

Participants fly their kites during the International Kite Festival in Colombo yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

Colombia's new president vows to 'defeat narco-terrorists'

AFP, *Cali*

Colombian President Abelardo de la Espriella vowed to restore order and eradicate "narco-terrorists" in a fiery first speech as leader on Friday.

The US-backed millionaire flew by helicopter to address soldiers in a military garrison after his inauguration in the southwestern city of Cali.

His mandate marks a sharp turn right for the Andean nation, with the 48-year-old keen to cozy up to Washington and come down hard on Colombia's patchwork of armed groups.

"There will be no room for maneuvers that undermine the stability of the nation," the president, who adopted a stiff military salute on the campaign trail, told hundreds of soldiers.

Iran, Oman 'very close' to deal on Hormuz

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the strait depended on other conditions, including US compensation to Iran.

The previous shipping traffic separation scheme through the strait was no longer acceptable to Tehran, he said, adding that Iran was discussing a temporary route with Oman while technical and legal issues surrounding a permanent route were resolved.

Iran has responded to the US attacks by targeting US bases in Gulf states and Jordan, and shipping in the narrow strait, which carried a fifth of the world's oil and gas shipments before the war.

The UAE yesterday said that Iran had attacked a carrier affiliated with its state oil company with a missile as it transited the Strait of Hormuz, with no injuries reported, in the latest escalation in attacks on shipping there.

There was no immediate comment from Iranian authorities. Iranian media quoted the UAE report without including the part in which the country blamed Iran for the attack.

In recent weeks, the Trump administration has repeatedly signaled that a deal to open the strait could be close, only to have Iran deny that talks are under way. It was unclear whether the latest flurry of negotiations would yield a more lasting arrangement.

"There is progress between Oman and Iran on the strait, and we expect a deal soon," a US official told Reuters on Friday. "Once the deal is announced to restore commercial shipping without impediments, the United States will lift the blockade of Iranian ports."

"As always, US actions will continue to be performance-based and tied to Iran's implementation of its commitments," the official said.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards also said yesterday that re-opening the Strait of Hormuz depended on Washington accepting Iran's conditions and was not related to the Iran-Oman negotiations.

Guards spokesperson Hossein Mohebbi did not specify the conditions but said Washington must stop interfering in the regional negotiation process.

"Whenever the United States accepts Iran's conditions, the Strait of Hormuz will certainly be reopened," he said, according to Iran's Tasnim news agency.

A proposed deal between Iran and Oman to help end five months of war between Iran and the US would give Tehran control over ships entering the Gulf through the strait, a senior Iranian source and two regional officials told Reuters on Wednesday, one of the biggest concessions yet to Iran.

US officials have repeatedly insisted they would never agree to Iran controlling access to the world's most important trade route for energy supplies. It was not clear whether they had sought to change the parameters of the deal.

Iran has used the hostilities to justify charging a toll on oil tankers. That, and the firing on ships that attempt to cross the strait without its permission, has badly disrupted global shipments, causing energy prices to surge and fueling inflation.

Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, one of the world's largest energy producers, said on Friday that 15 of its vessels had been struck in what it called unprovoked attacks while transiting the Strait of Hormuz since the start of the conflict. The attacks have killed one crew member and wounded 20 others, it said.

Iranian media often report attacks on ships saying they violated Iran's directives, without specifying that Iran was behind the attacks.

Iranian strikes on Strait of Hormuz shipping have been coupled with increased attacks by its Yemen-based allies, the Houthis, who have targeted ships at another oil chokepoint on the other side of the Arabian Peninsula between the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.

New BTV DG

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of the law being made effective. If it is not in effect, there is no scope to make an appointment under it."

"If the act has been made effective through the issuance of a gazette notification, then there is no problem with the appointment," he added.

According to Ministry of Information sources, BTV DGs are appointed on deputation from among government officials of joint secretary or additional secretary rank, or on a contractual basis from outside the government. For contractual appointments, media personalities or professionals are selected under the "Public Service Act, 2018". Ministry of Public Administration sources said Mahbubul Alam, who was appointed during the interim government, received a contractual appointment under the Public Service Act.

