

Odisha health minister shot by cop, accused nabbed

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The Daily Morning Voice Online Desk: Odisha's Health and Family Welfare Minister Naba Kishore Das was shot at by an assistant sub-inspector of police in Jharsuguda district on Sunday. Das received bullet injuries to his chest and was rushed to hospital. The minister's condition is said to be critical. He is being taken to Jharsuguda airport from where Das will be airlifted to Bhubaneswar. The health minister will be shifted to Apollo hospital for further treatment, says a local news agency.

In a video footage, Das is seen bleeding from the chest with people trying to lift the injured minister, who seemed unconscious, and place him on the front seat of a car. The cop fired at least four to five bullets when the minister stepped out of his car at Gandhi square. The accused, ASI, was nabbed by local people, who then handed him over to the police. The incident took place in Brajrajnagar town of the district when the minister was on his way to attend a meeting. The cop was identified as ASI Gopal Das. The exact reason behind the firing is yet to be ascertained.

The ASI was deployed to look after the security arrangements for today's event and was in close proximity to the minister while he opened fire. "Assistant Sub-inspector of Police (ASI) Gopal Das opened fire at the minister. The minister is injured and rushed to hospital," Brajrajnagar SDPO Gupteswar Bhoi told PTI. "Assistant Sub-Inspector Gopal Das fired at Minister Naba Das from his revolver," informed Bhoi. According to Bhoi, the exact reason behind the firing was not clear. Bhoi said that the ASI was currently being interrogated, and more details will be available after a thorough investigation.

When asked on whose instructions the ASI fired at the minister, the SDPO said that there is no such information in this regard. The incident has raised serious questions on the security measures as a police escort was also provided for Naba Das who was scheduled to attend a mega programme. "At a public grievance office opening, Naba Das was the chief guest. When he arrived, the crowd gathered to welcome him. Suddenly, a gunshot was heard. We saw police personnel running away after shooting from close range. The minister will be air lifted to Bhubaneswar," an eye witness told ANI. Odisha Crime Branch will carry out an investigation into the matter. Tension prevailed at the spot after BJD activists staged a dharna following the firing incident. It is suspected that the firing was 'pre-planned' as the minister was allegedly shot at from close range.

Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik condemned the attack on the health minister and prayed for his speedy recovery. "I am shocked at the unfortunate attack on minister Naba Das. I strongly condemn the attack on him. I pray for his early recovery. The crime branch has been directed to take up the investigation of the case. Senior officers from the crime branch have been asked to go to the spot," the CM said. As Naba Das is a key BJD leader, and firing at him ahead of the 2024 elections is certainly a matter of grave concern as Odisha has a history of witnessing violence during the polls, said senior journalist Prasanna Mohanty. Naba Das is a very influential leader from Jharsukhda and had dumped Congress to join the BJP a few years back.