

Police team robbed in Sirajganj

MOSTAFA SHABUJ, Bogura

A team of Bogura police, on a mission to rescue an abduction victim, was robbed in Sirajganj Sadar upazila early yesterday.

At knifepoint, criminals robbed their walkie-talkies, mobile phones, and money. The robbers also stabbed the abduction victim's uncle. He was receiving treatment at a hospital.

The incident happened on the Sirajganj-Bogura highway as the police team, along with the abduction victim and his uncle, was returning from Dhaka after a successful rescue operation, said sources.

Contacted, Soikot Hasan, officer-in-charge of Sonatala Police Station in Bogura, refused to give any details of the incident.

"We are on a drive. Please communicate with Sirajganj police in this connection," he said.

Asked, Arifur Rahman Mondal, superintendent of Sirajganj police, said three unarmed plainclothes policemen were on a civilian microbus when they were attacked by the robbers.

"Four to five criminals attacked them with sharp weapons, robbed two smartphones, and Tk 5-7 thousand," he added.

SP Arifur, however, claimed the criminals did not stab the abduction victim's uncle. He was injured by broken glass of the microbus as the attackers hurled something at the vehicle.

Meanwhile, Sudeep Kumar Chakraborty, superintendent of Bogura police, said the man was stabbed and received treatment at a hospital.

"He is now out of danger," he said.

No case was filed in connection with the incident till the time this report was filed at 9:00pm yesterday.

SP Sudeep, however, said a case would be lodged with Bangabandhu Pashchim Police Station in Sirajganj.



Two young children showing their collection of kadam flowers to a potential customer near Dhaka University's TSC. The children pick the flowers, synonymous with monsoon, from different trees and sell them to people looking to add a dash of vibrancy and colour to their day.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Ukraine reclaims more settlements in south

Russian strikes kill eight at a market in frontline town

AFP, Kyiv

Ukraine said yesterday it reclaimed more territory from Russia in the south and welcomed the delivery of Western air defence systems that Kyiv said would usher in a "new era" after mass strikes from Moscow.

Russia for two days pummelled Ukraine with missiles, damaging energy facilities nationwide, in attacks that President Vladimir Putin said were retaliation for a deadly explosion at the Crimea bridge.

Russia's FSB security service said yesterday it detained eight suspects over the blast that ripped through the road and rail bridge connecting Crimea to the rest of the country.

But it also claimed to have foiled two more attacks that Ukrainian special services allegedly planned to carry out on Russian territory.

"The whole activity of the FSB and Investigative Committee is nonsense," Ukraine's public broadcaster Sputnike cited the interior minister spokesperson, Andriy Yusov, as saying when asked about Moscow's allegations on the Crimea Bridge blast.

Nato chief Jens Stoltenberg said yesterday after Russia's missile barrage that Ukraine's Western backers were looking to provide Kyiv with more air defences to protect against Russia's "indiscriminate" attacks across the country.

Putin has vowed a "severe" response to any

further attack on Russia and what Moscow considers to be its territory, including the Crimea peninsula that it annexed from Ukraine in 2014.

The Russian military meanwhile said it had fended off Ukrainian attacks in the eastern Donetsk, Lugansk and Kharkiv regions.

And Russian strikes on the frontline town of Avdiivka killed at least eight people at a market, the Ukraine-appointed chief of the region said.

"There is no military logic to this kind of shelling, only the unbridled desire to kill as many of our people as possible and intimidate others," the Donetsk governor Pavlo Kyrylenko said on social media.

Situation went 'out of control'

FROM PAGE 1

Before halting the entire election, the EC stopped voting at 50 out of the 145 centres after noticing what officials said were serious irregularities.

This was the first by-election held by the current EC.

The parliamentary seat of Gaibandha-5 fell vacant after the death of Fazle Rabbi Miah on July 23. According to the constitution, by-elections to the vacant seats should be held within 90 days.

Polling at the constituency, which includes Phulchhari and Saghata upazilas, started at 8:00am using the electronic voting machines (EVM). Around 11:30am, four of the candidates boycotted the election, leaving only the AL nominee, Mahmudul Hasan Riton, in the race.

At a press conference in Saghata, Jatiya Party nominee HM Golam Shaeed Ranju said, "Today, when polling started, we saw Awami League men forcing people to vote for their candidate and beating up our agents. We can't say it's a fair election."

Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh nominee Jahangir Alam and independents Nahiduzzaman Nishad and Syed

AL unhappy

FROM PAGE 1

Party leaders also accused the grassroots in Gaibandha of not coordinating with the central leadership, said sources.

A group of AL central leaders, including General Secretary Obaidul Quader, held an unscheduled closed-door meeting at the party president's Dhamondi office yesterday evening.

In the meeting, they said they were not satisfied and confused over the EC's decision. They said the commission had made an unprecedented decision, insiders said.

The Election Commission can't make such a decision sitting in Dhaka. The EC's decision does not reflect reality. Some irregularities always happen in elections, but without investigation, the EC can't make such a decision," a leader who was present at the meeting told The Daily Star.

At the meeting, AL leaders questioned the reasons behind the EC's decision and whether the commission could monitor the CCTV feed in presence of journalists.

