

NCP terms Porwar's remarks 'arrogant'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

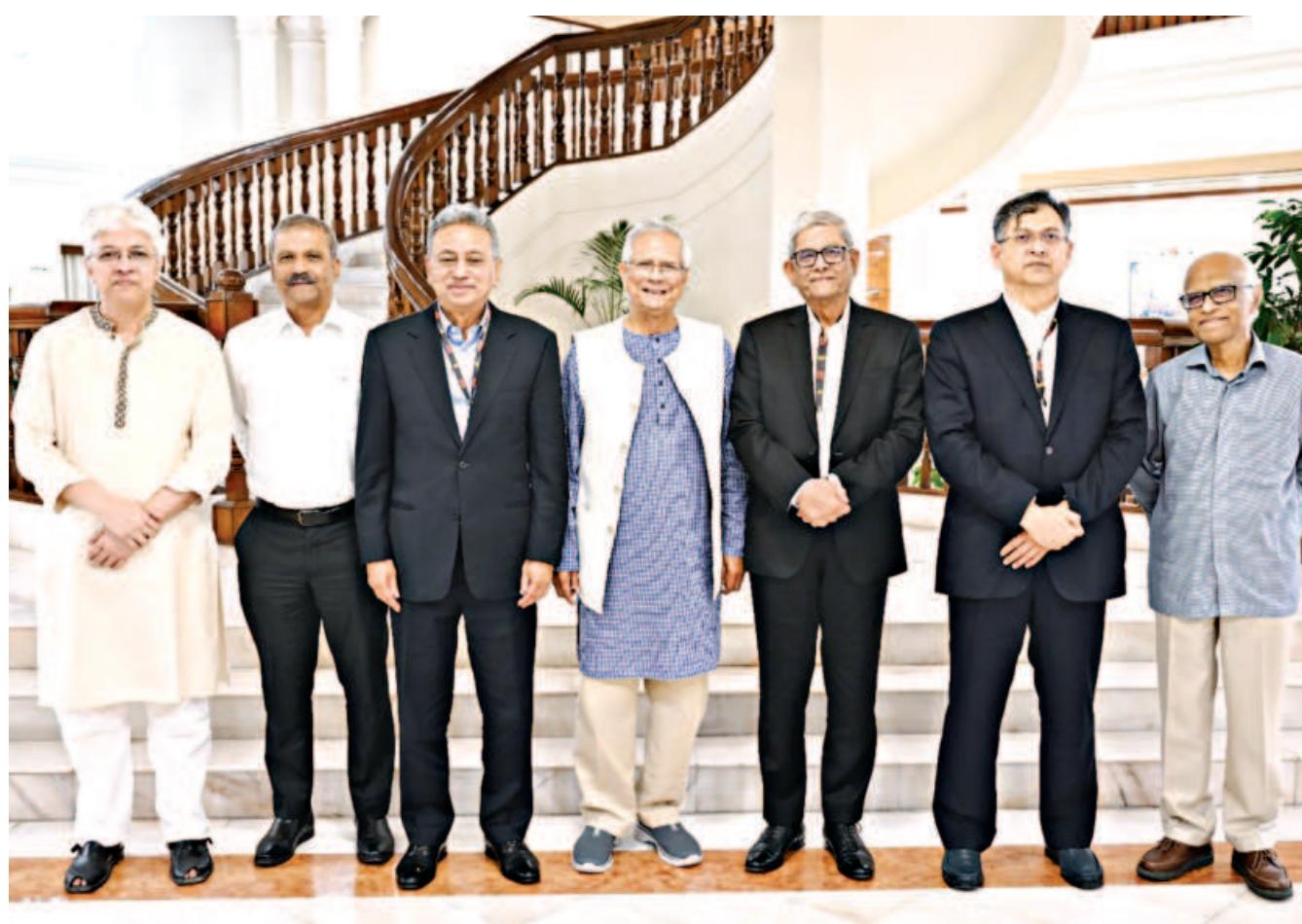
The National Citizen Party (NCP) yesterday slammed a recent comment of Jamaat-e-Islami Secretary General Mia Golam Porwar, terming it "arrogant" and an act of "misconduct".

