

Between Delivery and Drift: The BNP's First 80 Days in Power

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The Bangladesh Nationalist Party returned to power in February 2026 under Prime Minister Tarique Rahman. Eighty days on, its record is marked by sharp contrasts: rapid progress on welfare delivery alongside signs of institutional capture, judicial rollback and a selective approach to the constitutional mandate it once championed in opposition.

Bangladesh held its parliamentary election on 12 February 2026 in what the Election Commission described as one of the country's most credible polls in decades, with [voter turnout of 59.88 per cent](#). The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)-led alliance secured 212 of 299 parliamentary seats, while the Jamaat-e-Islami-led alliance, including the National Citizen Party, won 77 seats. The result was not only a political vindication for the BNP but also a mandate weighted with high expectations of reform and renewal.

Barely 21 days after taking office, Prime Minister Tarique Rahman inaugurated the Family Card programme on 10 March 2026 – a headline promise of the BNP's election manifesto. At the launch ceremony in Banani, Dhaka, he handed cards to 17 women before [digitally crediting 37,567 female-headed families](#) across 14 upazilas with ₳2,500 (S\$26.07) each. For the pilot phase through June 2026, the government has allocated [₳38.07 crore](#) (S\$3.97 million), with roughly two-thirds going out as direct cash. The long-term aim is to reach close to 100 million people and convert the card into a universal social identity by 2030, making it the [largest welfare commitment](#) in Bangladesh's history.

Furthermore, allowances for the imams and muazzins arrived on 14 March 2026, canal excavation on 16 March 2026, Krishak Cards (cards for farmers) on 14 April 2026, a ₳10,000 (S\$104.28) agricultural loan waiver and Sports Cards for 129 athletes. Bangladesh's safety net has long comprised nearly a [hundred overlapping programmes](#) across 23 ministries, often criticised for [excluding the truly poor](#) while favouring the politically connected. Structurally, a single platform linked to the national identity card is intended to replace this fragmentation

While the BNP quickly established an early governing rhythm through a series of welfare and development initiatives, political observers have also raised significant concerns about its conduct and direction. The government's first 80 days in office have been overshadowed by persistent violence, factional conflict and public insecurity. The Human Rights Support Society (HRSS) quarterly report for January-March 2026 found [36 deaths and 4,078 injuries](#) across 610 incidents, with 28 BNP members killed in intra-party clashes. Between September 2024 and January 2026, internal BNP feuds caused [121 deaths and 7,131 injuries](#) across the country. [Gang rapes and murders of teenagers](#) occurred in Narsingdi and Pabna in February 2026, and the HRSS described these incidents as evidence of deep societal decay. According to the HRSS January-March 2026 report, 328 children were subjected to violence in three months, with 138 killed – a figure that indicts the state rather than a particular political party. An earlier HRSS report counted [550 child rape victims](#) over 17 months.

Despite its manifesto pledge to build a “non-discriminatory, merit-based and accountable state,” the BNP has faced criticism over the politicisation of appointments to key constitutional and academic institutions, including university vice-chancellorships. Within weeks, the government appointed its central committee’s Education Affairs Secretary as [Dhaka University’s Vice-Chancellor](#) and placed the party chairperson’s personal adviser at the head of the University Grants Commission. On 16 March 2026, seven university vice-chancellors were appointed without the Senate nomination process required under the [Dhaka University Order 1973](#) or input from the government’s search committee. By May 2026, a [further 11 universities](#) had received vice-chancellor appointments on similar terms.

The BNP government also introduced bills in parliament to repeal [two ordinances](#) passed by the interim government – one establishing an independent Supreme Court secretariat and the other reforming judge appointment procedures. That this move comes from a party that spent years demanding judicial independence after its leaders were imprisoned by a pliant bench has drawn particular criticism. [Badiul Alam Majumdar](#), Secretary of Sushashoner Jonno Nagorik and former head of the Election Reform Commission, expressed his dismay, saying, “We do not understand why BNP did this”.

Moreover, the July Charter, born of the 2024 revolution, signed by 24 parties including the BNP, and endorsed by [60.26 percent of voters](#) in the 12 February 2026 referendum, proposes 84 reforms – prime ministerial term limits, genuine judicial independence, a proportional upper house and hard constraints on executive power. At their swearing-in, members of parliament (MPs) were required to take two oaths – one as parliamentarians and another as members of a Constitution Reform Council tasked with enacting the Charter within 180 days. BNP’s MPs refused to take [the second oath](#). As the party holds a two-thirds majority, the Council cannot be constituted without its participation.

Commentator [Faisal Mahmud](#) described it as a “strategic reversal that contradicts a deep-seated consensus among legal scholars and international observers”. [Majumdar](#), himself a negotiator on the National Consensus Commission, called it “sophistry”. Mazhar Bhuiyan noted that the BNP’s objections target precisely the provisions designed to constrain a dominant parliamentary majority – the very majority it now holds. As Monir Haider, former Special Assistant to the Chief Adviser, told [BBC Bangla](#), it was not the manifesto, but the Charter which was put to a popular vote.

While the Family Card system delivers tangible support to long-neglected households, and initiatives such as canal excavation and farmer cards address genuine rural needs, a government that campaigns on a “new Bangladesh” while reproducing familiar patterns – partisan control of universities, rollback of judicial reform, and resistance to a referendum-backed reform agenda – risks reinforcing rather than transforming the political culture it claims to challenge. A key test for the BNP will be whether it can translate electoral legitimacy into institutional restraint rather than a renewed form of majoritarian rule.

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