Asked why the new DG was appointed under an inactive law when contractual appointments are possible under the Public Service Act, Golam Robbani, deputy secretary of the Ministry of Public Administration who signed the appointment notification, declined to comment and requested that senior officials be contacted.

Contacted, Nilufar Jesmin Khan, joint secretary of the Contract and Foreign Employment Branch of the Ministry of Public Administration, said, "We are discussing the matter. Please speak to our wing chief for comments on this."

Despite phone calls and text messages, Aknur Rahman, head of the Appointment, Promotion and Deputation Wing, did not respond.

Asked how the appointment happened despite multiple stages of scrutiny for contractual appointments, a senior Cabinet Division official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said, "Officers with the skills and personality required to run the state should be appointed to public administration. Otherwise, such problems will keep occurring."

"A few days ago, a retired officer was promoted from deputy secretary to joint secretary. This is the state of the Ministry of Public Administration," the official said, citing an example.

India can't play Hasina

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the Fall of the Fascist Government", organised by Sada Dal (White Panel), a pro-BNP teachers' organisation at Dhaka University, and the University Teachers' Association of Bangladesh (UTAB), marking the second anniversary of the July mass uprising.

He said Bangladesh wants friendly ties with India based on mutual respect.

"We want to maintain a friendly relationship with you. But we will never become the Awami League. We will maintain relations with you while upholding Bangladesh's interests, based on mutual dignity and respect and based on sovereignty and equality," he said.

On August 5, the Foreign Correspondents' Club of South Asia hosted a press conference in New Delhi where Hasina, her son Sajeeb Wazed Joy and other AL leaders spoke. The event was broadcast live on social media. Hasina reiterated her plan to return to Bangladesh in December this year.

Dhaka had earlier requested New Delhi to prevent Hasina from speaking at the event, saying it could affect bilateral relations.

On August 7, India's Ministry of External Affairs said the Indian government had no role in the event organised by a private media entity. It also said the government did not endorse anything said at the forum, "especially with regard to the duly constituted government of Bangladesh".

Referring to India's statement, Salahuddin said Bangladesh accepted the clarification but objected to Hasina being repeatedly allowed to speak to international media from India.

He rejected comparisons between Hasina's presence in India and BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman's political activities while in London.

Noting that Hasina has neither expressed remorse nor apologised to the people for the atrocities committed during the July uprising, Salahuddin questioned whether she could still be regarded as a democratic leader. He also alleged that Hasina was using her stay in India to make statements against Bangladesh's democratic process and create instability.

"The statements she is making from Delhi are against our democratic culture and the people of this country, and they are attempts to create instability -- these are our allegations. India cannot avoid responsibility for this," he said.

Turning to the interim government and its reform process, Salahuddin said some quarters had advocated extending its tenure for another five years, ignoring people's aspirations for a fair election and the transfer of power through a democratic process.

BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi called for institutional and constitutional reforms and a change in the mindset of political leaders.

He said no single group could claim sole credit for the July uprising and noted that 142 Chhatra Dal leaders and activists were martyred during the movement.

Referring to a recent documentary screening at the official residence of Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman, Rizvi alleged that although the documentary mentioned Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, it did not mention former president Ziaur Rahman as the proclaimer of independence.

Dhaka University Vice-Chancellor Prof ABM Obaidul Islam said free thinking was obstructed on the campus during what he described as the fascist era.

DU Prof Md Mohiuddin moderated the event, chaired by UTAB Secretary General Prof Morshed Hasan Khan.

15,712 killed

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percent, were head-on collisions. The remaining 706 crashes occurred for other reasons.

Goods vehicles, including trucks, covered vans, pickups, tractors, trolleys and lorries, were blamed for the largest number of crashes. Their drivers were responsible for 6,481 crashes, or 40.34 percent, according to the report.

Motorcycle riders were solely responsible for 5,831 crashes, or 36.29 percent. Bus drivers were blamed for 2,164 crashes, three-wheelers for 732, private cars, microbuses, ambulances and jeeps for 438, pedestrians for 296, and bicycles and rickshaws for 123.

