

Dear colleagues, partners and friends,

I write to you today, on what is usually the most festive day of the year in Bangladesh, the Bengali New Year. Unfortunately, this will be the quietest celebration that the country perhaps has ever experienced, as all official festivities have been cancelled and many families will go without eating or will have one simple meal prepared with items from a relief package tomorrow

1. The highest one-day spike in cases (182) has been reported in Bangladesh yesterday (13 April), raising the total number of cases detected to 803. A total of 1,570 samples were tested across the country in the last 24 hours. The majority of the infected cases are in Dhaka. More tests are being carried out, but the insufficient number of tests continues to provide an inaccurate picture of the total number of infections.

A community-centred approach is crucial in identifying and testing, and preventing community outbreak. BRAC has partnered with a2i, Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), Community Based Health Care (CBHC) and UN agencies to support the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. BRAC's network of 50,000 community health workers who conducted door-to-door awareness campaigns will now work with government teams to verify clusters of COVID-19 through household level visits and contact tracing of suspected cases, provide guidance on home quarantine and distribute essential medical packages for supportive treatment. These health workers are trusted in their communities, and the initiative is expected to encourage people to be less fearful about reporting.

Like all emergency services, we are keeping all 41 of BRAC's maternity centres open during the lockdown to provide maternity healthcare and normal delivery services. The continuity of normal healthcare services is vital to curb fatalities from other diseases through this period.

2. We are in the 18th day of economic shutdown. Dhaka, with 75 areas affected, and Narayanganj, remain areas of high risk. Large areas in the cities and hotspots, including over 15 districts, continue to be under lockdown. The 'general holiday' has been extended until 25 April, and people have been instructed not to leave their homes after 6pm.

3. We believe that all children deserve a childhood that is safe and secure, and that their learning continues especially in the midst of uncertainty. We are supporting national efforts to continue secondary and primary classes on television. BRAC is also piloting and scaling remote learning through basic phones across BRAC schools, with a special focus on psychosocial counselling and COVID-19 awareness. More details are included in the report attached.

4. Working in close coordination with the government and community-level organisations, BRAC has provided an initial 99,450 families with BDT 1,500 (USD 18). This support has focused on people who were already living in vulnerable situations and have been affected particularly hard by the shutdowns - workers in the informal sector still living in urban areas, people living in ultra-poverty in the host communities surrounding the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar, and people living in the most remote areas of Bangladesh. The second phase of this support will be announced this week, and we additionally hope to increase this coverage through the funds raised in the current appeal.

BRAC will continue to prioritise the most vulnerable - the elderly, pregnant or lactating mothers, people with disabilities, women-headed households, people living in ultra-poverty and those who are not receiving support from any other sources. 15 organisations are now registered on BRAC's urban slum mapping website, which will hopefully improve information sharing, enable coordination and reduce duplication of relief efforts.

Thank you to BRAC Bank management staff who are donating two days' salary and non-management staff who have donated one days' salary to the appeal.

We cannot succumb to fear and anxiety. Now more than ever, we must invest in hope, empathy and compassion. All of us have the ability to light a candle for those facing darker times.

We will get through this. Happy Bengali New Year 1427 to all.

Please see details on the current situation and our work in the [attached situation report](#).

Asif Saleh
Executive Director
BRAC