Ariful Islam Adeeb, senior joint convenor of NCP, said the urge to claim patriarchal authority in politics reflects a flaw in perspective.

"NCP was born out of the July uprising. Every political party today is a child of that movement, as all joined the struggle under its leadership," Adeeb told BBC Bangla.

"Those who followed commands during the uprising are now claiming to be commanders -- this is politically arrogant and an act of misconduct."

His remarks followed Porwar's oblique reference to NCP when he told a Satkhira rally, "If you want to compete with Jamaat, you still have a long way to go. Don't challenge your father right after being born."



Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus and three advisers pose with senior BNP leaders after a meeting at the State Guest House Jamuna in Dhaka yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

Photo: PID

243 citizens, Mahila Parishad seek probe into media worker's death by suicide

Call for stronger safeguards for women in workplaces

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A group of prominent citizens has expressed outrage over the recent death of Dhaka Stream graphic designer Sornomoye Biswas, demanding a proper investigation and accountability for those responsible.

In a joint statement signed by 243 citizens, including Jahangirnagar University Associate Professor Dr Rezvana Karim Snigdha and poet-journalist Girish Gaitrik, they called for immediate action against Dhaka Stream's Bangla Content Editor Altaf Shahnewaz, who had been accused of sexual harassment and indecent behaviour by Sornomoye and 26 of her colleagues.

"Despite a written and evidence-backed complaint from 26 media workers, Dhaka Stream's Editor in Chief and Publisher Golam Iftekhar Mahmud took no punitive action against the accused. According to regulations, the accused should have been suspended in such cases, but the institution did not do so," the statement read.

Citing her colleagues, the statement added that Sornomoye had become mentally shattered and deeply depressed after being denied justice.

The signatories demanded that the negligence of the outlet's authorities be investigated, stressing



Sornomoye Biswas

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Time to act like a caretaker admin

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"Deputy commissioner appointments would be made based on merit, with officials selected and placed appropriately before the election."

"It is our duty to remain neutral. The election is a major undertaking. We will choose the individuals [admin officials] who are capable of maintaining peace and order [during polls]. This will be [done] under my supervision. We will do whatever necessary to ensure a peaceful and neutral election."

Fakhrul, along with BNP standing committee members Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury and Salahuddin Ahmed, held an hour-long meeting with Yunus that began around 6:00pm.

Besides Yunus, Planning Adviser Prof Wahiduddin Mahmud, Law Adviser Prof Asif Nazrul, and Industry Adviser Adilur Rahman Khan were present.

On October 13, BNP standing committee meeting decided that party leaders would meet the chief adviser and the chief election commissioner to discuss the government's and EC's neutrality ahead of the polls.

After yesterday's meeting, Fakhrul told reporters that they raised several concerns. "To make the election, scheduled for February next year, neutral, and acceptable to all, the interim government needs to be shaped in the model of a caretaker government."

"For that, the administration must first be made completely neutral, and it must be apparent to the public."

He also demanded that officials in the Secretariat, who are "known to be accomplices of fascists", be removed and replaced with neutral officials.

On the district administration, Fakhrul said they raised concerns about certain individuals who continue to serve the interests of the previous regime. "We called for their removal," he said, adding that neutrality should be upheld in all appointments and promotions of government officials.

Regarding the judiciary, Fakhrul pointed out that some accomplices of fascists remain in the judiciary and urged that they be replaced with neutral ones.

Although the judicial matters fall under the judiciary's domain, the interim government is responsible for overseeing all affairs, he said.

Meanwhile, the CA Press Wing statement said Prof Yunus and BNP leaders discussed the preparation for the upcoming election.

It said the BNP leaders also presented several observations to the chief adviser regarding police recruitment and transfer procedures.