Regional roads saw the largest share of crashes, with 6,689, or 41.63 percent. National highways saw 4,773 crashes, while 2,646 occurred on urban roads and 1,957 on rural roads.

Motorcycles account for 71 percent of all registered motor vehicles in Bangladesh, the RSF said, adding that teenagers and young adults operate a large proportion of them.

The RSF blamed reckless riding, disregard for traffic rules, weak enforcement, unsafe road infrastructure, inadequate monitoring, and a shortage of affordable public transport for the high number of crashes.

It also said the way motorcycles are advertised encourages young people to associate speed with excitement.

Motorcycles are 30 times more dangerous than four-wheeled vehicles, the report said. It added that the use of substandard helmets was a major factor in motorcycle deaths and that quality helmets could reduce the risk of death in a crash by 48 percent.

The RSF called for standard helmets to be made compulsory, stricter enforcement of traffic laws, greater use of safety and surveillance technology, and safer road infrastructure.

It also recommended awareness campaigns at educational institutions and on social media, changes to the language used in motorcycle advertisements, and affordable, accessible and passenger-friendly public transport.

Indian

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memories and photos of the anti-Modi movement have also been taken down," he said.

Asked by journalists, he said the BNP might be afraid of India. "If they weren't afraid, why would something that is a part of history be excluded?" he questioned.

He alleged that the current government had changed the museum's original plans.

Nahid further claimed that the museum's current state disproportionately highlights oppression faced by the BNP as a party, increasing its partisan narratives and statements.

The sections highlighting the July uprising should be more elaborate and follow a timeline, he said. "In particular, the roles of private university and madrasa students should be highlighted separately, which is missing [in the museum]."

He said there were similar stories of torture, brutality and resistance at various universities outside Dhaka and in different districts, but those aspects had not been included.

NCP lawmakers Akhter Hossen, Abdullah Al Amin and Nusrat Tabassum, among others, accompanied Nahid during the visit.

Small changes key

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was Bangladesh's greatest strength. However, young people seeking systemic change must build alliances with other sections of society, as resistance to change remained strong.

Stressing decentralisation, he said farmers, women, entrepreneurs and ordinary people across the country should also be seen as agents of change, rather than viewing change as centred only on Dhaka and political leaders.

Citing education and health, he said forming an education commission alone would not transform the education system. Reforms were also needed in areas such as appointing vice-chancellors and ensuring education quality.

Similarly, small but important reforms were needed to make primary healthcare a pillar of the health system, he added.

He also urged people not to view young Bangladeshis' migration abroad negatively, saying they could not be blamed for leaving when adequate opportunities were unavailable at home.

Many, he added, want to return and contribute to the country. "The main question is whether we can create that environment."

He said reform was needed not only in state institutions but also in individual behaviour, citing traffic-rule violations and a lack of respect for women despite laws and public discussions on road safety and gender justice.

Speaking during the panel discussion, Alternatives organiser Tasnuva Zabeen said the July uprising had moved Bangladesh 10 to 15 years forward.

People can now speak out more freely, while political groups and civil society actors are raising their voices together, she said, calling for greater opportunities for women to enter politics.

Chairing the discussion, Supreme Court lawyer MM Khalequzzaman said systemic change was the long-term objective of the July uprising.

"We have long seen the 'politics of narrative'. Now we want to see the 'politics of performance'," he said.

He called for an autonomous judiciary free from executive control, a separate judicial secretariat and a review of laws from the British and Pakistani periods that are unnecessary or inconsistent with human rights.

Muneem Mobasher, co-founder of Bengal Institute of Peace and Economic Development, also spoke, among others.

Hafizur held

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Justice Md Rezaul Haque suspended Hafizur's bail until August 9 and ordered him to surrender within 24 hours.

The court also ordered law enforcement agencies to arrest him if he failed to surrender within the stipulated time.

PBI first arrested Hafizur from Keraniganj on the night of April 21 this year.

EC plans phased local polls

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Meanwhile, LGRD Minister Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir on July 22 said local government elections were likely to be held by the end of this year or early 2027.

