



Many candidates submitted nomination papers for the February polls yesterday before the end of the deadline. Among them were BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir, top left; Jamaat Secretary General Mia Golam Porwar, bottom left; NCP Chief Organiser (South) Hasnat Abdullah, top right; and BSD's Manisha Chakraborty, bottom right. Many candidates brought a large number of supporters in breach of the law, leading to unwanted situations at some places, centre, as seen in Chattogram.

PHOTO: STAR

## BNP leaves 14 seats for allies

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As part of its electoral strategy and efforts to foster unity, BNP has also absorbed several senior leaders of smaller parties, who are not registered with the EC.

Among them, Bangladesh LDP Chairman Shahadat Hossain Selim is contesting from Lakshmipur-1, while Bangladesh National Party Chairman Syed Ehsanul Huda will contest from Kishoreganj-5. Both joined BNP after dissolving their respective parties. The BNP had earlier nominated its own candidate for Kishoreganj-5.

In addition, Redwan Ahmed, former general secretary of Bangladesh Nationalist Party, will contest from Cumilla-7; Rashed Khan, former general secretary of Gono Odhikar Parishad, from Jhenaidah-4; and Bobby Hajjaj, former chairman of the National Democratic Movement, from Dhaka-13, all using the BNP symbol. Each resigned from or

dissolved their previous party to join BNP.

**CHANGES IN CANDIDATES**  
According to party insiders, BNP has changed candidates in 17 constituencies initially announced, citing political calculations, internal conflicts, and complications arising from seat-sharing with allies.

While some changes, which the party insists were made on popularity and grassroots support, eased tensions, some created more dissatisfaction. A significant number of leaders denied nominations plan to contest independently, creating a major organisational challenge.

Party leaders said acting chairman Tarique Rahman, if needed, may summon the leaders concerned to resolve disputes.

In Brahmanbaria-4, former MP Mushfiqur Rahman was initially nominated but replaced due to age and illness, with Kabir Ahmed

Bhuiyan finalised as the candidate. In Chattogram-6, Gias Kader Chowdhury had submitted papers, but Golam Akbar Khondkar, adviser to the BNP chairperson, was later nominated. In Narayanganj-5, Abul Kalam, a three-time MP and former metropolitan BNP president, replaced businessman Masuduzzaman.

In Chattogram-12, the party faces internal tensions over Enamul Haque who was expelled for allegedly helping move luxury cars of S Alam Group. In Jhenaidah-2, Saiful Islam Firoz, central senior joint general secretary of Jatiatabadi Swecchasebak Dal, announced an independent bid following the inclusion of Rashed Khan.

BNP sources said leaders denied nominations are preparing to contest as independents in at least 50 constituencies, including Kushtia-4, Jamalpur-2 and Dinaipur-2.

## 2,582 submitted as clock runs out

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Awami League allies be barred from the polls. The Awami League cannot contest since its activities are banned and registration suspended, the government had said.

Election Commission sources said that by 5:00pm on Sunday, 3,144 individuals had collected nomination papers. EC Secretary Akhtar Ahmed said yesterday afternoon that the final tally would be confirmed once data compilation was complete.

Later at night, EC Public Relations Officer Ruhul Amin Mollik confirmed the figure at 2,582. They include 444 candidates for 41 parliamentary seats in Dhaka region; 142 for 15 seats in Faridpur; 194 for 23 seats in Chattogram; 365 for 35 seats in Cumilla; 260 for 39 seats in Rajshahi; 276 for 36 seats in Khulna; 166 for 21 seats in Barishal; 311 for 38 seats in Mymensingh; 146 for 19 seats in Sylhet; and 278 candidates for 33 constituencies in Rangpur region.

The total number is lower than those in the last two elections. In the January 7, 2024 polls, 2,741 aspirants submitted nomination papers despite a boycott by the BNP and other opposition parties.

That election largely featured Awami League nominees facing so-called rebel candidates — an arrangement critics derided as a contest of “dummy candidates”.

In 2018, when the BNP and others joined the race, 3,056 nomination papers were filed, though the election was widely criticised over allegations of ballot stuffing on the night before voting. The figure stood at 1,107 in the one-sided 2014 election, 2,460 in 2008, 2,563 in 2001, 3,093 in 1996, and 3,855 in 1991.

office said NCP leader Nahid's representatives submitted his nomination for Dhaka-11 at the Dhaka Divisional Commissioner's office.