The party congratulated the government for involving political leaders in the United Nations General Assembly and for the successful signing of the July charter.

The leaders also expressed concern over the recent series of fires at various installations across the country and called for an investigation into whether these incidents were acts of sabotage.

The statement further mentioned that a Jamaat-e-Islami delegation is scheduled to meet the chief adviser today.

Ahead of the national polls in 1991, June 1996, and 2001, the caretaker governments reshuffled the administration and police.

ICT to review progress in cases

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appear voluntarily before the tribunal or be arrested and produced by law enforcement agencies. The tribunal may then decide whether to grant bail or order detention. The prison authorities would determine where they would be held.

"If they don't appear or are not produced tomorrow [Wednesday], a notice will be published in two national dailies -- one in Bangla and one in English -- directing them to appear before the tribunal by a specific date," he said, adding that, "Failure to comply even after the public notice will lead to them being declared absconding, and the tribunal will appoint a state defence counsel to represent them."

Asked about the army statement that 15 of the accused officers were in military custody, Tamim said such claims were unofficial. "The tribunal acts strictly in accordance with the law. It does not rely on social media posts or unofficial briefings. Only

formal communications through the authorities concerned will be considered."

Tamim said the chief prosecutor would decide whether to raise the issue of producing the officers before the court if they are not presented, stressing that the same legal provisions apply to all accused, regardless of their position.

Responding to a question about whether the prosecution faced pressure in filing the cases, Tamim referred to high-profile accused, including the former prime minister, being tried in crimes against humanity cases.

The 32 accused in the three cases include deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina, former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal, three former director generals of Rab.

In two cases of enforced disappearances, Maj Gen (retd) Tarique Ahmed Siddique, former defence and security adviser to Hasina, is accused.

NCP, 4 leftist parties dig in

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most issues at a meeting today and submit the complete implementation process by tomorrow. However, he noted that the draft texts cannot be shared with a single party in advance, as that would require extending the same to all political groups.

Asked, Rasin said the NCP will not change its decision unless all three of its demands are met.

A commission source, seeking anonymity, said the NCP's position now seems to be a ploy to delay the process.

Meanwhile, the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), Socialist Party of Bangladesh (BSD), BSD (Marxist), and Bangladesh Jasad said they will

not be part of the charter unless the four state principles -- nationalism, socialism, democracy, and secularism -- are retained in the constitution's preamble.

"We cannot compromise on the four founding principles of the country," CPB General Secretary Abdullah Al Kafi Ratan told The Daily Star.

Commission member Prof Ali Riaz said one of the key demands of these parties has already been addressed by retaining the Declaration of Independence in the constitution. "We have discussed their concerns, but they remain adamant. It's not possible to accommodate every demand," he said.

Dhaka air turns unhealthy even before dry season

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Quality Index (AQI) in these areas hovered between 150 and 200 -- well above the threshold of 50, which is considered healthy.

The DoE website issued a warning, "People are advised to wear masks when outdoors, while those belonging to sensitive groups are urged to stay indoors."

Sensitive groups include children, the elderly, pregnant women, and individuals with pre-existing heart or lung diseases, who are more vulnerable to the effects of air pollutants.

The AQI is a standardised system used globally to measure air pollution levels. It assesses the concentration of particulate matter (PM2.5), an extremely hazardous substance for human health, along with other pollutants.

In Dhaka city, the level of PM2.5 -- particles smaller than 2.5 micrograms -- ranged between 64 and 79.7 micrograms per cubic metre from October 14 to 20 -- more than double the national standard of 35 micrograms and over 12 times the threshold of 5 micrograms set by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Though the WHO threshold for PM2.5 is 5 micrograms, Bangladesh has set the benchmark at 35 micrograms, considering that it would be almost impossible to achieve the global standard in the near future.

Between 1998 and 2023, the country's PM2.5 pollution surged by 66 percent, said the global annual report of the Air Quality Life Index (AQI), published by the Energy Policy Institute of the University of Chicago.

