

POLICE FLOUTED SPG GUIDELINES: CENTRAL OFFICIALS

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Executive: Structure, Organization & Functioning ; Ministries and Departments of the Government

No way: Police personnel and officials at the flyover where the PM's convoy got stuck in Ferozepur on Wednesday. PTI

The sequence of events leading to the breach in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's security on Wednesday indicates that the Punjab government and the State police "completely failed to provide effective security", according to Union government sources.

The State's Director-General of Police (DGP) had cleared the PM's road trip. Advance security liaison (ASL) meetings were held and intelligence inputs on sabotage possibilities shared, but the State police did not adhere to the Blue Book guidelines of the Special Protection Group on the Prime Minister's security, they alleged.

Stating that the overall responsibility for ensuring the PM's safety was with the State government under the Blue Book's Chapter 1, Rule 1, the sources said the SPG had the duty of providing proximate security. Under Rule 2, the State police were required to make all the protective arrangements, while Rule 5 made the DGP responsible for implementing the rules.

The ASL meetings were conducted by the SPG, the Punjab administration and the police on January 1 and 2. A contingency plan for a road journey from Bathinda to Ferozepur was discussed in detail. Therefore, a route survey for the identification of vulnerable points was to be conducted to secure them with strong police deployment.

The contingency rehearsal for the road journey was carried out on January 4. The sources said the State police's internal communications showed exchanges on securing the roads for his visit, taking into account the possibility of any *dharna* or movement of farmers or protesters for disrupting the PM's rally.

Bad weather

A Union Home Ministry statement on Wednesday said Mr. Modi was to reach the National Martyrs Memorial at Hussainiwala in Ferozepur by helicopter, but with bad weather, the road route, "which would take more than two hours", was opted for. A rally at Ferozepur was cancelled.

The PM's itinerary, as shared by the Punjab Congress on Twitter, said he was to leave the Bhatinda airport by helicopter at 10.30 a.m. and arrive at the Kila Chowk helipad (Ferozepur) by 11.05 a.m. The motorcade was then to take a 10-minute drive to the memorial.

As word got out that Mr. Modi was to travel by road from Bhatinda, a distance of over 100 km, supporters of a farmers' union, who were on their way to the office of the District Commissioner for a protest, mobilised more people, forcing the motorcade to stop for 15-20 minutes on a flyover and return, said another government official. "The previous night [January 4], protesters had gathered at various points, but the police asked them to return and they came back the next morning," said another official. On Wednesday, Surjeet Singh Phul, Bharatiya Kisan Union (Krantikaari) president, told *The Hindu* that its members were protesting on the Ferozepur-

Moga stretch against the PM's visit. On Thursday, he posted a video on Twitter stating that nearly 1,000 people, while on their way to the DC's office, were stopped by the police around 10.30 a.m.

'Traffic jam'

"Soon the gathering swelled to more than 2,000 people. We did not intend to stop his motorcade, but when we were stopped, we had no option but to wait there... whatever happened there was spontaneous, there was no pre-planning, when we caused a traffic jam, PM was caught in it," Mr. Phul said.

The protesters, he said, had picketed the main roads and highways leading to Ferozepur. Government sources said that when flying from Bathinda was not possible, the SPG Director discussed with the Punjab DGP the possibility of going by road. After clearance from the police chief, the road journey was planned. Senior Superintendents of Police piloted the motorcade.

"Even if timely information about the blockade was relayed to the PM's motorcade by the police control room, the situation of getting stuck on a flyover could have been averted....," said an official, adding that all along the route, there was skeletal police deployment.

When the motorcade got stuck, no visible efforts were made by the policemen to clear the blockade, they said. In accordance with the Blue Book, a car was ear-marked for the Chief Secretary and the DGP but neither joined. The sources said the police control room failed to inform the pilot of the motorcade about the protests.

(With inputs from Vijaita Singh in Delhi and Vikas Vasudeva in Chandigarh)

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