

Police team robbed in Sirajganj

MOSTAFA SHABUI, Bogura

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

At knife-point, 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 Suspilne 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 Ripon, in the race.

At a press conference in Saghata, Jatiya Party nominee HM Golam Shaheed 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 Dhanmondi 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 polls.

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

Standoff over unpaid bills hurts consumers

FROM PAGE 1

Rental power plants operating with high profit margins are now holding citizens hostage over an unpaid bill, albeit a large one.

Power Division Secretary Mohammed Habibur Rahman acknowledged the problem and said, "We are trying to solve the problem. We are trying to pay the arrears from May to encourage them to continue importing fuel."

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.

A further 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."

"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 Ashrafur Islam said, "We are undergoing a crisis and I am contacting power plants to ask them

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 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 Ripon were seen inside the

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.

Fuel import data shows that heavy fuel oil imports decreased by 19 percent last month, compared to the month before.

This month, even though a third of the month has gone by and power plants are sitting idle citing fuel shortages, the amount of fuel imported is only about 10 percent of that imported in August.

Only four power companies imported heavy fuel oil this month – Acorn Infrastructure Services, Anlima Energy Ltd, Baraka Shikalbaha Power Limited, and Kanchan Purbachal Power Generation.

They imported about eight crore tonnes, worth about Tk 495 crore.

The plant of Kanchan Purbachal Power Generation, which received its shipment on October 10, was sitting idle yesterday.

Two of Sinha Peoples' Energy's plants – the rental Amnura 50MW and the IPP Katpotti 52 MW – were sitting idle yesterday, but the company had not imported fuel since July, import data shows.

Arifur Rahman Sinha, the representative of Sinha People's Energy, was called several times yesterday for comments but his phone was found switched off.

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 Kamarpara 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 Nagorik (Shujan), said as far as he could remember, this was the first time the EC halted an entire by-election.

consumers

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 Amnura 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.

Pregnant woman gang-raped in the city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A pregnant woman has alleged that she was gang-raped by three men at a flat in the capital's Shukrabad on Tuesday night.

The woman, who provides beauty parlour services at home, went to the flat to attend a client around 8:00pm, said Monsur Ahmed, sub-inspector of Dhanmondi Police Station.

Three men, in presence of a woman, raped her there. They also threatened to kill her if she did not leave the place immediately, he said, adding that the woman was five months pregnant.

The woman then told her family members what had happened and they took her to a hospital after she fell ill yesterday, SI Monsur said.

Police are looking for the suspects, he said.

11th JS session from October 30

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The 20th session of the 11th parliament will begin from 4:30pm on October 30.

President M Abdul Hamid convened the session, said the parliament secretariat in a press release yesterday.

This will be the fifth session this year.

Sources at the parliament secretariat said the duration of this session will be short.

Officials report 2 deaths from Covid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two elderly women died from Covid-19 in the 24 hours preceding 8:00am yesterday, said a press release of the Directorate General of Health Services.

They were aged between 61 and 70 years.

At least 456 new cases were detected after testing a total of 4,763 individuals during this period.

With the new infections, the total number of cases rose to 20,31,006.

Lightning kills one

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

A lightning strike killed a young man and injured two others in Jhikargacha, Jashore, Tuesday night.

The deceased is Habibur Rahman Jony, 20, and the injured are Al-Amin, 18, and Roknuzzaman, 15.

They took shelter under a tree during rain, said Sumon Bhakta, officer-in-charge of Jhikargacha Police Station.

At that time, lightning struck the tree and seriously injured the trio, he added.

Locals rushed them to Jashore General Hospital, where a doctor declared Jony dead.

Fighting again

FROM PAGE 1

recent anti-government protests.

The opposition party will conclude the demonstrations through holding a grand rally in the capital on December 10.

Fakhrul yesterday said there would be no democracy in the country and the nation's existence would be at stake if the BNP's ongoing movement failed.

Painting a gloomy picture of the country's economy, he alleged that the government destroyed the economy and all state institutions by indulging in corruption and laundering money abroad over the last "15 years".

"This monstrous regime of the Awami League has turned Bangladesh into a crematorium," he said.

Referring to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's recent statement that there might be a famine in the world, Fakhrul said, "If it is coming, then why are you still holding the office? Leave the office safely. Otherwise, there will be no room for a safe exit."

He said the US sanctioned the Rapid Action Battalion, but the sanction should have been imposed on the AL government as the Rab carried out extrajudicial killings and disappearances following the directives of the government.

"The United Nations and human rights groups have said that killings and disappearances were taking place in the country."

The BNP leader said the only demand of the people is ouster of the government and holding of a free and fair national election under a non-partisan interim government.

Speaking at the meeting, chaired by Chattogram City BNP Convenor Shahdat Hossain, party standing committee member Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury said some policemen were involved in arresting and harassing opposition leaders and activists on their way to the rally venue just to make the government happy.

I must thank

FROM PAGE 1

Sakhawat, a retired army brigadier general, said the by-polls once again showed that the EC alone cannot hold a free and fair election as the role of the field-level officials is very crucial.

Basically, the field-level officials conduct the elections and that's why they need to be proactive about holding polls in a free and fair manner, he added.

The former election commissioner urged the EC to investigate the role of the returning officer and the presiding officers concerned.

"If the commission finds any evidence of negligence by them, it must take steps against those responsible."

Referring to the EC's recent meeting with DCs and SPs, Sakhawat said, "There was an unpleasant situation for the Election Commission. The commission should think about how it would take election control measures in future through its field-level officials."

"Despite attacks and various repressive measures, the government could not prevent the people from pouring into the rally venue. Several lakhs of people have joined the rally."

He said the people of Chattogram through their spontaneous participation in the meeting have sent out a message to the PM that she should step down immediately.

BNP leaders and activists joined the meeting reportedly amid attacks and harassment on their way to the Polo ground. A huge number of law enforcers took positions in and around the venue to avoid any untoward incident.

Party leaders and activists from Chattogram city and its adjoining upazilas and districts started gathering near the rally venue since Tuesday night.

Many alleged that they were obstructed by ruling party men at the entrances to the city.

Since morning yesterday, BNP activists gathered in CRB, Tiger Pass, Kadamtali ground and Polo ground areas. Traffic was disrupted on the roads near the meeting venue due to the huge gatherings of people.

Thousands of BNP men started marching towards the meeting venue in groups from around 1:00pm. Many carried banners, festoons, placards, and sheaves of paddy.

Standing on the roads in the area, many people were seen hearing the speeches of the BNP leaders on loudspeakers.

BNP leaders alleged that police members, both uniformed and plainclothes, raided the houses of party men in the port city on Tuesday night. During the raids, police arrested many leaders and activists, they claimed.

Krishna Pada Roy, commissioner of Chattogram Metropolitan Police, said police conducted routine raids on Tuesday night to arrest fugitive criminals accused in different cases.

He said no raid was carried out to nab BNP leaders and activists.

He said if such irregularities could take place in one constituency (Gaibandha-5), then what would happen when voting would be held in 300 constituencies during the parliamentary polls?

He said the commission was able to monitor the election situation from Dhaka and take prompt actions because it installed CCTV cameras in all polling centres in Gaibandha-5.

"If CCTV cameras are not installed in all polling booths in 300 constituencies and field level officials get involved in electoral dishonesty, then it would not be possible for the Election Commission to conduct a free and fair national election."

The former election commissioner suggested that the commission should not focus only on electronic voting machines, rather it should ensure the use of CCTV cameras which can be a good option for monitoring polls.