In 2023, the annual average PM2.5 concentration across the country was 60.8 micrograms per cubic metre. In Dhaka city, it was between 90 and 100 micrograms.

The high level of air pollution

reduces the average life expectancy of Bangladeshis by five and a half years, making it the country's deadliest external health risk, said the report.

A recent global study has revealed that in Bangladesh, more than 19,000 children under five died due to air pollution in 2021, meaning two children died per hour.

Dhaka city and its suburbs at times top the global list of places with worst air quality. This year, Dhaka or other cities of Bangladesh had the worst air quality in the world for a total of 16 days from January to August this year; 29 days last year; 17 days in 2023; and 19 days in 2022, according to DoE data.

When asked, Ziaul Haque, director of the Department of Environment (DoE), said, "We observe a sharp deterioration in air quality between October and March each year, when brick kilns become active and wind patterns shift, carrying pollutants into the city from the northwestern region of the country."

"Around 25 percent of fine particulate [PM2.5] pollution originates from transboundary sources, which are beyond our control. Air pollutants generated in Lahore, Punjab, New Delhi, Jharkhand, Bihar, and West Bengal drift into Bangladesh," he added.

He further said the government has taken some initiatives in recent times to curb air pollution but those appear to be insufficient.

"If we truly want to curb air pollution, different government agencies, such as city corporations and the roads and highways department, must work together."

He said city corporations must stop burning solid waste at dumping grounds and take steps to check pollution at construction sites. "But they are failing us all."

Regarding recent government

initiatives, Ziaul said Savar upazila has been declared a "degraded airshed", prohibiting operations of all brick kilns, except for environment-friendly units, and the burning of solid waste and garbage from next month.

"We will not allow any of the 106 conventional brick kilns in the upazila to resume operations."

Ahmad Kamruzzaman Majumder, professor of environmental science at

REGIONAL SOURCES OF AIR POLLUTION

Greater Dhaka area **56%**

Transboundary **21%**

Other region within country **15.9 %**

Natural sources (solid dust) **7.1%**

BANGLADESH NATIONAL AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT PLAN (2024-2030)

Stamford University Bangladesh, said the authorities have not been able to enforce any of the measures to contain dust pollution at construction sites, remove polluting vehicles from roads or stop operations of illegal brick kilns.

"After the interim government took office, I was included in a taskforce on preventing air pollution. But it became inactive after holding a couple of meetings."

HEALTH IMPACTS

Exposure to air pollution leads to a wide range of health complications -- from respiratory diseases to impaired cognitive performance -- and children are particularly vulnerable to the harmful effects.

Children in developing countries like Bangladesh are 94 times more likely to die from air pollution than those in developed nations, according to a study titled "Structural Dependencies Perpetuate Disproportionate Childhood Health Burden from Air Pollution" released on October 16.

Earlier, a World Bank report published in 2023 said more than 159,000 lives were lost and 2.5 billion days were lived with illness in 2019. The cost of these health effects was estimated to be equivalent to 8.3 percent of Bangladesh's GDP that year.

PERSISTENT SOURCES, LIMITED SOLUTIONS

Air pollution in Dhaka stems from a combination of industrial activity and urban mismanagement. More than 7,000 traditional brick kilns operate across the country, most of which lack modern emission controls.

At least 56 percent of emissions originate within the greater Dhaka area, while 15.9 percent come from other regions, nearly 21 percent from other countries, and 7.1 percent from natural sources such as soil dust, according to the National Air Quality Management Plan 2024-2030.

The plan aims to achieve two key targets -- reduce the annual concentration of ambient PM2.5 by 15 microgram per cubic metre across Bangladesh, and by 30 microgram per cubic meter in the greater Dhaka area, and increase the number of days with "good" or "moderate" AQI across the country.

Environment Adviser Syeda Rizwana Hasan said, "Even with full action, it will take years to reduce air pollution."

"We also need quality fuel, otherwise the air will remain polluted," she told The Daily Star recently.

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