

Justice Zubayer sworn in as 26th chief justice

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Justice Zubayer Rahman Chowdhury was sworn in as the 26th chief justice of Bangladesh yesterday morning.

President Mohammed Shahabuddin administered the oath to the new chief justice at Darbar Hall in Bangabhaban at 10:30am, Supreme Court Registrar General Mohammed Habibur Rahman told The Daily Star.

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus, other advisers of the interim government, most of the judges of the Appellate and High Court Divisions of the SC, and chiefs of the armed forces, among others, were present at the oath-taking ceremony.

The felicitation of Chief Justice Zubayer will be held on January 4 at the SC, he said.

On December 23, the president appointed him as the new chief justice.

On Saturday, Chief Justice Dr Syed Refaat Ahmed retired from his post.

Born on May 18, 1961, Justice Zubayer is the son of the late AFM Abdur Rahman Chowdhury, who also served as a judge of the Supreme Court.



President Mohammed Shahabuddin administers the oath to new Chief Justice Zubayer Rahman Chowdhury at Darbar Hall in Bangabhaban yesterday morning.

PHOTO: PID

I'm not becoming a part of this NCP: Mahfuj Alam

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Mahfuj Alam, former adviser to the interim government, has announced that he will not join the National Citizen Party. He also said he had rejected an offer to contest the national election from a Dhaka seat under the Jamaat-NCP alliance.

In a Facebook post yesterday, Mahfuj said maintaining his ideological position was more important to him than securing a nomination.

"It is not true that I was not offered a proposal from the Jamaat-NCP alliance. However, maintaining my long-standing position is far more important to me than becoming a candidate for a Dhaka seat under this alliance," he wrote.

He clarified that he had provided strategic guidance to the NCP and the Nagorik Committee over the past 18 months, as both were led by his "July co-fighters".

"In the existing reality, my respect, affection and friendship for my July co-fighters will not be erased. But I am not becoming a part of this NCP," he said.

Explaining his decision, Mahfuj said his attempt to establish the NCP as a "Big July Umbrella" had failed.

Describing the current political climate as a "cold war", he said neutrality was the most prudent path.



Reform push or an ideological trade-off?

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The NCP believes consolidating pro-reform votes into a single ballot would speed up implementation of core reforms.

At a press briefing yesterday, NCP Convener Nahid Islam stated that his party's joining the Jamaat-led eight-party alliance is strictly an electoral arrangement and not based on any ideological alignment.

He explained the NCP was preparing to contest the polls independently and had planned to field candidates in all 300 constituencies, but after Sharif Osman Hadi was killed, Bangladesh's political landscape has changed significantly.

"Through this incident, we realised that the forces of hegemonic aggression are still active in the country. They are still conspiring to derail the election."

Speaking to The Daily Star yesterday, NCP Senior Joint Convener Ariful Islam Adeeb said, "We're politically aligned on implementing the reform proposals within the democratic alliance. This will allow us to strengthen the role of eight to ten parties in implementing the July uprising's political agreement."

"At the same time, we can encourage everyone to play a more effective role in seeking justice for the genocide [during the uprising], implementing fundamental reforms, resisting domination, and protecting Bangladesh's independence and sovereignty. This is why we are moving forward with the alliance."

Yesterday, around 130 NCP leaders submitted a letter to party Convener Nahid Islam, expressing solidarity and support for the alliance decision.

The signatories included senior joint conveners Ariful Islam Adeeb, Sarwar Tushar, Dr Atik Mujahid, Javed Rasin, Sultan Muhammad Zakaria, and Ehtesham Haque; Joint Member Secretary Ariful Rahman Tuhin; Senior Joint Chief Organiser Saifullah Haider; along with other members including Ataulah, Mahmuda Mitu, Ali Naser Khan, Mahin Sarkar, and others.

In the letter, they said, "We extend our full trust and support to any political understanding or alliance decision taken by the convener and member secretary, considering party and national interests and the goal of democratic transformation."

They also expressed hope that the convener would keep the party united and strong through visionary leadership and political wisdom, reinforcing public trust.

Sarwar Tushar told this correspondent that talks about an alliance with BNP fell through because "consensus and alliances are built as a team, not based on individual preferences".

