday afternoon.

The clash began when BNP activists attacked a local JP leader.

The anti-election activists also ransacked the thana BNP and election offices and damaged five vehicles.

In Choudhagram, anti-election activists harassed a Khelaif Andolan candidate from Comilla-12 constituency from Comilla-12 constituency and set fire to the thana BNP office and damaged eight vehicles.

Our Correspondent from Sirajganj reported that five persons were injured and two shops and a motor bike of a policeman were damaged in three separate incidents in the district.

Anti-polls activists also foiled a polls training meeting of officials at Kazipur RDA High School premises at 10

IEH management not cooperating with probe body

Star Report

The management committee of the Islamia Eye Hospital (IEH) is not cooperating with the second probe committee on the hospital, headed by Abdul Mannan, Minister of State for Civil Aviation and Tourism. It was alleged.

The second probe committee formed about two months back, held several meetings with the hospital administration to resolve the alleged irregularities in it. But the chairman of the hospital management committee, Dr Matin Patwari did not attend any of the meetings. It was alleged by meeting sources.

Abdul Mannan, talking to The Daily Star yesterday said that he proposed formation of an "electoral college" with participation of some prominent citizens, doctors of the IEH and representatives of the Isaphani family, founders of the hospital.

According to the Mannan Formula, the "electoral college" which will elect the management committee must not exceed 100 members, including 10 from the Isaphani family.

When contacted, Dr. Matin Patwari declined to give his comments about the meetings.

24 Tamils killed in army shelling

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka, Feb 12: Soldiers defending a military post fired shells that struck a nearby rice paddy, killing at least 24 Tamil civilians and wounding 30 today, a police official said, reports AP.

Dozens of people were working in the field around dawn when the shells fell near the eastern village of Kumarapuram in Trincomalee district, the official said on condition of anonymity.

A military spokesman in Colombo denied that civilians were killed by military shelling, but acknowledged that fighting broke out in the area after Tamil separatists attacked the post late Sunday.

The Midnight File

Pak embassy employee expelled from Britain

LONDON, Feb 12: Britain today expelled a Pakistani embassy employee accused of trying to procure equipment for Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme. The Home Office said Mohammad Saleem had been ordered deported on the grounds his presence in Britain was "not conducive to the public good," reports AFP.

India, Nepal sign water treaty

NEW DELHI, Feb 12: India and Nepal signed a treaty today resolving a decade-old dispute over water and electricity that had strained relations between the South Asian neighbours, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said. Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao and his Nepali counterpart, Sher Bahadur Deuba, signed the treaty during the first day of the visiting leader's week-long trip to India, reports Reuters.

Fresh dialogue

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centage of voter turnout may be less than last election's if the opposition continued their violence during the election. "If they enforce hartal without violence, the turnout might be normal."

As per the rule of the Election Commission, she said, it is obligatory for all to halt all kinds of publicity and programmes 48 hours prior to the election.

"Let the opposition be silent for 48 hours. If they cease their violence and bomb blasting at that time, it can be proved which side the people support."

When asked to comment on the "people's curfew" announced by a major party leader, Begum Zia said there was nothing called people's curfew. "It is never good to say anything you like. Every body should think and ponder before uttering anything, otherwise people will not accept it."

Replying to the question of debate between Begum Zia and Sheikh Hasina, the BNP leader said that the Awami League did not come up with any proposal on this. She said she had known about it from newspapers, but there never was any formal proposal for such debate.

Without mentioning the name of any party, Begum Zia said: "If the party can sit with the Pakistanis to resolve political problems then why can't they sit with me. I am a Bangladeshi. What is the problem to sit with me?"

The Prime Minister said that her party along with the opposition parties in Parliament had passed the 12th amendment to the Constitution and introduced parliamentary system to stop the illegal taking over of power through violating the Constitution. "Now there is no scope to occupy the post of Prime Minister by an unelected person."

But the opposition parties deviated from the 12th amendment and wanted appointment of an unelected person as the head of the government.

"We have been strict to our principles and we will remain so in future. We will maintain parliamentary system and no unelected person would be allowed to assume the powers of an elected Prime Minister," she said.

Replying to a question, she said no party ever brought any bill on caretaker issue in the parliament. She clarified that a bill from Jamaat-e-Islami that came was not placed as per parliamentary process and was not a complete one. The Jamaat MPs did not reply on the notice given by the parliament secretariat on their bill.

