

Will the real poor get the benefits of the family card?



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The social safety net or social protection programme enables the government to advance the well-being and security of citizens by protecting them from vulnerability and deprivation so they can pursue a better life. The purpose of the family card, proposed by the new government, seems to be the same. Prime Minister Tarique Rahman, during an inter-ministerial meeting held on February 19, instructed the launch of the programme. On the same day, a 15-member cabinet committee led by Finance Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury was formed. The high-powered committee includes ministers, advisers and secretaries who will finalise the beneficiary selection process and eligibility criteria, and propose a rollout mechanism of the initiative. The committee will identify marginalised and low-income families in one upazila per division for the pilot phase to test the programme starting this Ramadan before rolling it out across the country.

The family card programme reportedly has an ambitious target of reaching five crore families eventually and would offer more than double the benefits currently provided under the existing social safety net schemes. At the planning stage, several factors need to be considered. If the weaknesses of the existing social safety net programmes are not taken into consideration during design, implementation and monitoring, the family card may end up like the older programmes.

The social safety net programmes in Bangladesh, with provisions for cash, food and assets, are expected to reduce and ultimately alleviate poverty and food insecurity. As per

Article 15 (d) of Bangladesh's constitution, it shall be a fundamental responsibility of the state to attain a constant increase of productive forces and a steady improvement in the material and cultural standard of life of the people through planned economic growth, with a view to securing its citizens' right to social protection, that is to say, to public assistance in cases of undeserved want arising from unemployment, illness or disablement, or suffered by widows or orphans or in old age, in other such cases.

Bangladesh has a fairly long history of social safety net programmes (SSNPs), the first undertaken immediately after independence in 1971. Since then, the number of total schemes implemented is over 120. The country spent about 16 percent of the national budget on SSNPs in recent years,

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which is 2.5-3 percent of the GDP, covering about 35 percent of citizens. However, a vital question is whether the benefits of the SSNPs reach the targeted beneficiaries—poor households and the vulnerable population?

According to Bangladesh's 8th Five-Year

Plan, there are high exclusion and inclusion errors in the existing SSNPs. However, there is no recent data to estimate the errors, which is necessary to assess beneficiary selection or targeting efficiently. The current process of beneficiary selection often relies on individual knowledge rather than the collection and evaluation of standardised data. Details about people's income and how much land they own are not checked

commitment to address the triple problems of poverty, vulnerability, and marginalisation, and it provides a roadmap for establishing a lifecycle-based social protection system covering people's needs over their entire lifetime. It adopted a lifecycle approach developed by William Beveridge, which involves long-term planning of programmes directed at different stages of life, such as childhood, school age, youth, working age

needs to be formulated and adopted, which requires a lot of attention by the government and all relevant stakeholders.

Any large-scale SSNPs are ideally required to follow a life-cycle approach covering all the stages of life. There are many factors which can cause or exacerbate poverty and can occur at any point in a person's life. The NSSS brought together all SSNPs under five broad themes to align with the lifecycle approach. The needs are different at different stages of life, and families require different support depending on the age of the family members, and vulnerability conditions such as disability, sickness, poverty level, etc. Therefore, no single social SSPN can replace all the existing programmes. A single programme—family card—will not be able to cover all, as programmes are age-specific, implemented by different ministries and departments, and do not necessarily use cash as the only support tool. For example, the objectives of the mother and child benefit programme are to ensure nutrition and good health of women and newborns up to 1,000 days through a combination of cash payment, training of pregnant women and lactating mothers of poor families on parenting, and taking good care of their babies, and ensuring vaccination.

Ultimately, the success of the government's ambitious family card programme will depend entirely on its execution. If it inherits the systemic flaws of past social safety net schemes—such as unverified data, poor targeting, and weak monitoring—it risks becoming just another inefficient programme. Moreover, as the current NSSS concludes this year, it is crucial to recognise that a single card cannot address all human vulnerabilities. The upcoming strategy must seamlessly integrate the family card with the proven lifecycle approach, ensuring that specific needs like child nutrition, maternal health, and elderly care are not sidelined. A transparent, data-driven, and comprehensive social protection system is the only way forward to sustainably uplift the nation's poor and marginalised.



VISUAL: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

for accuracy. Due to poor monitoring, it is not possible to have accurate information on the weaknesses of the SSNPs in Bangladesh. However, it is apparent to those who know the programmes that they have very high exclusion and inclusion errors.