"Perhaps other parties were interested in certain individuals rather than the party as a whole, whereas the alliance with Jamaat means two parties coming together."

Post-election security was also cited as a factor, with NCP leaders claiming increasing harassment of their grassroots activists by BNP members. "Once and if they come to power, it will be difficult to protect the people of my constituency. Allying with Jamaat will allow the party to protect its grassroots-level activists," he said.

Party leaders said BNP's gradual shift towards the centre-left, coupled with its move to woo vote banks left empty by the Awami League's removal from the electoral arena, has left the centre-right open.

NCP insiders said that while the party always planned to move ahead independently, their abysmal performance in the student union elections across campuses was a moment of reckoning. "It made us seriously consider the need for an alliance," Tushar said.

Regarding their previous alliance, Senior Joint Convener Ariful Islam Adeeb said, "Our previous Gonotantrik Songskar Jote was a political alliance, but the alliance we are now forming with Jamaat and eight other parties is an electoral one."

Though the NCP is proceeding with the 30 seats committed by the Jamaat-led alliance, insiders said negotiations were ongoing to raise the number to 40, while the party is seeking 51.

The party's decision to enter this alliance alienated a small but significant faction, which includes former information adviser Mahfuj Alam.

In a Facebook post yesterday, he wrote that he had tried to establish NCP as a "Big July Umbrella" but failed, and questioned whether the platforms had truly embraced principles such as a new political-economic settlement, cultural resistance to fascism, and building a society of empathy.

The alliance also did not sit well with five other leaders – Senior Joint Member Secretary Tasnim Jara, Joint Member Secretary Arshadul Haque, joint conveners Monira Sharmin and Tajnuva Jabeen, and Joint Chief Coordinator Navid Nowroz Shah – to announce their resignations and/or withdrawal from the polls.

While Jara has announced her resignation and decision to run independently in the polls on Saturday, Jabeen yesterday resigned from the party and withdrew from the race.

Monira remains in the party but announced her withdrawal from the election yesterday.

Monira and Jara had initially been offered seats under the 30-seat sharing arrangement, but both turned down the offer.

Arshadul, who was the NCP's Chattogram-16 nominee, resigned from the party on Thursday but has yet to announce whether he will contest the polls. The party's Cumilla-6 nominee Navid last night announced withdrawing from the race but remaining in the NCP.

The small but influential faction argues that the alliance with Jamaat is a strategic miscalculation and will cost the party politically in the long run.

Announcing her resignation yesterday on her verified Facebook page, Jabeen wrote, "Many assume my objection to the alliance with Jamaat is rooted in historical reasons or women's issues. But what was more alarming was the process through which this was executed. Although it's being framed as an electoral strategy, I see it as entirely pre-planned."

"The situation was engineered in a way to make it seem like there was

no alternative to forming the alliance. Other possibilities were deliberately sidelined. Many have been brought into this platform through calculated tactics and effectively held hostage."

She also criticised the nomination process, saying, "Just days ago, 125 aspirants were asked to collect nomination forms. The subsequent decision to cap the arrangement at 30 seats and ask the remaining aspirants to stand down was not taken through any open discussion or general meeting. Now, leaders are being told to campaign for Jamaat candidates in the remaining constituencies – an issue that was never previously discussed."

Jabeen also took a jab at the party's top leadership over alleged internal power struggles. "Senior leaders are preoccupied with removing one another through internal feuds. They are so consumed by personal rivalries, they'll never be able to build a centrist, Bangladesh-focused political force capable of serving the country.... The July spirit is not cultivated here; it is only used for political gain."

Joint Convener Monira Sharmin wrote on her Facebook page yesterday, "I believe in the independent political strength of the NCP. I have not broken my commitment to the party. But at this moment, my commitment to the mass uprising and to the people of this country outweighs that to my party."

"To those who supported me financially, encouraged me on this difficult path, and sent messages of hope, I sincerely apologise for disappointing you [by withdrawing from the race] at this moment. Please know that I did not enter politics to pursue power. I won't betray my party or the people by going to power through seat-sharing while preaching political change."

Thanking the party convener, member secretary, and the political council for nominating him for Cumilla-6, Navid on his Facebook page wrote, "Yesterday, an electoral alliance comprising Jamaat, the NCP, and eight other parties was announced.... In light of the changed circumstances, I am withdrawing myself from the race... I extend my advance best wishes to whoever the alliance nominates for Cumilla-6."

