



POLLS MONITORING

Number of local organisations to be cut by half

EC decides at meeting

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

The number of local organisations that will monitor the next general polls is likely to be reduced by nearly half compared to previous elections.

The election commission yesterday decided at a meeting that a total of 68 local organisations would get registration to monitor the 12th parliamentary election.

EC Secretary Jahangir Alam said the EC in a public notice following the meeting published a list containing names of 68 local organisations as election observers.

Jahangir said any individual or organisation can raise objections about the names on the list. However, he noted, the objections should be lodged with the EC within the next 15 working days.

The list will be finalised after considering such objections, he added.

Ahead of the last December 30, 2018 parliamentary polls, the EC provided registration to 118 local organisations.

The EC secretary also said the local

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Vehicles in a long tailback at the capital's Kakrail intersection around noon yesterday. Several streets in the city had gridlocks amid intermittent rain the entire day.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

It's a strong message to the corrupt

Say analysts about US anti-corruption official's communication to Momen

PORIMOL PALMA

Washington's communication that it may consider sanctions as a tool against corruption delivers a strong message to those who have already been proven corrupt or have been accused of large-scale corruption, analysts say.

US State Department Coordinator for Global Anti-Corruption Richard Nephew made the communication to Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen during a meeting at the Foreign Service Academy on Monday.

"This message [from Washington to Dhaka] can add a new dimension in the fight against corruption," Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman told The Daily Star yesterday.

Nephew, who arrived in Dhaka on Sunday, met officials of the Anti-Corruption Commission, foreign ministry, Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU), businessmen and civil society members before ending

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IMF'S \$4.7B LOAN

Two of 6 major conditions missed

Staff mission to review H1 progress later this quarter

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Bangladesh has failed to meet two of the six quantitative targets set for the first half of 2023 by the International Monetary Fund for the \$4.7 billion loan, with one of them being a mandatory condition.

The finance ministry has already written to the Washington-based multilateral lender explaining why the country missed the two conditions, The Daily Star has learnt from officials involved with the proceedings.

They have also explained the matter to Krishna Srinivasan, the IMF's director of the Asia and Pacific Department, when he called into Bangladesh last month.

The government has failed to maintain minimum net international reserves (NIR) of \$24.46 billion at the end of June.

The NIR target was missed by about \$3 billion as the government had to dip into reserves to pay for essential imports of fuel, fertiliser and foodstuff from the reserves, the finance ministry officials said.

Govt will seek a waiver from meeting the two conditions such that the second instalment of the loan can be released.

The minimum tax revenue target will also be missed. The government needed to collect at least Tk 345,630 crore in tax revenue in fiscal 2022-23.

That target will be missed by about Tk 15,000 crore as collections slowed down as a result of the import curbs put in place to preserve the strained dollar stockpile.

Subsequently, the government will seek a waiver from meeting the two conditions from the IMF such that the second instalment of the loan can be released, the finance ministry officials said.

If a country misses a quantitative performance criteria (QPC) condition, the IMF executive board may approve a waiver if it is satisfied that the programme will still succeed. This may be because the deviation was minor or temporary or because national authorities are taking corrective actions.

Missed structural benchmarks (SB) and indicative targets (IT) do not require waivers but are assessed in the context of overall programme performance.

The minimum NIR is a QPC while the tax revenue floor is an indicative target.

The rest of the quantitative targets like the floor on budget, social spending and development capital investment and the ceiling on reserve money have been met.

The government has also met all six of the SBs for June 2023, the finance ministry officials said.

The SBs for June include the adoption of an interest rate corridor system, reporting official reserve assets as per the IMF's BPM6 definition and introduction of a market-determined exchange rate.

The central bank was supposed to complete the pilot risk-based supervision action plan and publish banks' distressed assets in the annual financial stability report as well.

The finance ministry has also adopted tax revenue measures yielding an additional 0.5 percent of GDP in fiscal 2023-24's budget.

The first review of the programme to assess the programme's quantitative targets and progress of reform implementation will take place in the last week of September or the first week of October.

Russian missiles destroy apartments, hotel

Says Ukraine; 7 killed; Poland to send additional troops to Belarus border

REUTERS, Pokrovsk

Russian missiles struck the eastern Ukrainian city of Pokrovsk twice on Monday night, destroying a popular hotel and apartments, killing at least seven people and wounding scores, officials said yesterday.

