

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

Over 2.7 lakh deaths linked to air pollution in 2023

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as well as from agriculture, waste burning, and wildfires.

Public health experts say prolonged exposure to fine particles is driving a surge in chronic illnesses, straining families and the healthcare system. These particles, less than 2.5 micrometres in diameter, can enter the lungs and bloodstream, affecting multiple organ systems and increasing the risk of NCDs such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, lung cancer, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

Prof Sohel Reza Choudhury, head of epidemiology and research at the National Heart Foundation Hospital and Research Institute, said fine particles penetrate deep into the lungs, triggering inflammation and disrupting gas exchange, which leads to chronic oxygen deficiency and diseases like COPD.

"That is why the primary impact of air pollution is often seen in respiratory diseases," he told The Daily Star.

However, its effects are not limited to the lungs. "We have also observed significant cardiovascular impacts. In Bangladesh, the rate of premature deaths, especially those caused by heart disease, has risen sharply due to air pollution," he said.

According to the World Health Organisation, NCDs now cause 71 percent of all deaths in Bangladesh, with over half of these being premature. It notes that NCDs are not only a medical challenge but a socioeconomic threat,

straining the health system, increasing poverty, and hindering development.

Bangladesh's poor air quality often makes global headlines due to fossil fuel combustion, biomass burning, and emissions from unfit vehicles, brick kilns, and construction work.

The annual Air Quality Life Index report, published in August by the University of Chicago's Energy Policy Institute, said air pollution is cutting Bangladeshis' average life expectancy by 5.5 years, making it the country's deadliest external health risk.

The SoGA 2024 report released in June last year said that at least 236,000 people died due to air pollution in Bangladesh in 2021.

NCD CRISIS, DEMENTIA

The SoGA 2025 report said air pollution is driving Bangladesh's growing NCD crisis, with three out of four COPD deaths linked to poor air quality. It was also responsible for one in three deaths from heart disease, one in five diabetes deaths, and 40 percent of lower respiratory infection fatalities.

The report added that Bangladesh's air pollution-related death rate stands at 156 per 100,000 people, nearly nine times higher than in high-income countries, which average 17 per 100,000.

While health risks from unsafe water and poor sanitation have declined since 2000, the burden of both ambient and household air pollution has increased between 2000 and 2023.

This year, for the first time, the

report included findings on the effects of air pollution on people living with dementia. In 2023, dementia linked to air pollution caused more than 5,300 deaths in Bangladesh. Globally, it accounted for 626,000 deaths.

Asked how air pollution contributes to dementia, a physician involved in the noncommunicable disease control programme at the Directorate General of Health Services said tiny airborne particles such as lead, black carbon, and mercury can enter the brain and trigger inflammation and oxidative stress.

"This gradually damages the blood-brain barrier, the protective shield that keeps harmful substances out. As the barrier weakens, memory loss begins, and long-term exposure to polluted air can ultimately be fatal," he said, requesting anonymity.

The SoGA report said that because people with dementia require daily care, rising cases have ripple effects on productivity and family income, with a global economic impact exceeding one trillion dollars annually.

"Women often bear the largest burden, being both more likely to provide care for people with dementia and more likely to develop dementia themselves," it said.

HEI's Head of Global Initiatives, Dr Pallavi Pant, said, "The data highlight the significant impacts of poor air quality on the health and well-being of billions of people, especially those living in Asia and Africa. Growing momentum on

air quality management through better monitoring, regulations, and sectoral interventions is yielding progress, but much more is needed to protect those most at risk."

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE

Experts warn that while the government has begun enforcing seasonal brick kiln shutdowns and promoting cleaner energy, these efforts remain insufficient. They emphasised coordinated action across all sectors of government and society.

Prof Choudhury identified emissions from ageing vehicles and poor-quality fuel as Dhaka's main pollution sources. Although authorities in October last year announced plans to remove vehicles over 20 to 25 years old from city roads, there have been no visible changes due to weak enforcement.

"If we can firmly phase out outdated vehicles and gradually shift to battery-powered or electric alternatives, pollution levels could drop significantly," he said, adding that the causes of air pollution are well known and continued exposure is "like knowingly drinking poison".

The SoGA report urged governments to integrate air pollution control into national NCD prevention strategies, noting that reducing pollution can simultaneously lower disease burden, healthcare costs, and climate impacts.

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

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.

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 Rezwan 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.

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."

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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.

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 Abdurrahman Khan Kafir 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.