He added he and his colleagues would continue campaigning for a "yes" vote in the July Charter referendum on behalf of the NCP.

Senior Joint Convener Samanta Sharmin clarified her position on her Facebook page. "Some members of the National Citizen Party deviated from the party's core aspirations on December 28, 2025 at 5:30pm in exchange for a handful of seats.... Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami is not a reliable ally. I believe that entering into any form of cooperation or understanding with Jamaat – given its political position and ideology – would require the NCP to pay a heavy price."

"According to the National Citizen Party's long-held position, its core principles and vision for the state are fundamentally different from those of Jamaat. The NCP is a party built around the issues of justice, reform, and a Constituent Assembly election, leading toward a Second Republic. Therefore, a shared position on these three issues must be a prerequisite for any political alliance."

NCP ties up with Jamaat

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The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), led by Col (retired) Oli Ahmed, also joined the Jamaat-led electoral pact, expanding it from eight to 10 parties.

Yesterday afternoon, Jamaat Ameer Shaliquir Rahman announced the development at a press conference at the Jatiya Press Club.

He said the alliance has nearly completed its nomination list for all 300 constituencies through discussions, with the remaining work to be completed fairly after the submission of nomination papers.

Referring to the NCP's absence in the briefing, he said the party's leaders were unable to attend due to time constraints but had formally conveyed their decision to join the alliance and would brief the media separately.

"We want a free, fair, and acceptable election on the announced date. Ensuring a level playing field and fulfilling constitutional responsibilities is the duty of the government and the Election Commission. Any deviation will not be accepted by the nation."

He said many in the younger generation were unable to vote in the last three elections. "Our voting rights were taken away. Standing shoulder to shoulder with this new generation, we will fight to restore the right to vote through a free and fair election. This is not merely an alliance; it is a unity stronger than an alliance – essentially a 10-party electoral understanding for nation-

building and the election."

Asked about seat allocations, the Jamaat ameer said, "No single party is allocating seats to others. Based on fairness and merit, we are entrusting seats to one another."

However, senior leaders of the parties involved in the joint movement said an understanding had been reached by Sunday afternoon on around 260 to 265 seats.

For the remaining 30 to 35 constituencies, where multiple parties believe their candidates are more qualified or popular, discussions will continue after Jamaat's grand rally scheduled for January 3, with informal talks ongoing in the meantime.

On the condition of anonymity, a senior leader said the LDP had sought 10 seats, though it is unlikely to receive more than four. While discussions have mentioned conceding 30 seats to the NCP, the number is expected to be capped at 25. Jamaat is unlikely to contest more than 180 to 185 seats, Islami Andolan Bangladesh no more than 35, and Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis no more than 13 to 14 seats.

Another leader said that at a meeting of top alliance leaders yesterday, aspirants in constituencies, where consensus has yet to be reached, were asked to submit nomination papers. Once an agreement is finalised, others will withdraw their candidacies.

An Islami Andolan Bangladesh leader said the party would submit nomination papers in all 300 constituencies but

added that seat-sharing talks were continuing. "We remain hopeful that an excellent understanding will be reached, Insha'Allah," he said.

A Jamaat leader, speaking anonymously, said the NCP commands around 5-6 percent public support nationwide but lacks organisational strength to translate that support into votes.

Jamaat, he said, sees strategic value in aligning with the NCP, which would bring the July force into the electoral field. Jamaat also believes unity among Islamist parties could help strengthen an Islamic ideological narrative against BNP's nationalism.

Jamaat insiders said an alliance with the LDP would add further momentum, citing the presence of a distinguished freedom fighter in the fold.

At the press conference, LDP Chairman Oli Ahmed sat beside the Jamaat ameer but did not speak. The event was moderated by Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis Ameer Mamunul Haque who said the alliance should now be described as a 10-party electoral understanding.

Others present included Islami Andolan Bangladesh Presidium Member Ashraf Ali Akon, Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis Secretary General Ahmad Abdul Kader, Bangladesh Khelafat Andolan Naye-e-Ameer Mujibur Rahman Hamidi, Jatiya Gonotantrik Party (Jagpa) spokesperson Rashed Pradhan, and Jamaat Assistant Secretary General Hamidur Rahman Azad, among others.

