

Panic rush to withdraw Oriental Bank deposits

Accused top bankers go to HC to challenge ACC cases

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

On the first day of government imposed six-month moratorium on some activities of Oriental Bank, depositors yesterday crowded its branches to withdraw their money.

Following writ petitions by four accused officials of the Oriental Bank, the High Court yesterday issued a rule asking the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) to reply why the cases against the four shall not be declared illegal.

The court also directed the law enforcers not to arrest the petitioners and asked the petitioners to appear before the court on Thursday.

The government on Thursday imposed a moratorium for six months on all activities of Oriental Bank except seven kinds of transaction, including limited deposit withdrawal.

The finance ministry in a gazette notification said the decision was taken to ease depositors' plight and create a congenial atmosphere to recover its outstanding loans.

Many depositors withdrew their deposits following the ceiling limit of Tk 10,000 while some others, convinced by the bank officials that the bank will not be shut down, returned without withdrawing any

money, said the branch managers.

The overall situation was normal in Dhaka but a bit panicky situation was observed at some branches on the city outskirts, Assaduzzaman Khan, chief executive officer (CEO) of the Oriental Bank, told The Daily Star last night.

"Some clients withdrew their deposited money and some others deposited money to the bank. As a result net withdrawal stood at Tk 3 crore yesterday," the bank CEO said, adding that they hope the situation will come to normal today or tomorrow.

Several anxious clients who came to withdraw their money wanted to know what will happen if the bank shuts down, said an official of Motijheel branch.

The clients also requested the bank officials to allow withdrawal of money over the ceiling limit for 'daily emergencies', he said.

The bank officials asked the clients to submit applications for withdrawing money over existing ceiling limits so that the bank can negotiate with the central bank.

The bank officials said they could convince the customers by giving assurance that the bank will not be shut down.

A depositor wanted to close his account but the bank officials persuaded him to change his decision,

said an official.

An official of Oriental Bank Karwan Bazar branch said they cashed a total of 70 cheques worth Tk10,000 each.

A compiled version of the requests that they received from the customers yesterday will be sent to the Bangladesh Bank for further consideration, said sources at the bank's head office.

Four accused officials of the Oriental Bank yesterday filed writ petitions with the High Court challenging the ACC's authority to file cases against them.

Barrister Moudud Ahmed moved a petition in favour of one of four accused Oriental Bank staff Tariqul Islam Khan, an assistant vice president of the bank.

Moudud, the BNP leader who was the law minister of the immediate past government during the formation of the ACC, said the ACC has no legality to file such corruption cases as it has no rules in this regard till date.

Advocate Ozaer Faruk moved the other three writ petitions for M Shafiuddin, Abu Zafar and Arifur Rahman.

The court issued a rule asking

2,153 more arrested

STAR REPORT

The army-led joint forces yesterday arrested 2,153 people on various charges and seized 26 firearms during their ongoing countrywide drive within 24 hours preceding 6:00pm yesterday.

In Khagrachhari, the joint forces detained a BNP loyalist Pourasabha chairman, a Union Parishad (UP) chairman, presidents of two upazila units of BNP and two Pourasabha commissioners of three upazilas of the hill district.

Organising secretary of Jhenidah BNP, also a UP chairman of Sadar upazila, was detained in

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3 'muggers' beaten to death in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A mob lynched three alleged muggers at Chittagong city's Kaptai Rastar Matha near Kalughat yesterday noon.

Witnesses and police said two female employees of Grameen Bank Aman Bazar branch were returning to their bank after collecting Tk 2 lakh from borrowers when a gang of muggers, around 10 people in three CNG auto-rickshaws, stopped them. The gang snatched the cash and tried to leave the scene.

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PHOTO: STAR

BIWTA workers demolish an illegally built wall at Kamrangirchar in Dhaka yesterday during a drive to free the Buriganga bank of illegal structures.



PHOTO: SHAMIM ASHRAF

Ticket counters for buses reappear on a pavement near Azampur in Uttara in the capital, only a few days after the authorities evicted them.

'Suicide' blast kills 14 in Pakistan

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan ordered a federal probe and beefed up security yesterday after a suspected suicide bomber killed 14 people including two top police officers, the second such attack in two days.

As investigators hunted for clues about the bombing in Peshawar, the main city in northwest Pakistan, thousands of mourners attended the funeral prayers of its slain police chief and deputy superintendent.

President Pervez Musharraf and premier Shaukat Aziz condemned the bombing and ordered an immediate investigation, the Associated Press of Pakistan reported.

Akram Durrani, the chief minister of North West Frontier Province, said a joint investigation team comprising provincial and federal officials had been formed.

Meanwhile, thousands of armed policemen stood on alert in Peshawar and extra paramilitary troops were deployed around mosques to prevent further attacks, a security official told AFP.

The blast late Saturday targeted police who were guarding a Shiite

Muslim procession, Interior Minister Aftab Sherpao told AFP.

Around 30 people were injured in the explosion near a Shiite mosque in the Qisakhawani bazaar.

On Friday, a suicide bomber blew himself up at the upmarket Marriott hotel in the capital Islamabad, also killing security guard trying to prevent him entering the building.

The bombings occurred as Pakistan's minority Shiite community commemorates the 7th century martyrdom of the prophet Mohammed's grandson Imam Hussain.

Investigators probing the hotel blast said Saturday they were looking at possible links to pro-Taliban extremists fighting government forces near the Afghan border.

There was no immediate comment on suspects for the Peshawar attack which killed people in the city, including six police officers.

The two senior officers killed were identified as Peshawar's police chief Malik Saad and deputy

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Federer keeps Australian Open

INTERNET, Melbourne

Defending champion Roger Federer swept to his 10th Grand Slam title with a commanding straight-sets victory over Chile's Fernando Gonzalez in the final of the Australian Open here Sunday.

The peerless Swiss world number one fought off two set points in the opening set and went on to secure his third Australian title with a 7-6 (7/2), 6-4, 6-4 win over the 10th seeded Chilean in 2hr 20 min.

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EC recast in limbo

Commissioners wait on request from president or CG to resign

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Neither the president nor the newly formed caretaker government (CG) has asked for resignation of the election commissioners so that the Election Commission (EC) could be reconstituted, a prerequisite to holding a free and fair election.

On January 20, the law and information adviser told The Daily Star, "A new chief election commissioner (CEC) will be appointed. There is no question of sending people on leave anymore, they [controversial EC commissioners] would have to resign."

However, sources told The Daily Star the reconstitution of the EC might get into gear this week. A new CEC would be appointed and the "controversial" commissioners would resign.

"Neither the president nor the caretaker government has requested us to resign," acting CEC Justice Mahfuzur Rahman told reporters at his office yesterday.

The acting CEC had earlier said he would consider stepping down as

the poll chief if the request came from President Iajuddin Ahmed.

Asked whether they would resign on request of the president or the caretaker government, Election Commissioner Modabbir Hossain Chowdhury said they are ready to resign for the sake of the nation.

"We are yet to receive such request from the government," he added.

The EC activities remain subdued as the officials wait for instructions and guidelines from the CG.

The EC officials now spend their time in chit-chat as there is not much to be done in the office. Mahfuzur told reporters that they mostly chit-chat during the meetings of election commissioners.

CEC MA Aziz, who was on leave, resigned on January 21 but a new CEC is yet to be appointed.

On January 22, the other election commissioners—Modabbir Hossain Chowdhury and Saiful Alam—told newsmen that they would leave their posts only if the president asks them to do so.

Sathkhira editor hurt in attack

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sathkhira

A group of activists belonging to Sathkhira Awami Swechchhasebak League attacked editor of a local daily with sharp weapons and injured him seriously on Saturday night.

The injured journalist is Prof Anisur Rahim, editor of the daily

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More VoIP devices seized

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) personnel seized Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) devices worth around Tk 2.5 crore after raiding two houses in Tongi early yesterday.

During the hour-long raid from

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Prayer Timing		
January 29		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-35	6-10
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-15	4-30
Maghrib	5-46	5-50
Esha	7-15	7-45
Source: Islamic Foundation		

Mass US protest against more troops in Iraq

AFP, Washington

Tens of thousands of protesters crowded Washington Saturday to demand Congress cut off funds for the Iraq war and stop troop

increases ordered by President George W. Bush.

The crowds rallied at the foot of the Capitol, chanting, "Bring the troops home now!" and waving banners reading: "Escalation in Iraq? Wrong Way."

The moment for the protest was ripe, as poll numbers turned against

Bush ahead of a Senate vote expected in early February on a non-binding resolution condemning Bush's new strategy to deploy 21,500 additional troops to Iraq.

Len Singer, 74, traveled 300 kilometers for the demonstration held just weeks after Democrats took control of Congress.

"If the Democrats squander this time period, they'll never have another chance again," he said.

The protesters want Congress to vote a binding resolution to cut off funds for the war in Iraq, which has

lasted nearly four years, longer than the US participation in World War II.

In Iraq on Saturday, seven more US soldiers died, which would bring the US military's losses since the March 2003 invasion to 3,068.

"Our fellow Americans are dying as we stand here today," said actor Sean Penn. "We're going to push this until this resolution is binding, the money stops and the troops come home."

Medea Benjamin, founder of

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4 shops at city market looted

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In yet another big heist, hoodlums took away gold ornaments, mobile phone sets and other apparatuses worth around Tk 33 lakh from four shops including two jewellery ones at a city shopping complex on Saturday night.

Police and businessmen said the criminals took away gold ornaments weighing 184 tola—114 tola from Al-Emon Jewellers and 70 tola

from Surma Jewellers on the first floor of Ayesha Mosharraf Shopping Complex at Shanir Akhra in Shyampur.

They also looted mobile phone sets and other accessories worth Tk 2.65 lakh from Fardin Mobile Mart and Desire Trading Centre on the second floor of the market.

The thieves also took away Tk 1.35 lakh in cash from all the four shops.

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Prothom Alo sued for news on Mamun's pole business

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court directed Prothom Alo Editor Matiur Rahman, Publisher Mahfuz Anam and two staff reporters of the daily to appear before it on February 8 after the general manager of Khamba Ltd, on behalf of the company's Managing Director Giasuddin Al Mamun, filed a defamation case against them yesterday.

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