

## Nobility of bKash during the pandemic

While the onslaught of COVID-19 has hindered the growth of the global economy, it has surprisingly yielded several indirect benefits. Opening up a world of opportunities for digital transactions is one such advantage out of the current adversity. Despite bringing catastrophe for people, the situation has impacted accelerating financial inclusion in the digital space. Like many other countries, the people of Bangladesh have spontaneously adopted digital financial services like bKash to manage their transactional needs easily.



Image: bKash hands over medical equipment to Hon'ble Prime Minister

The pandemic has altered our usual lifestyle. The outrageous threat posed by Covid-19 placed massive pressure on the country's health care facilities. To help combat the crisis, bKash stepped forward.

At the beginning of the pandemic, when the grim situation was getting severe, bKash provided food aid sufficient for ten days to 5,000 families, distributed under the supervision of Sena Kalyan Sangstha (SKS). Later another 5,000 families received ten days food package provided by bKash. Besides, bKash handed over nearly 1,000,000 medical equipment, including 350 ventilators from Alibaba Foundation and Jack Ma Foundation, to PM's Relief Fund to facilitate COVID-19 treatment. It also helped in the construction of Bidyanondo Foundation's hospital, primarily set up for COVID-19 patients.

When the challenging situation continued, bKash, from its fund, provided 30 ventilators to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, Dhaka Shishu Hospital, Dhaka CMH, and Central Police Hospital to increase ICU capacity to attain a more significant number of critical patients. bKash also installed an oxygen plant at the Diabetic Hospital (BIHS General Hospital) as a part of its continued assistance to the medical sector.

During the lockdown of first and second wave, bKash had borne more than 900 million taka from its coffers by not taking any charge for the first 1,000 taka cash out and making Send Money charge-free up to 500 taka for the convenience of the customers. In addition, a large portion of the cash-out charge in government incentive disbursement has been borne by bKash. Significant cash out charge has also been borne by bKash in the payment of salaries and allowances to RMG workers.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, bKash has delivered stipends to secondary level students within the timeline defined by the Ministry of Education, and students have been able to cash out easily from any of 240,000 nearby agent points without any cost. It has brought added relief to the students and their parents.

The "Corona Info" icon was added in the bKash app during the first wave to make people aware. bKash app kept on updating with the changing needs of the time. 'Surokkha,' a government portal for Covid-19 vaccine registration, is also accessible through the bKash app for enrolling in the vaccination program.

When social distancing is mandatory, customers need to bring money to their mobile wallets from home. To facilitate that, bKash has enriched its Add Money network to bring money from bank accounts and thus integrated 30 banks till now. Before the pandemic, there were 12 banks and, within just one year, 18 more banks were brought into this network.