Besides, there is no robust, standardised, and operational grievance system for the safety net programmes. Also, regular monitoring and "cleaning" of the beneficiary registry is not done to remove people who are no longer eligible for various reasons, such as death, to make way for eligible, genuine new applicants to the programmes.

Bangladesh adopted the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) in 2015. The strategy is scheduled to end in 2026. It is a

and old age. Over the years, these systems have evolved globally through trial and error and incremental innovations. Taking into consideration risk factors such as natural disasters, climate change and food price shocks, policymakers aimed to create social safety nets, usually in the form of cash, food and other kinds of support, to improve the socioeconomic conditions of people living in poverty.

The adoption of NSSS coincides with the beginning of the new era of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which set out a global commitment to reduce poverty following the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Since the duration of the current strategy is due to end this year, a new strategy

Bangladesh's foreign policy enters its post-election test



A CLOSER LOOK
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TASNEEM TAYEB

The recently held parliamentary election in Bangladesh was watched more closely than usual. More than 330 international observers were accredited—over twice the number present in the 2024 election—reflecting a moment of suspended judgement rather than routine election monitoring. In the current international order, elections are just the beginning in a long order of assessments. What happens post-polls matters just as much. Some of the most consequential judgements will not be made at home but elsewhere, as neighbours adjust their expectations, markets weigh risk, and foreign partners decide whether the next government's assurances are meant to last.

The formation of the new government has confirmed the transition from spectacle to scrutiny. The early days of a new administration rarely produce policy manifests. They produce something more revealing: intent and indications. External partners often read these cues before they read statements.

The pressures shaping Bangladesh's foreign policy are less about ideological bent than structure. Neighbourhood stability now rests more on predictability, rather than sentiment. Market access is filtered through social compliance, regulatory credibility, and reputational risk. Infrastructure finance is assessed against political volatility. Labour migration depends on formal diplomatic negotiation rather than informal accommodation. These relationships are no longer moored in affinity. They are governed by constant evaluation.

What has changed is not simply the country's external environment, but the nature of foreign policy itself. It no longer operates primarily through bilateral courtesies or summit diplomacy, but is increasingly mediated through investment decisions, compliance benchmarks, grant conditionalities, and strategic supply-chain positioning. Diplomacy today is conducted as much through markets, regulators, investors and diasporas as through embassies. This is why foreign policy now reaches factory floors, remittance corridors and regulatory desks long before it reaches press briefings. The diplomatic arena itself has shifted from corridor negotiations among officials to networked engagement involving investors, institutions, civil society, and transnational communities. In this environment, traditional

definitions of foreign policy become insufficient. Navigation depends increasingly on alignment choices.

Early external responses suggest cautious continuity. Several of the country's key regional partners, such as India, China, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, along with the US, have already issued formal congratulations to the new government. While such gestures are routine in diplomatic practice, they also indicate that channels remain open and expectations remain in play.

But foreign policy today is shaped less by gestures than by the capacity to behave consistently once political theatrics end. Few issues test that capacity more starkly than Myanmar.

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The Rohingya crisis is no longer a temporary humanitarian emergency. It has become a permanent diplomatic condition for Bangladesh, exposing the limitations of multilateralism and the costs of prolonged deferral. Meanwhile, the strain on national security, public finances, and social cohesion persists.

This is no longer a question of alignment, but whether Bangladesh has the administrative capability to sustain what it has undertaken. Hosting the Rohingya population has already significantly impacted its security posture and coffers. The issue now is whether that endurance risks slipping into normalisation.

This is where foreign policy intersects most directly with domestic governance. Keeping the Rohingya issue internationalised requires sustained diplomatic efforts. It demands the ability to pursue justice, humanitarian

financing, and risk management, without allowing any one track to drift into symbolism.

In this context, many in Bangladesh will regard early clarity on a Myanmar engagement strategy as a measure of leadership acumen.

There is another lesson to be learnt here. In the years preceding its 2022 economic collapse, Sri Lanka experienced a gradual erosion of external confidence: rising debt, repeated credit-rating downgrades, delayed engagement with multilateral lenders, and shrinking access to capital markets. Long before shortages appeared on the streets, options were already thinning. Trust withdrew before diplomacy intervened.

The relevance of this comparison is structural. It shows how external judgement precedes formal crisis and how sovereignty can be hollowed out gradually when institutional capacity misaligns with external expectations.