According to the roadmap, polls in the haor and northeastern areas -- Sunamganj, Netrokona, Kishoreganj and parts of Habiganj -- will be held between September and November, when water transport is easier.

EC member Masud said the roadmap also covers training for EC officials, voter list preparation, ink stocks, appointment of presiding officers and voter awareness campaigns.

The roadmap states that November to February has been marked suitable for polls in the hill and coastal belt -- Rangamati, Bandarban, Khagrachhari, Cox's Bazar and islands such as Hatiya and Sandwip, as well as parts of Barishal -- as the monsoon brings risks of landslides, heavy rain and tidal surges.

For riverine and char districts -- Kurigram, Gaibandha, Jamalpur, Sirajganj, Munshiganj, Shariatpur, Chandpur and Rajbari -- September to March has been set to avoid floods and erosion.

In the plains and urban centres -- all other divisions, districts, upazilas, municipalities and city corporations -- polls can be held any time outside the monsoon.

The workplan highlights challenges in phased polls, noting that short gaps in past elections led to clashes over nominations, scrutiny, appeals, symbol allocation, training of officials and ballot transport. Limited intervals also strained law enforcement as personnel had to move rapidly between areas.

As part of preparations, the EC has drafted codes of conduct for five tiers of local government and sought opinions from political parties.

On July 21, the commission finalised the rules with recommendations, such as including the armed forces in the definition of law enforcement agencies and disqualifying MPO-listed teachers, dual citizens, loan defaulters and guarantors from contesting local polls.

On July 7, Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin directed the swift finalisation of the code of conduct and election management manuals. According to the roadmap, rule-making is to be completed by August 15.

Masud said, "We will send it to the law ministry very soon. Work is also underway on the election management rules."

He also confirmed that local government polls would have domestic observers only, as foreign observers would be too costly.

He said BG Press had estimated Tk 41 crore for printing voter lists.

Bangladesh has 13 city corporations, 500 upazila parishads, 61 zila parishads and 4,580 union parishads, but no local government elections have been held in more than two years.

The Local Government Division removed 323 mayors and 323 councillors in August and September 2024, following the political changeover. It also removed 493 upazila chairmen and 494 vice chairmen, including female vice chairmen, in August 2024.

Among all these local bodies, 108 union parishads and 10 municipalities remain ineligible due to delimitation, voter list complications, and legal disputes. The rest are eligible for the elections, according to the workplan.

On July 9, the EC sought information from the LGD on the number of local government bodies eligible to go to polls.

It asked the LGD to respond by July 31, but EC officials said they had not received a reply.

Asked about the update, LGD Secretary Shahidul Hassan yesterday declined to provide specific details on the scheduling or formal communication for upcoming local government elections.

Asked whether the LGD would issue a letter to the EC for conducting local polls, he said, "Naturally, it should be given according to the rules."

Asked when such a letter might be sent, he said, "I can't say. It will be done when the government makes a decision."

Nine killed in road

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in Nalka overpass area on the Jamuna Bridge highway around 1:00am, said OC Md Amirul Islam of Jamuna Bridge West Zone Police Station.

One of the deceased was identified as Md Monsur Ali, 26, of Bogura.

In Kishoreganj, two people were killed and two others injured when a passenger bus hit an auto-rickshaw at Boratia intersection in Pakundia municipality around 7:30am.

One of the deceased was identified as Selim Mia, 35.

OC SM Arifur Rahman of Pakundia Police Station said police seized the bus but its driver fled the scene.

In Thakurgaon, two persons were killed and another was injured as a motorcycle hit a pedestrian before crashing into an electric pole in the afternoon on the Thakurgaon-Baliadangi Road near Nengri Bazar in Sadar upazila.

The deceased are pedestrian Abul Hossain, 60, and motorcycle's pillion rider Arnab Islam, 13.

Md Likhon Hossain, a sub-inspector of Thakurgaon Police Station said filing of a case was underway.

PRAYER TIMING
AUGUST 9

	Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN	4-20	12-45	5-00	6-47	8-15
JAMAAT	4-55	1-15	5-15	6-50	8-45

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION