

Russia hits key Ukraine energy facilities

Two killed; Zelensky urges increased sanctions on Russia; several Ukrainian cities using generators for power and water

AFP, Kyiv

A Russian attack hit Ukraine's energy infrastructure, killing two people and prompting power cuts in several regions, Ukrainian authorities said yesterday.

Moscow has in recent months escalated attacks on energy infrastructure in Ukraine, damaging natural gas facilities which produce the main fuel for heating in the country.

Experts have said Ukraine risks heating outages ahead of the winter months.

"Russian strikes once again targeted people's everyday life. They deprived communities of power, water, and heating, destroyed critical infrastructure, and damaged railway networks," Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiga said.

Russia launched 458 drones and 45 missiles at Ukraine overnight, said the Ukrainian air force, adding that it had downed 406 drones and nine missiles.

A drone strike on the eastern city of Dnipro ripped through a nine-storey building, killing two people and wounding six, Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Svyrydenko said.

Attacks forced emergency power cuts and interrupted water supplies in the northern



A woman with a dog walks near an apartment building hit during the Russian drone strike in Dnipro yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

city of Kharkiv, where the mayor said there was "a noticeable shortage of electricity."

There was no electricity, water, and partial heating in Kremenchuk, in the eastern Poltava region, the administration said.

There were also significant train delays, Restoration Minister Oleksiy Kuleba said, accusing Russia of stepping out its attacks

on locomotive depots.

"We are working to eliminate the consequences throughout the country. The focus is on the rapid restoration of heat, light and water," Svyrydenko said.

Russia has targeted Ukraine's power and heating grid throughout its almost four-year invasion, destroying a large part

of the key civilian infrastructure.

Drones also hit energy infrastructure in Ukraine's southern Odessa late Friday, the region's governor Oleg Kiper said on Telegram.

"There was damage to an energy infrastructure facility," he said, reporting no dead or wounded.

Russia's defense ministry said it struck "enterprises of the Ukrainian military-industrial complex and gas and energy facilities that support their operation."

The attacks on energy infrastructure have raised concerns of heating outages in Ukraine as the war enters its fourth winter.

Kyiv's School of Economics estimated in a report that the attacks shut down half of Ukraine's natural gas production.

Ukraine's top energy expert, Oleksandr Kharchenko, told a media briefing Wednesday that if Kyiv's two power and heating plants went offline for more than three days when temperatures fall below minus 10 degrees Celsius, the capital would face a "technological disaster".

Ukraine has in turn stepped up strikes on Russian oil depots and refineries in recent months, seeking to cut off Moscow's vital energy exports and trigger fuel shortages across the country.

Unsafe storage, fire system failures to blame

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did not alert the national Fire Service and Civil Defence immediately.

The first airport fire truck arrived at 2:23pm after the entire room was ablaze. It was followed by two others at 2:25pm and 2:26pm. Each of these trucks had a capacity of holding between 9,500 litres and 12,500 litres of water and 1,200 to 1,500 litres of foam.

A security assistant finally dialled 999 at 2:25pm, and the Uttara fire station was notified. Its first truck reached the site at 2:50pm, when the entire shed was already engulfed.

POOR PREPAREDNESS

Because the source of the fire could not be accessed without tearing down walls of the courier building's corrugated tin structure, the response was initially limited to spraying water and foam onto the roof.

The airport lacked the necessary demolition equipment. Only when the fire service arrived with bulldozers could the source of the fire be reached.

The army joined the operation at 3:21pm. Altogether, 37 units battled the blaze.

The report noted a critical lack of fire hydrants near the import cargo complex, forcing firefighters to draw water from distant points, such as the Biman hangar, airport fire station, domestic terminal, Biman training centre swimming pool, a nearby pond, and the domestic terminal's underground reservoir.

At the time of the incident, there were no people in the courier building. Courier companies said they had closed by 1:30pm, as it was a Saturday. Though many of the courier units had fire extinguishers, none were used.

All ground support vehicles carried extinguishers, and staff were trained in firefighting. Biman, as ground handler, had also installed 34 additional extinguishers in the complex. Staff responded with nine 25-litre extinguishers at 2:32pm, but the fire had already grown uncontrollable.

The cargo compound is divided among multiple warehouses leased to different operators. Biman oversees unloading cargo from aircraft and transporting it to the import complex.

The courier building houses 57 courier services operating under separate leases with the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB). Thirteen courier offices are inside the main building and 44 in the tin shed outside.

While Civil Aviation Rules 1984 make couriers responsible for cargo safety, the lease agreements do not define this liability clearly. CAAB's leases also prohibit structural changes without its permission.

"By constructing a tin shed courier facility inside a high security area of the airport, partitioned into small iron-grilled compartments that would be difficult to access during a fire emergency, the IAEAB exposed the airport to severe fire risk," the report said.

"As the regulator, airport operator, and lessor, it was CAAB's responsibility to ensure that safety standards were upheld while approving the lease, permitting the structure, and maintaining it afterwards," it added.