Bangladesh's position is different. The point is not that the fundamentals are identical; it's about sequence: how credibility erodes before collapse, and how foreign policy options narrow long before crisis is acknowledged.

In such an environment, strategic partnership is less a declaration of alignment than an exercise in calibrated balance. For Bangladesh, this requires sustaining working equilibrium among its major relationships, particularly with India, China and the US, without allowing engagement with one to be read as positioning against another. Durable diplomacy rarely rests on extracting concessions at a counterpart's expense; it rests on structuring cooperation so participation remains rational for all sides. A foreign policy that places national interest first succeeds through agreements whose stability serves every participant. Upcoming negotiations such as the renewal of the Ganges water treaty with India will offer an early indication of how effectively this balance can be maintained in practice. The Bangladesh-US deal, signed in a rush just days before the election, can also serve as an opportunity for the government to prove its mettle if, in light of recent developments, it can re-open negotiations with the US to work out a more favourable path for Bangladesh.

Initial remarks from the new administration has emphasised continuity, procedural engagement and dialogue with all partners rather than immediate strategic pronouncements. Such language is characteristic of governments seeking to stabilise external expectations before articulating doctrine.

A public mandate may open doors. How long they stay open depends on credibility. And credibility is built over time and tested under uneven circumstances. Transitions test not the strength of mandates but the discipline of systems. Elections redistribute authority. Governance determines whether that authority stabilises or thins. The world rarely reacts to declarations. It reacts to

patterns. That is usually where the real verdict begins.

Our foreign policy will not be judged by intent alone. It will be judged by whether markets, migration partners, and multilateral institutions continue

to treat Bangladesh as a country whose commitments survive political change. Foreign policy is no longer something governments conduct abroad. It is something states perform continuously at home.

Zila Parishad, Manikganj zp.manikganj.gov.bd

Memo No. ZPManik/e-Tender/02/2025/108

Date: 22/02/2026

Invitation for Tender (Works) e-Tender Notice No. 05/2025-2026(LTM)

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of the following works packages:

| Sl No. | Tender ID & Package No. | Name of scheme | Tender proposal last selling & submission date and time |
|--------|---|--|---|
| 1 | 1225995 e-GP/ZPM/2025-26/02/REV/W-21 | (a) Improvement of road from Joyra Abd. Karim house to Abdul Jolil house under Jagir UP 2 No. Ward, Upazila-Manikganj Sadar, Dist-Manikganj. (b) Construction of Guide wall with slope protection work at Motilal Digree College Main-Gate to Golam Mostofa house road under Daulatpur upazila, Dist-Manikganj. | 09 March-2026 16.00 & 10 March-2026 14.00 |
| 2 | 1225996 e-GP/ZPM/2025-26/02/REV/W-22 | Construction of Noore Rowshan Girls Madrasa Bhabon under Manikganj Sadar upazila, Dist-Manikganj. | |
| 3 | 1225997 e-GP/ZPM/2025-26/02/REV/W-23 | Development of Chakmirpur Yad Ali Darul Uloom Madrasa under Daulatpur upazila, Dist-Manikganj. | |
| 4 | 1226000 e-GP/ZPM/2025-26/02/REV/W-24 | Maintenance of Bridge Approach on Alok River of the north side of Baliati Jomidar house under Sauria upazila, Dist-Manikganj. | |
| 5 | 1226001 e-GP/ZPM/2025-26/02/REV/W-25 | Improvement of road from Basamara Purbopara Rowshan Member house to Basamara Bazar Jame Mosque via Shamsul shop (ch.00-700m) under Daulatpur upazila, Dist-Manikganj. | |
| 6 | 1226002 e-GP/ZPM/2025-26/02/REV/W-26 | Maintenance of road with Guide wall of the pond at Baliati Ishwar Chandra High School under Sauria upazila, Dist-Manikganj. | |
| 7 | 1226396 e-GP/ZPM/2025-26/02/REV/W-27 | Improvement of road from Gopalpur-Savar road to Abdur Rahman Khan High School (Ch 00-366m) by HBB under Sauria Upazila, Dist-Manikganj. (2nd Call, FY 2021-22) | |
| 8 | 1229341 e-GP/ZPM/2025-26/02/OWN/W-04 | Maintenance of Zila Parishad Auditorium cum Community Center under Manikganj Sadar upazila Dist.- Manikganj. | |

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