In Chattogram, a brief scuffle broke out around 12:30pm between police and supporters of BNP nominee Sayeed Al Noman during the submission of nomination papers for Chattogram-10.

Police and witnesses said 100 to 150 supporters attempted to enter the office premises, breaching the code of conduct. Police intervened, after which Sayeed entered with only a few people, and the main gate was temporarily locked.

Asked about the incident, Sayeed said, “Such love and emotion from people are part of Chattogram's tradition. While this is an achievement, it is also embarrassing.”

## NCP submits nomination forms for 47

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Commissioner's Office. General Secretary Akhter Hossen submitted his nomination in Rangpur-4. Outgoing chief coordinator Nasiruddin Patwary has also received the alliance's green signal to contest from Dhaka-8.

Other leaders who got approval include Chief Organiser (South), Hasnat Abdullah, from Cumilla-4; Chief Organiser (North), Sarjis Alam, from Panchagarh-1; Senior Joint Convener, Ariful Islam Adeeb, from Dhaka-14; and Joint Convener, Javed Rasin, from Dhaka-9. Rasin told The Daily Star last night that he has submitted his nomination form.

Outside the capital, key alliance-approved candidates from major districts include Sarwar Tushar from Narasingdi-2, Abdullah Al-Amin from Narayanganj-4, Saif Mostafiz from Brahmanbaria-4, Abu Sayed Musa from Barishal-4, Dr Zahedul Islam from Dhaka-4 and Shakil Ahmed from Meherpur-2.

Former adviser Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuiyan has officially joined

the NCP as the party's spokesperson. He, however, will not contest in the upcoming national elections. Nahid made the announcement at the press conference.

Patwary resigned from his position as chief coordinator and president of the election management committee, handing over the responsibilities to Asif. Asif has also been included in key political councils and policy-making bodies of the party.

Nahid mentioned, “The election management committee will be reorganised, and those who are not contesting in the elections themselves will focus on the party's electoral efforts.”

At the briefing, the newly appointed spokesperson, Asif, said, “I will focus entirely on the election process to ensure the victory of the party candidates. I will also make every effort to fulfil the dreams of the martyrs and injured comrades of the 2024 mass uprising. I will work to ensure that the election is conducted in a fair, impartial, and democratic manner.”

The party's decision to enter an

alliance with Jamaat continues to stir internal turmoil, with Azad Khan Bhashani, the grandson of Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, leaving the party.

“Inspired by the people-centric, anti-imperialist, anti-hegemonic, and anti-discrimination political vision of the oppressed people's leader Maulana Bhashani, I first became involved with the National Citizen Committee and later with the NCP,” he posted on his social media handle.

“However, it is with deep regret that I must say that, in real experience, I have felt a clear lack of historic responsibility, compassion for the masses, and depth of sacrifice required to build a new Bangladesh. The expected success in establishing a new political order and a distinct political identity has not been evident,” he continued.

Over the past week, at least 10 senior and mid-level leaders have either quit party posts or withdrawn from the polls race, reflecting the growing dissent over the alliance with Jamaat.

## NCP's gamble, Jamaat's gain?

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While many were surprised or even “hurt” by NCP's decision to align with Jamaat, Altaf Parvez said it was not unexpected. According to him, the move was almost inevitable for the NCP under three political realities.

“From the very beginning, there has been a right-wing tilt among the NCP ranks. Secondly, over the past 17 months, a significant section of the public has held the NCP party responsible for the failures of the interim government. This is because the head of the government himself had said that it was the students who appointed him. There is also a widespread perception that many advisers were effectively appointed or selected by students.

“As a result, many people associated the government's performance with the NCP, and it has partly tainted the party's political prospects.”

As a third reason, he said, “NCP's advisers wanted to ensure that if the party failed to perform well in the election, it would at least have the option of being in the opposition afterwards.”

Explaining why the NCP aligned with Jamaat instead of the BNP or contesting independently, Parvez observed, “There was an opportunistic tendency among the party's frontliners — such as the desire to remain influential, stay close to the administration, hold positions and titles, and remain in the public eye. These populist traits made leaning towards Jamaat almost inevitable.”