Editor of Bangladesh Observer

Al-Amin editor arrested

By Staff Correspondent

Mokbul Hossain, editor of the daily Al-Amin and chief of the Awami Secchasebak League, was arrested from his Mohammadpur residence last night, family sources and police said.

A plainclothes Special Branch team picked him up from his Tajmahal road residence at around 10 pm, said the eldest son of Mokbul Hossain.

The cause of the arrest could not be known immediately.

No definite charges were recorded against him, police said.

Meanwhile, protest processions were brought out in Mohammadpur. A number of shops were damaged and crackers were blasted in the area, local said.

Bomb hurled

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parking area at around 9 pm, according to an agency reports.

A private car was burnt at the TSC road crossing while another microbus was set ablaze near Titumir hall at the BUET in the evening, students and fire service sources said.

An autorickshaw was set on fire while bombs were hurled near the T&T office at Gulistan after the PM's speech.

An incident of bomb explosion at a godown at Road No 7, Dhanmondi, was also reported in the evening.

server Prof KM Munim. Editor of Holiday AZM Enayetullah Khan, UNB Chief Editor Enayetullah Khan, Chief Editor of Financial Express Rezauluddin Ahmed and Editor Moazzem Hossain, Morning Sun Editor, Atiqul Alam, Dainik Bangla Editor Ahmed Humayun, Bhorer Kagoj Editor Matinur Rahman, Joint Editor of Dinkal Syed Zafar, New Nation Editor Alamgir Mohiuddin, Daily Star Editor Mahfuz Anam, Media Syndicate Editor Shawkat Mahmud, Khabar Editor Mizanur Rahman Mizan, Meilat Editor Chowdhury Mohammad Faruque, Jai Jai Din Editor Shafiq Rehman and others took part in the discussion.

Some 28 editors were present at the function. Commerce and Information Minister M Shamsul Islam and Press Secretary to the Prime Minister Mohammad Mozammel Haq were present.

100 hurt in clash over control of saltbed

COX'S BAZAR, Feb 12: A fierce clash between two rival groups of people over the possession of a saltbed in Chokoria thana today left more than 100 people injured, five with bullets, reports UNB.

Police and witnesses said the clash between two rival groups, one led by Moulaib Kabir Ahmed and another by Saleh Ahmed, erupted at about 8 am when the supporters of later went to Bahaltal saltbed in Kotakhali union to cultivate salt.

The rival groups during their two-hour clash traded several hundred gunshots and used ramdoo and lethal weapons.

Police rushed to the spot and rounded up five people from the scene.

Of the injured, Shamsul Alam, 18, Haji Nurul Huda, 45, Muhammad Abdus Salam, 50, Haji Nurul Haque, 40, and Haji Mokhtar Ahmed, 55, were rushed to Chittagong Medical College Hospital in critical conditions while 31 others admitted to Chokoria Health Complex and Dolahajara Missionary Hospital.

EC: Intimidation

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Syed Rezaul Hayat, Principal Staff Officer of Armed Forces Major General MSA Bhuiyan, Inspector General of Police ASM Shajahan, DG of BDR Major General Ezzat Ahmad Chowdhury, DG of DGF Major General Imam-uz-Zaman, DG of Ansar and VDP Major General MA Kabir Talukdar, Additional Secretary of EC SM Zakaria, DG of NSI Brigadier AJM Aminul Haq and high police officers.

Elaborating on the background of the election, being boycotted by main opposition parties, the CEC said it is constitutional obligation for the EC to hold elections by February 21.

He said the EC had deployed security forces, police, BDR and Ansar-VDP members to ensure free and fair conduct of polls on February 15.

Barricade

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however, were exempted from this programme, said an AL press release issued last night.

Meanwhile, the activists of the opposition political parties also brought out separate processions yesterday in different parts of the city to drum up support for the barricade programme.

AL chief Sheikh Hasina, in a press statement issued last night, appealed to the people to make the barricade programme a success and to resist the forthcoming farical elections.

"This is no election... where the people are not participating and the officials have expressed their inability to perform their election duties," Hasina said.

Last week, the Opposition held demonstrations, rallies and attempted a march towards the PM's residence as part of its ongoing anti-government agitation programme.

Amidst tightened security measures the planned march of the Opposition towards the PM's residence on Saturday last was blocked by police at various strategic locations, leading to large scale violence in and around the city.

Meanwhile, the government has declared February 15 a public holiday on occasion of the forthcoming general elections.