

Dear colleagues, partners and friends,

Eid is usually the most festive day of the year for many Bangladeshis - a time to reflect, express gratitude and spend time with family and loved ones.

Unfortunately, many will struggle to celebrate this *Eid*.

While COVID-19 continues to spread, and millions across the country struggle to feed their families because of the continued economic lockdowns, **the strongest cyclonic storm ever recorded in the Bay of Bengal hit the coastal regions of Bangladesh. Bangladesh did extremely well to save lives amid all the chaos of COVID- 19**, but the damage in the [coastal areas is extensive](#) and recovery will take time and support from all.

BRAC staff are on the ground doing door to door needs assessment and analysing the damage, even in the last days of *Ramadan* and into the *Eid* holiday. More in the report.

BRAC also supported the administration in launching a massive preparation drive in the week before the cyclone hit. 28 BRAC district and sub-district disaster management teams were on the ground with 252 trained staff from those communities spreading awareness across 14 cyclone-prone districts. 40 BRAC cyclone shelters were readied, early warning messages were broadcasted every two hours in local dialects through community radio in seven coastal districts and masks, gloves and sanitisers were sent to Khulna, Bagerhat, and Satkhira.

The Testing Conundrum and the dreaded COVID-19 certificate

I wrote about the testing conundrum in my last update. That challenge exponentially multiplied across the country in the last week. To make things worse, many hospitals are refusing to admit patients without a COVID-19 test certificate. With the lack of testing facilities and large queues in the existing ones, this has meant [unimaginable hassle for even the non-COVID-19 patients](#). In this week's report, I also share an update from our TB clinics where we have seen an 85% drop in traffic. This is a dangerous trend. This can potentially mean that we may actually see more people dying of non-COVID-19 diseases than the virus itself, and also more long term damage to the public health gains achieved so far in Bangladesh - in TB detection, immunisation etc. As advised by many diaspora Bangladeshi doctors and experts dealing with this outbreak, we must stop this differentiation between COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 hospitals and create separate facilities for both in all hospitals. This policy of separate hospitals may have made sense when the transmission was low, but it does not any more. All hospitals need to have COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 units, so that there are arrangements to treat both and to stop harassment of such patients. With Chittagong fast becoming the new hotzone, BRAC is setting up five kiosks based sample collection booths there. The pace of setting up kiosks now very much depends on the increase of our lab capacity.

Serious concerns exist about increased transmission in the coming weeks.

Bangladesh reached the 10,000 mark of confirmed cases on May 4th. It took 11 days to reach the next 10,000 and only 7 more days to reach the following 10,000.

Thousands of people travelled back to their villages from the capital ahead of the *Eid* holiday, despite the government's ban on public transport and checkpoints at the entry and exit points in the capital. This was

the third wave of mass internal migration since the lockdown was announced almost two months ago. These people will all return to the capital after the holiday, creating the fourth wave of mass internal migration.



***Eid* week is likely to be the last week of the lockdown. So what should we do during this week?**

With all sorts of indication coming in that this may be the last week of the lockdown, the Government must take a few urgent steps during the coming week before it decides to open up the economy to slow down the spread.

1. Mask wearing should be made compulsory outside home and within the workplace and public transportation. Noses and mouths must be covered at all times.
2. Following the end of the lockdown, a tactical zoning approach must be taken to lockdown, which must be defined based on epidemiologically-informed processes and by analysing the formal and community data that is now coming to government servers on the spread.
3. Since we will need to coexist with the virus for some time, there is absolutely no alternative to having a community driven approach to prevention, awareness, case identification, quarantine and isolation. Wider groups of private sector, NGOs, community groups, etc need to be officially brought in to the integrated solution to be designed and rolled out quickly.
4. New normal rules for public transportation, factories, offices and shops must be put in place to operate at reduced capacity so as to ensure social distancing.
5. Clear, consistent communication from PMO should start coming out going forward on a regular basis which will continuously update on the social, economic and health dimension of this epidemic.

This *Eid* is particularly challenging for those working on the frontline.

I want to extend my sincerest gratitude to BRAC's responders, who have to spend *Eid* away from their families, and who have been working for over two months now in unprecedented situations staying away from their family. They are unable to go home during the Eid as well. We have tried to reduce their pain a little bit by allocating additional 3 days of leave that they can take any time during the year and by giving them an additional 3 GB data package in their phone to video call their friends and families.

BRAC's values dictate that we will always be available to stand beside those who need us the most, and so, while most organisations closed their services, BRAC stayed on the ground to provide life-saving awareness and keep essential services open - which has likely saved many thousands of lives.

A huge thank you to those who continue to provide essential services overall in the community, from healthcare workers and police officers to journalists and staff in delivery services. We are eternally grateful to you.

We are facing difficult times, and this will be a difficult *Eid*. I extend a particular thank you to all of the individuals and organisations supporting BRAC to enable us to continue our work. The way forward looks uncertain, but we will get through this, as Bangladesh has done so many times before.

Please see [the attached report](#) for more details.

Asif Saleh
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BRAC