CLOGGED ACCESS
The report also blamed the fire's rapid spread on piles of uncleared cargo blocking access roads. Fire trucks struggled to reach the site as goods belonging to couriers and Sky Capital were stacked outside due to limited storage inside.

By law, uncleared cargo must be removed within 21 days and auctioned within three months. However, the rule is routinely ignored, causing chronic congestion.

Forklift operators tried to clear paths for the fire trucks, but it was too

late.

A January 24, 2024 letter from Biman to CAAB warned that the 1,58,000 sq ft cargo complex was half the required size. Without an examination yard, customs clearance was delayed, forcing cargo to pile up in the open as import volume was increasing by 10 percent annually.

Biman is required to list uncleared cargo after 21 days and hand it over to customs for auction. The report found that these lists are not prepared on time, and auctions are delayed, leading to continuing accumulation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Investigators recommended that lease agreements for the cargo complex clearly define each stakeholder's responsibilities regarding fire safety.

It also recommended the installation of automatic fire detection and fire suppression systems in all warehouses, cargo sheds and service buildings.

When asked about whether the DHL area had automatic fire suppression systems, Miarul Haque, the managing director of DHL in Bangladesh, declined to comment, citing ongoing investigations.

A HISTORY OF NEGLECT

Warnings about inadequate fire safety at the airport date back more than a decade.

On October 18, 2011, exactly 14 years before the fire, Biman notified the HSIA director that the cargo village and complex lacked any permanent fire suppression system, warning that delays could destroy goods worth thousands of crores and tarnish the airport's reputation.

A survey committee later recommended installing hydrant points, extinguishers, auto fire pumps, and a brigade system across both export and import cargo complexes.

Biman's internal records show that CAAB handed over the complex's operations to Biman in 1982-83, but part of it was later subleased to IAEAB in violation of rules. The courier building became that subleased section.

After a 2013 fire in the courier section, CAAB reclaimed the building and leased it directly to IAEAB from January 1, 2014. In 2019, IAEAB stopped paying rent, and the lease remained unrenewed until 2023.

The dispute was resolved in September 2023, when CAAB signed separate lease agreements with each courier company, collecting Tk 10.44 crore in rent until June 2024. A year later, in September 2024, CAAB attempted to reinstate a collective lease with IAEAB but withdrew under pressure from the couriers.

On October 30, 2025, Ahmed Jamil, joint secretary of the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, wrote to the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) chairman, noting that a seven-member committee had, in January, recommended relocating all "dangerous goods" cargo to a 21,780 sq ft abandoned Ansar barrack north of the airport complex.

"We do not know what steps were taken to implement these recommendations," the letter said.

The committee, tasked with assessing overall airport safety, had concluded that there was no space to build a new warehouse and advised repurposing the unused barrack for storing hazardous cargo.

MANY ARMS MISSING

At least 16 consignments of weapons were in the vault of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, from which many of them went missing on October 28, documents reveal.

These include three consignments of pump action shotguns, two of sporting shotguns, two of "pump-action sporting", two of semi-automatic shotguns, one of "unloaded firearm",

two of "semiautomatics", one of handguns, one of "sporting weapons", and one of pistols.

The vault had other items, including electronics, laboratory equipment, and chemicals.

Following the incident, police found 67 pistols, 12 shotguns, one rifle, and 991 blank cartridges in the vault, leaving unspecified weapons unaccounted for.

A list of imported arms obtained by The Daily Star shows that the consignments were from between 2019 and 2025. Failing customs clearance, they were stored in the vault.

Biman Bangladesh Airlines, which is responsible for maintaining the vault and handling the ground cargo at the airport, has not disclosed the exact type or quantity of the missing weapons.

The vault was found intact during a routine inspection on October 27. However, the next day, Biman's security department discovered the vault's lock broken, said Boshra Islam, general manager of Biman's public relations department.

Biman has filed a general diary on the same day over the missing firearms.

On October 18, a major fire swept through the airport's import cargo complex, destroying storage facilities containing large quantities of raw materials, apparel, and product samples belonging to exporters.

On October 25 – three days before the vault was found broken – Biman sent a letter to the civil aviation secretary, requesting immediate measures to remove the arms.

"Due to the fire, all facilities and warehouses of the import cargo terminal have been reduced to rubble, with no goods remaining except in the strong room. Given the sensitive and fragile situation, it is not appropriate to continue storing valuable items in the strong room. In light of this, the National Board of Revenue may be specially requested to take these inventoried items into the custody of the customs department to ensure their proper protection," the letter, signed by Biman Managing Director Dr Md Shafiqur Rahman, read.

As per the Bangladesh Land Customs Statutes, Biman, as the handling agent and warehouse keeper, is required to remove all cargo from the complex within 21 days, if not cleared by customs, and to auction them within three months.

However, the rule is often ignored, according to an investigation report prepared by Biman and submitted to the civil aviation ministry on November 3.

Md Foysal Kabir, proprietor of Gun Max, said three of his consignments might have gone missing from the vault.

"These include 20,000 bullets, 16 pistols, and a consignment of air rifles," he said. These items were not in the seizure list prepared by police after the vault was emptied.

Kabir said he had five consignments stuck in the strong room, imported in 2020, 2022, and 2023. "Once we obtain an import permit, we are given 18 months to bring in the product. But clearing goods from customs takes years while we negotiate the duty to be levied," said Kabir, who has been importing weapons since 2011.

He claimed to have paid duty for 50 arms stored in the strong room in July, but even those had not been released.

According to sources, except for the semiautomatic rifles brought in on October 15, the other firearms in the strong room were past their sell by date.

Taslima Akhter, officer-in-charge of Airport Police Station, said, "We are still investigating the incident. We have interrogated different people, but as of today, we have no updates to share with the media."

movement, warned yesterday that if their demands are not met, they will announce tougher programmes at their November 11 rally.

The demands include the issuance of the July charter implementation order and holding a referendum on it within this month.

Amid ongoing disputes over the timing of the referendum, the charter's implementation order, and the fate of the notes of dissent, the government on Monday called on parties to settle disputes and reach a unified decision, preferably within a week.

Law Adviser Asif Nazrul, speaking after a special advisory council meeting that day, told reporters: "We haven't issued any ultimatum. We'll wait. After that, the government will act as necessary."

Speaking at a discussion on "Revolution and Solidarity Day", organised by the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal yesterday, BNP Standing Committee Member Salahuddin Ahmed urged the interim government to remain neutral.

"We have and will continue to support you... But if you think you can invite us to dialogue through another political party... who are they? If the chief adviser invites us to discuss any issue, we're always willing to engage. But why are we being invited through another party?"

He said his party maintains political communication and dialogue with others as part of democratic culture. "However, if you indirectly invite us by assigning a referee role to another party, that may not be appropriate."

Salahuddin added that the interim government does not have the authority to impose "such deadlines." "You are not an elected government, please remember that. You don't have the mandate to dictate terms by saying, 'If you don't reach a decision within seven days, we will make one.' Such a display of power may not suit you."

Addressing Jamaat-e-Islami, he said the party took a contrary path in 1947 and again in 1971. "Jamaat became companions of Hussain Muhammad

Ershad through the Jatiya Party. Now, if you seek a political revival by aligning with the Awami League, only God knows what the outcome will be. What you have initiated could encourage the fallen fascists and other undemocratic forces.

"However, if you claim that since you're not getting your share, you'll spoil the pot for everyone, the people of Bangladesh will not accept that. They won't give you that opportunity."

He added, "If you [Jamaat] want to enjoy the benefits, go ahead. But we will not allow the democratic battlefield of Bangladesh to burn again."

"You have declared an ultimatum until November 11. Who is issuing ultimatums to the government? The government has already made recommendations in your favour. The National Consensus Commission has given you everything you asked for. That's why you're echoing its position."

Salahuddin said there was "no need" for a referendum. "This referendum will result in legislation and constitutional changes. However, it will also impose a moral obligation on current and future MPs – whether the people want these reforms implemented or not. If it is to be held, there is no alternative but to hold it on election day."

Speaking at an event titled "Janat-e-Islam", organised by Trace Consulting Firm, a civic organisation, yesterday, Jamaat's Assistant Secretary General Hamidur Rahman Azad said, "We invited the BNP secretary general to sit for a dialogue. They responded by saying they would not accept Jamaat's call."

Speaking to The Daily Star, Azad, also part of a two-member committee formed to prepare a "consensus framework" on the electoral structure, implementation of the July charter, and conduct of the referendum, said most parties had given a positive response to their proposal for talks. "However, the BNP was negative when we contacted them on Thursday."

At yesterday's event, Azad said the Awami League regime had followed a similar pattern: agreeing to sit with some parties while refusing others.

"Can't we move beyond that culture? If you invite us, we'll come. If the BNP extends a call, Jamaat will be the first to respond – and we'll encourage others to join as well."

He added that a referendum before the polls is necessary so that people understand what the proposed reforms actually mean. "The public may know a little, but a referendum would allow for broader awareness."

Explaining why Jamaat began its current movement regarding the referendum and charter implementation, Azad said they were advancing through a democratic process to reach out to the public rather than acting as a pressure group.

Speaking at the same event, BNP Standing Committee Member Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury said the country's people respect differences of opinion.

"That culture must remain among us. You can't just take to the streets at the drop of a hat. If another party then takes to the streets, what happens? If they respond with counter protests, won't that lead to clashes? Is this why we removed Sheikh Hasina?"

He said everyone has the right to protest. "But the people of Bangladesh do not want confrontational politics. They want stability."

The BNP leader added, "The issues on which we haven't reached consensus, we'll take those to the people in the upcoming election. And the points on which we've agreed, we'll implement them."

At the same programme, Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam said many parties are still saying there is uncertainty surrounding the July charter. "But debates like these continue for 10 to 15 years in many parts of the world. There is no 'quick fix' to this constitutional debate."