

Dear colleagues, partners and friends,

We are entering a crucial phase next week in Bangladesh - the lockdown's gradual exit phase.

While the holiday has been extended till the 16th of May, shops and markets are reopening in time for a limited period every day for *Eid-ul-Fitr*, the major religious holiday that concludes the month of Ramadan. The government has lifted restrictions on gathering at mosques with new SOPs for mosque. A notice issued on 7 May by the Ministry of Religious Affairs stated that mosque authorities must ensure that certain health guidelines are met, such as wearing masks, maintaining social distancing, and having fewer staff.

The tally of infections surged to 13,134 in the 24 hours to 8 am today after another 709 people tested positive from 5,941 samples with a total death toll being 206..

Testing facilities are [under massive pressure](#). 1,000 people lined up to get tested at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University on 5th of May. To help ease the process, BRAC in partnership with DGHS, will scale up its sample collection kiosk model with 100 kiosks in the short term and eventually to about 600 kiosks around the key hotspots in the country. The scarcity of labs outside Dhaka is causing long delays in results coming back. With the increase of sample collection facilities, the capacity of the labs outside Dhaka needs to increase significantly to see the full benefit of the scaling up of sample collection.

The government is preparing to combat the economic fallout caused by the lockdown through 18 stimulus packages worth BDT 956.19 billion - equivalent to 3.3% of Bangladesh's GDP. From this, BDT 777.5 billion will be lent to small to medium businesses through banks, under the supervision of the finance ministry and the central bank. However, concerns remain whether the benefit of this will go to the small farmers and businesses. A much bigger role of intermediaries such as various microfinance institutes can be considered here for ensuring scale, reach and inclusion. This will not only help the small businesses and small scale farmers but at the same time support the MFIs which are facing a massive economic challenge as well. [The Economist covered this issue of MFIs "existential threat" this week](#) where BRAC's Microfinance Senior Director Shameran Abed was interviewed. BRAC's microfinance borrowers have hugely benefited from withdrawing their savings in such trying times during the last few weeks. BRAC disbursed electronically close to 115 crore taka worth of savings to its borrowers during the last few weeks.

A lively webinar on how Bangladesh should target its social safety net support was held on Thursday with representation from BRAC, A2i, Gates Foundation, Overseas Development Institute, Yale University and BRAC JPG School of Public Health. This can be [accessed here](#).

On a more positive note, The Economist [listed Bangladesh as the 9th strongest economy](#) on the financial strength of 66 emerging economies in the wake of the pandemic. The vulnerability of selected economies was looked at across four potential sources of peril - public debt as a percentage of GDP, foreign debt (both public and private), cost of borrowing and reserve cover. Not everyone [agrees](#), however.

More than 90% of the annual harvest of *boro* paddy (a special type of rice grown on residual water) has been completed in the *haor* (wetlands) areas, amidst the shortage of agricultural labourers because of the pandemic and the threat of forecasted flash floods. BRAC report reveals that the yield of rice may increase in the northeastern region this year despite the decreased cultivation of land. For more details, please see the report.

Violence and discrimination against women during the crisis has increased. 57% of respondents in a BRAC study reported that disappointment over no earnings and staying at home for a long period of time is causing increased incidences of violence. For more details, please see the report.

It is heartening to see that Bangladeshi and international universities and research institutions are continuing to supply the vital data and evidence which is crucial for decision making. I am especially proud of the contribution made by various programmes of BRAC, BRAC University's [Institute of Governance and Development](#), [James P Grant School of Public Health](#) and Institute of Educational Development and their various partners. We will continue to share these findings to inform decisions.

While the road to a new normal for Bangladesh remains uncertain, I am confident we will find our way, as we have done before.

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

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BRAC