Interior Minister Ihor Klymenko said seven people, including five civilians, were killed.

"We are resuming clearing the rubble. At night, we were forced to suspend work due to the high threat of repeated shelling," Klymenko said on the Telegram messaging app yesterday.

Two missiles hit the centre of Pokrovsk within 40 minutes of each other, witnesses said. Pictures posted by officials showed that the hotel, in the centre of the city, suffered a direct hit, with several floors missing.

Residents said the Druzhba (Friendship) Hotel was popular with journalists, aid workers and the military. It was one of the few still operating in the eastern Donetsk region, close to the frontline.

Russia's defence ministry yesterday said Russian forces had hit a Ukrainian command post in Pokrovsk, known in Russia as Krasnoarmysk, the Interfax news agency reported.

President Volodymyr Zelensky said in a video published yesterday that Ukraine would fight back against Russia in the Black Sea to ensure its waters were not blockaded and it could import and export grain and other goods.

The comments, published on the president's website, come days after Ukrainian maritime drones packed with explosives damaged a Russian warship near a major Russian port and struck a Russian tanker.

"If Russia continues to dominate the Black Sea, outside its territory, blockading or firing at us again, launching missiles at our ports, Ukraine will do the same. This is a just defence of our opportunities, of any corridor," Zelensky said.

Meanwhile, Poland's defence ministry has agreed to send additional troops to the Belarus border following a request from the border guard service, state-run news agency PAP reported.

Warsaw has been on high alert recently as Russian Wagner mercenary troops arrived in Belarus for training.

On Monday, the border guard service asked the defence ministry to send an additional 1,000 troops to the border amid increased attempts to cross the frontier illegally.

CYBER SECURITY ACT

Stakeholders should have a say in it

Says US state dept

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The US encourages Bangladesh to give all stakeholders an opportunity to review and provide input to the new draft Cyber Security Act to ensure it meets international standards.

"We welcome the Bangladeshi government's long stated commitment to reform the law, to protect freedom of expression," said State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller at a briefing on Monday in response to a question.

He said as Washington previously stated, the Digital Security Act has been used to arrest, detain, and silence critics.

The comment comes after the government on Monday decided to "transform" and "modernise" the Digital Security Act and change its name to Cyber Security Act.

The bill dropped the provision of jail term for defamation charge and

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Long before whales, a marine reptile was a filter-feeder



REUTERS

The blue whale and other baleen whales, the gentle giants of the sea, sift huge quantities of tiny prey from ocean water using a filter-feeding system in their mouths. But they were not the first marine creatures to feed like that.

Fossils unearthed in China's Hubei Province indicate that a curious marine reptile called Hupehsuchus nanchangensis that lived 248 million years ago in the Triassic Period employed a similar system during a time of tremendous evolutionary innovation following Earth's worst mass extinction.

Unlike the blue whale, today's largest animal, Hupehsuchus was modest in size, about three feet (one metre) long. It possessed a long and narrow snout, toothless mouth, front and back limbs that could serve as paddles for steering, and a broad tail that it flipped from side to side for forward propulsion.

Long and loose bones made up its snout, with a narrow lower jaw only loosely connected to the rest of the skull to let it open its mouth widely to take in large quantities of water bearing small prey called zooplankton.

Kidnapped Bangladeshi UN official released

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Bangladeshi UN official, who was abducted by al-Qaeda from southern Yemen, has been released yesterday, around 18 months after his kidnapping, family members said.

AKM Sufiul Anam, field security coordination officer of United Nations Department of Safety and Security, was kidnapped in February last year.

He retired from the Bangladesh Army as lieutenant colonel in 2005 and had been working with the UN since.

Sakeef, son of Sufiul, told The Daily Star that they were grateful to the prime minister, chief of army staff, and everyone who was involved in the matter in the administration.

"I talked to my father a few hours ago. He is well," Sakeef said yesterday evening.

Sufiul was among five UN employees who were taken as hostage by al-Qaeda.



Rescuers work at the site of a building destroyed during a Russian missile strike, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Pokrovsk, Donetsk region, Ukraine yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS