
Halt In OMX Sparks Market Bid Speculations.

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STOCKHOLM, Sweden: A trading halt in Nordic bourse operator OMX AB on Thursday spurred market rumors that the Stockholm-based company could be involved in a merger.

In a brief statement, the Stockholm stock exchange said the suspension had been made at the company's request and that a news announcement was expected before market opening on Friday.

OMX spokesman Niclas Lilja declined to comment on the reasons for the trading halt, saying only the news would be unveiled in tomorrow's statement.

The Stockholm-based company - the largest bourse in the Nordic region and the result of seven merged Nordic stock exchanges in the past three years - has repeatedly said it is continuously eyeing the stepped-up consolidation climate in the sector, and that it will continue to evaluate its strategic opportunities.

It has kept relatively quiet on specifying those opportunities, but in December it launched a ~\$4.2 million (US\$5.65 million) bid for the Ljubljana Stock Exchange in Slovenia, and in April it agreed to buy the Armenian bourse and the Central Depository of Armenia.

Sweden's new center-right government, which holds 6.75 percent in OMX, has also put it on its up-for-sale assets list as it wants to reduce state ownership in Swedish companies.

Shares in OMX rose 3.2 percent before the suspension.

In mid-April, shares in the company soared after a news report said OMX had received a 23 billion kronor (~\$2.5 billion; US\$3.36 billion) offer from Nasdaq Stock Market Inc. in the U.S., but both bourses denied an offer had been made.

At the same time, OMX said it was in "exploratory discussions with several exchanges and other market venues regarding possible forms of cooperation," but did not issue any further details.

A Stockholm-based analyst, who requested anonymity, said the trading halt was most likely due to takeover news.

"There was a rumor yesterday that OMX would be taken over. My guess is that that this is about M&A activity," he said.

The London Stock Exchange has also been rumored to be interested in the Nordic bourse operator.