BNP reviews several picks

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and has advised that several nominations be reconsidered.

The development came from his first day in the party chairperson's office in Gulshan yesterday. A room had been prepared for him on the second floor of the independent building on Road 88 of Gulshan, which has been serving as the party chairperson's office since 2008.

He arrived at the office at 1:40pm and left at around 10:28pm for Evercare Hospital in Bashundhara to see his ailing mother, former prime minister Khaleda Zia.

The review comes as the BNP intensifies its internal preparations ahead of the national election, with the party leadership placing a growing emphasis on grassroots mobilisation, local visibility and organisational strength at the constituency level. The Daily Star has learnt from people with direct knowledge of the discussions.

Tarique assessed the activities of candidates already announced for specific seats and expressed dissatisfaction with the level of engagement in some areas, they said.

He found weak organisational presence, limited voter outreach and a lack of sustained political activity on the ground in certain constituencies.

In response, Tarique asked members of the party's election steering committee to reassess those nominations and examine whether alternative candidates would be better placed to strengthen the party's position locally.

He advised reviewing organisational feedback from local units and recent political activity before taking any final decision on the nominations.

Party leaders said the move should not be seen as punitive but as part of a broader effort to ensure electoral readiness. The leadership wants candidates who are visible, active and able to mobilise voters at the local level.

Discussions took place on the possible changes of candidates in 17 constituencies, including Munshiganj-3, Sunamganj-2, Brahmanbaria-4 and Chattogram-6, according to party insiders.

In the seats, new nominees may be announced if the review concludes that current candidates are underperforming or left vacant for alliance members.

No final decision has yet been taken and consultations are still ongoing. Any changes would be made after further assessment and approval by the party's highest decision-making bodies.



BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman signs nomination papers for Dhaka-17 and Bogura-6 yesterday.

PHOTO: BNP MEDIA CELL

Tarique also instructed party leaders and activists to strictly follow the election code of conduct.

During the extended meeting, he held discussions with members of the BNP standing committee on election planning and the party's organisational position across key constituencies.

The talks centred on strengthening grassroots activity, coordination at the local level and assessing readiness ahead of the nomination process, according to party insiders.

During the time, Tarique also reviewed and finalised the supporting documents for his own nomination papers, which are scheduled to be submitted today. He will contest from two constituencies, Dhaka-17 and Bogura-6 with the party's electoral symbol, the Sheaf of Paddy.

He also met with leaders of various units of Dhaka-17 constituency to review the local situation and discuss election strategy.

Party leaders said two separate election committees have been formed for the constituencies.

For the Dhaka-17 constituency, BNP Chairperson's Advisory Council member Abdus Salam has been appointed as the chief coordinator, while Advisory Council member Farhad Halim Donar will also play a key coordinating role in leading the election activities.

The committee for Bogura-6 will be led by Bogura district BNP president Rezaul Karim Badsha.

Separately, nomination forms for BNP chief Khaleda for the Bogura-7 and Feni-

1 constituencies are set to be submitted today, party sources said.

Her nomination paper for the Dinajpur-3 seat was submitted yesterday.

Upon arrival at the party chairperson's office, senior party leaders, including standing committee members Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, Mirza Abbas, Gayeshwar Chandra Roy, Abdul Moyeen Khan, Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury and senior joint secretary general Ruhul Kabir Rizvi, welcomed him with a bouquet.

Election related issues and organisational matters were discussed, Mosharraf told journalists afterwards.

"To fulfil the hopes and expectations that have arisen, we will have to go to the people of Bangladesh in the coming days and listen to them. Tarique Rahman listens more than he speaks – that is one of his qualities," Khosru said.

Meanwhile, the Election Commission yesterday included Tarique and his daughter Zaima Rahman in the country's voter list ahead of the national election, EC Senior Secretary Akhtar Ahmed told reporters.

On Saturday, Tarique and Zaima completed the necessary process for National Identity Card registration and voter enlistment at the Election Commission's National Identity Wing in Agargaon, where their biometric data and photographs were taken.

They were registered as voters in the Dhaka-17 constituency under DNCC Ward No. 19 in the Gulshan area, using the address of House No. 196, Gulshan-2.