Insiders said Quader would today hold a press conference to reveal the AL's stance on the EC's decision.

AL Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif while talking to reporters yesterday said that he could not understand why the EC halted the poll.

He said there were no reports of even small-scale violence centring the polls but the EC first stopped voting at some centres and then suspended the entire by-election.

"I can't understand why this happened."

Mahbubar Rahman also announced their decision to shun the polls at the press conference.

Nishad said the AL men didn't allow him to cast his own vote.

After announcing that the election had been halted, the CEC said, "It seems that the voting atmosphere has gone out of control. A party or a certain candidate may influence it."

"We noticed from the beginning that there were irregularities. At many centres, we noticed illegal infiltration into the secret polling booths. They illegally entered [the booths] and forced the voters to vote."

He further said that he received one after another allegations that criminals cut the cables connecting the CCTV cameras.

EC officials noticed that people appearing to be polling agents were wearing outfits with the electoral symbol of a party in violation of the electoral code of conduct, said the CEC.

Whether or not the election will be rescheduled will be announced later, he added.

Asked whether the EC will be able to control the situation in the national

election, the CEC said, "Many people will ask this question. It will not be appropriate to say anything now."

Defending the use of EVMs, he said "human elements" were behind the irregularities, not the devices. "We had not seen any mechanical problems. The EVMs did not create any problem. Election officials, including the presiding officers at the polling stations, have gone out of control."

"We will investigate the matters."

"We can see that a lot has gone out of control. You have also seen what is happening in the secret room, and the election is not being held in an orderly manner."

"They are robbers, they are miscreants. We can call those who do not obey the laws robbers and miscreants. Everyone has to respect the law. If everyone does not obey the law, the Election Commission will not be able to deliver a beautiful election."

SITUATION AT POLLING CENTRES

The Daily Star correspondent visited five polling stations and saw small queues of voters. Men wearing T-shirts containing a photo of AL nominee Mahmudul Hasan Riton were seen inside the

centres.

Tarek Rahman, 35, an agent of independent candidate Nahiduzzaman Nishad, said, "AL activists drove out many voters after they logged in their fingerprints in the EVM machine at Kamarpura Government Primary School."

"We went to the presiding officer and police, but they did nothing," he said.

Jahidul Islam, 45, a voter, said, "An Awami League agent and others forced me to vote for the boat symbol. I left after arguing with them for a while."

AL nominee Mahmudul told reporters in the evening that the election was halted to embarrass the government.

"Goons from Bogura and many other districts came to Phulchhari and Saghata. It's a deep conspiracy. My rival candidates are directly involved in this conspiracy," he added.

JP Chairman and Deputy Leader of the opposition GM Quader in a statement demanded re-election and blamed AL activists for electoral fraud.

Badiul Alam Majumdar, secretary of Shushashoner Jonno Nogorik (Shujan), said as far as he could remember, this was the first time the EC halted an entire by-election.

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experts and activists question whether the heavy fuel oil-run short-term plants, which are underproducing and not importing fuel, have any solid grounds to do so.

By design, short-term rental power plants are taken on board for three-five years and are supposed to recover their investment within that time. But multiple renewals over the decades means they recover their investments several times over and provide some of the most expensive electricity in return.

Speaking to this newspaper recently, Mohammad Hossain, the director general of the Power Cell, had said, "When deciding the unit price at which electricity is bought, the rental charge is divided by the number of years of the contract of the rental."

They experienced multiple renewals over the years, keeping provisions for capacity payments intact, meaning they recovered their capital investment several times over.

The Amuria power plant of Sinha, which sat idle yesterday is an example of this - the plant was finally given a no-energy no-pay contract in September this year. It has been running for a decade even though it is a short-term rental plant.

"The rental power projects made perfect sense for a short period of time as an emergency measure. Renewing them was a short-sighted decision and we are paying the price for that now," said Mushtaq Khan, professor of economics at SOAS University of London who had published a research paper analysing how power plants got preferential, overpriced deals over the decades.

"Even if the government settles the payments now, it will not reflect the current exchange rates [of dollars], so there will be a deficit," said Karim.

Speaking to The Daily Star last Saturday, PDB member (generation) Mohammed Ashraful Islam said,

"We are undergoing a crisis and I am contacting power plants to ask them

to produce."

"Most of the IPPs are now using

this crisis to create pressure on the

government. The small power plants

can have problems but what about

the big companies? Anyone can buy

fuel from Bangladesh Petroleum

Corporation," said Hasan Mehedi,

member secretary of Bangladesh

Working Group on External Debt.

But just yesterday, 48 power plants

were sitting completely idle citing fuel

shortages and engine problems. Nearly

a quarter of them run on heavy fuel oil

and 10 of those are privately owned.

Another seven were running at less

than 30 percent production capacity.

Heavy fuel oil-run private plants

generate 3,720MW, but the production

dropped by about 500MW this month,

according to the data of Bangladesh

Power Development Board (PDB).

"It is stipulated [in the deal] that

the government clears bills by 45

days," said Imran Karim, president of

Bangladesh Independent Power

Producers' Association.

"This is hampering fuel imports," he

added. "The unpaid bills have mostly

hampered small- and medium-sized

power plants, which have exhausted

their banking lines and can no longer

open lines of credit."

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