

Dear colleagues, partners and friends,

*Ramadan*, the holiest month for Muslims, has started on a sombre note this year. While many in Bangladesh will observe the ritual of fasting, millions living in poverty will struggle to find food to break their fast, and many will be making *iftar* (the daily meal to break the fast) out of items from relief packages.

1. Bangladesh is in the 32nd day of the economic shutdown. The 'general holiday' has been extended until 5 May 2020. The Prime Minister has announced that all educational institutions may remain closed until September. Government is taking steps to re-open certain economic sectors.

The economic shutdown cannot be extended for an indefinite period for any country. However, to lift it, we need to know where we are in the infection curve and we need a lockdown exit strategy towards opening low risk establishments. For that, we need to increase testing, targeted in potential hotspots as our testing resources are limited. DGHS is continuously working on expanding its testing facilities. BRAC is working with them to plan a rapid scale up of the community support team to help with the kiosk based sample collection and also verify cases and do contact tracing. We have also started a separate process for collecting surveillance data from the pharmacies in a small capacity and are finalizing the design for the scale up.

2. We need to ensure that we are putting in place a new way of doing things, that includes managing social distancing and mitigating risks. This needs to be coupled with strong community engagement to ensure people know about the disease and understand how to prevent it. Every family in Bangladesh needs to have at least one person who understands how to prevent this and knows what to do if one is infected. I have more on this in my interview with the Business Standard [here](#).

A big move towards that happened this week by opening some of the RMG factories. The ready-made garments sector accounts for 83% of the total export earnings of the country. Government has prioritized their opening agreeing to BGMEA's phased planning and risk mitigation strategy. While the phased openings have been proposed and planned, I have serious concerns about their ability to self govern and implement the plan across the board. This was already evident this week. Although the proposed staggered plan was to open Gazipur factories from the 2nd of May, a significant number of factories were opened there on April 26th. This saw huge queues of people on the roads not maintaining any distance whatsoever. A stricter government oversight and support is needed, particularly, in the hotspot areas of Gazipur and Narayanganj.

3. Bangladesh's COVID-19 recovery rate (2.2%) is much lower than the recovery rates in neighbouring India (22.2%) and Pakistan (23.1%). It is important to note, though, that fatality rates can appear higher in countries which only tested symptomatic patients. Fatality rates appear lower in countries with widespread testing.

The trend of COVID-19 patients being young and male is continuing. Males have made up 68% of cases, and 35% of all cases have been people under 30 years of age.

People are continuing to hide symptoms due to stigma, and refrain from reporting when going to hospitals.

4. 30 doctors have been tested positive in the last week. A total of 320 doctors have tested positive so far, as well as 400 healthcare professionals. 15 hospitals are under lockdown.
5. Boro harvesting is ongoing and the farmers are racing against the clock to cut the crops to avoid the flash floods. More than half of the crops are already harvested. DCs are ensuring additional people are mobilized to support the farmers. Volunteers are joining as well to support them in Sylhet.
6. BRAC and Grameenphone launched the *Dakchhe Amar Desh* (my country is calling me) campaign on April 24, calling upon individuals and businesses to join hands to support those in most need. Grameenphone will provide BDT 1,500 to each family as a cash incentive to purchase essentials. BRAC has now run two phases of the campaign in which almost 198,182 families were provided with Tk1,500 each.

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

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