Explaining why this is a major success for Jamaat, he said, “In South Asia and around the world, Jamaat's image is that of a Shariah-based party. Jamaat-e-Islami exists in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. In

its 84-year history across these three countries, this is the first time Jamaat has achieved such a major moral success. It has effectively brought an entire force that led a mass uprising under its fold.

“As a result, it can now demonstrate to the world that despite being a Shariah-based party, its appeal has spread to the liberal middle class.”

The analyst added, “Secondly, politics in Bangladesh will continue even after the February 12 election. Even if Jamaat loses, having the NCP with it will make it easier to build opposition politics under Jamaat leadership. In effect, it has eliminated the space for any other opposition force. In politics, moral and cultural aspects matter greatly, and the NCP's young leaders come from a middle-class cultural background.”

Mohiuddin Ahmad, however, views the NCP's move into the Jamaat bloc as a natural pre-election development, noting that such alignments have occurred before every election in Bangladesh's history.

“I don't see the NCP's alignment with Jamaat as something exceptional. This is how power politics works. The NCP was born only recently. None of its leaders witnessed 1971, so they have no emotional attachment to it. They practise state power-centric politics and will go wherever it suits them.”

He added, “We know they also bargained with BNP and weren't satisfied with the outcome. They may feel they are in a better position bargaining with Jamaat, and that is why they have chosen this path. Moreover, the NCP is not a crystallised political party. The 2024 anti-discrimination student movement involved people outside the ruling

establishment, but not all of them joined the NCP when it was formed.”

Mohiuddin also said that just as the Awami League had a tendency to “appropriate” the glory of the collective effort that led to independence in 1971, the NCP too shows a similar tendency to appropriate the glory of the 2024 mass uprising.

He added that the NCP is unlikely to wield significant influence as a political party in post-election politics. “We've already become accustomed to such politics in this country.”

Salahuddin Muhammad Babar, however, said there is a clear difference between past “alliance politics” and the current Jamaat-NCP “politics of understanding”.

“In alliance politics, there is a commitment. When the alliance comes to power, partners have to be given positions and rehabilitated. We have seen how Inu, Rashed Khan Menon and others were given ministerial posts and privileges during the Awami League's tenure.”

“The BNP, which previously formed alliances, is also now moving towards a strategy of understanding with like-minded parties. I think Jamaat is following the same model this time.”

Describing the current politics of understanding as a new phenomenon, he said, “If different points are raised separately or in isolation in every corner, they do not yield fruitful results. But if these come under a common understanding, and if all parties can participate in a parliamentary election and enter parliament, then real politics will move into parliament. This will ensure the participation of smaller parties as well.”

## Khaleda's health shows no signs of improvement

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physician, AZM Zahid said she was going through a critical phase.

The BNP chief has long been battling multiple health complications, including liver cirrhosis. She has a permanent pacemaker and has previously undergone stent

implantations in her heart.

Khaleda was admitted to the hospital on November 23 on the advice of her medical board after being diagnosed with infections affecting her heart and lungs.

The medical board, led by cardiologist Prof Shahabuddin

Talukder and comprising specialists from Bangladesh, the UK, the US, China, and Australia, is overseeing her treatment.

Earlier this month, there was an initiative to take her abroad for treatment, but it could not proceed due to her poor physical condition.

## Afghan farmers taking heavy hit from opium poppy ban: UN

**AFP, Kabul**  
Farmers in northern Afghanistan have yet to make up for lost income since the Taliban government banned poppy production for opium three years ago, the United Nations said yesterday.

The ban has slashed poppy production overall to just 10,200 hectares (25,200 acres) this year, “one of the lowest levels ever recorded” in Afghanistan, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) said.

However, it also resulted in a shift

from traditional growing areas in the south to northern provinces further from the control of the Taliban authorities.

In Badakhshan on the border with Tajikistan, surveyed in the agency's most recent report, poppy production has jumped since the Taliban returned to power in 2021.

In that province and in nearby Kunduz and Balkh, “on average, 85 percent of families... reported either no replacement or only partial replacement of their poppy income” after abandoning production, the

report found.

Many farmers are instead growing wheat and other cereals, but in 2023 “the average per-hectare income from wheat was just \$770, whereas opium poppy yielded around \$10,000 per hectare”.

“This income loss goes far beyond households, weakening rural purchasing power, reducing local economic activity, and increasing communities' overall vulnerability to poverty and food insecurity,” said Oliver Stolpe, the UNODC's regional representative.