

BANGLADESH UPDATE



4,846
New cases in 24hrs



8,61,150
Total cases



13,702
Deaths



7,88,385
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE



3,891,365
Deaths



179,698,451
Total cases

Two in 3 slum dwellers have had Covid-19

Finds icddr,b survey in Dhaka, Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

More than two-thirds of the people in the slum areas of Dhaka and Chattogram have most definitely been exposed to Covid-19, found a study by the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (icddr,b).

About 72 percent of the samples collected from those in slum areas by the study had antibodies, which indicate exposure to a SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) infection.

Antibodies are proteins made by the immune system to fight infections like viruses and may help to ward off future occurrences by those same infections. It can take days or weeks to develop in the body and it is unknown how long they stay in the blood.

The study titled "Driving factors of COVID-19 in Slums and Non-slum Areas of Dhaka and Chattogram" was conducted between October last year and February this year to evaluate the extent of the spread of SARS-CoV-2 infection in the slum and non-slum communities of the two cities.

A cross-sectional study was carried out among 3,220 people residing in the slums and the adjacent non-slum areas in the two cities. Household-level interviews, blood pressure and anthropometric measurements, and blood samples were collected and a seroprevalence survey carried out.

A seroprevalence survey uses antibody tests to estimate the percentage of people in a population who have antibodies against SARS-CoV-2.

The estimated SARS-CoV-2 antibody seroprevalence was higher in slums than in the adjacent low-to-middle-income non-slum areas, said the study, which was unveiled at a webinar yesterday. Rubhana Raqib, the principal investigator of the study, presented the study findings.

The overall seropositivity, which means having the presence of antibodies in blood serum, was higher in Dhaka than in Chittagong: 71 percent as opposed to 55 percent in the port city.

It also found that the presence of antibody is almost similar across the adults and the young.

The seroprevalence was higher in females (70.6 percent) than in males

(66 percent), it said.

Among the people whose antibody was found, only 35.5 percent were estimated to have some/mild symptoms, the report finds.

"Since the young and working-class people live in the slum areas, probably that explains why they got some sort of protection from the severity of the covid-19 infection," said Mahmudur Rahman, chair of the executive advisory committee of the study.

The study samples are purposive, so they would not represent the whole scenario of the country.

"This study will help to predict the future situation and such studies should be done more frequently to track the trend of the Covid-19 situation."

Stressing on mask wear, Rahman, a former director of IEDCR, said the face-covering protects against all variants.

A higher prevalence of antibody was found in individuals with fewer years of education, diabetes, overweight and hypertension.

Lower antibody was found in individuals who frequently washed hands, did not put fingers on the face/in the nose, have been vaccinated with BCG and carried out moderate physical activities.

The level of zinc was higher in the seropositive individuals than the seronegative ones.

This may be related to mild disease or asymptomatic infection in the study population, finds the study.

Inadequate vitamin D status did not show any impact on seropositivity. Rather, there was a high rate of vitamin D insufficiency in the population.

"We need to keep continuing the vaccination and research to understand the situation -- the situation is changing and so the research must be ongoing to understand the trend," said Firdausi Qadri, senior scientist at icddr,b.

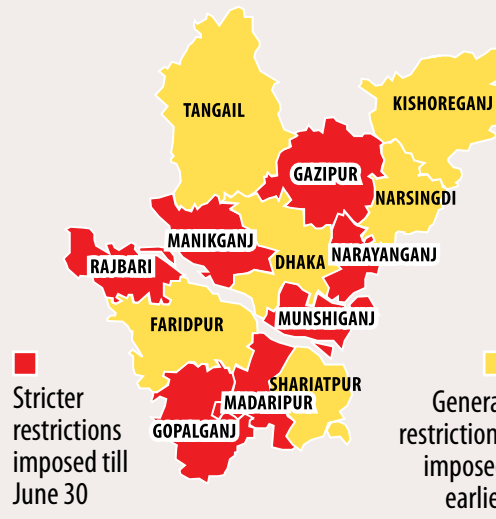
The study does not reflect the severity of the disease, said Tahmeed Ahmed, executive director of icddr,b.

Physical activity should be increased and preventive measures like wearing masks, maintaining social distancing should be strictly followed.

If people have any of the three symptoms -- fever, coughing and sore throat -- they should be tested.



DHAKA DIVISION



Launches are docked at the capital's Sadarghat Launch Terminal yesterday as movement of passenger vessels to and from Dhaka remain suspended to contain the spread of Covid-19. Bottom, inter-district buses parked in Mohakhali Bus Terminal.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN, PRABIR DAS



Curbs toughen to delink Dhaka

FROM PAGE 1

In reply to a query, he said some passengers, unaware of the restrictions, went to Sadarghat Launch Terminal to go to different destinations yesterday. They returned home after learning about the curbs.

Flight operations on different routes from the capital will continue as usual.

"It is up to the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh to decide on the matter. We have not yet got any instructions from it," Biman Deputy General Manager (public relations) Tahera Khandakar told this newspaper.

Meanwhile, the nine-day restrictions on public and vehicular movement came into effect in seven districts surrounding Dhaka from 6:00am yesterday.

The law enforcement agencies strictly enforced the restrictions, preventing vehicles from entering the capital.

There were traffic congestions from Hemayetpur to Gabtoli and from Abdullapur to Tongi intersection as police intercepted vehicles at the entry points to the capital and compelled those to make U-turn, report our correspondents.

Many were seen walking to their destinations in the rain.

Contacted, Suvenkar Ghosh,

joint secretary of Bangladesh Bus Truck Owners' Association, said the operation of long-haul buses was suspended as per the government instructions.

"As the directives came quite late on Monday night, many drivers and commuters were not aware of those. And a number of Dhaka-bound vehicles had been barred by law enforcers at several points from entering Dhaka," Suvenkar said.

No vehicles without emergency reasons were allowed to enter Dhaka through the seven districts yesterday, causing sufferings to many commuters, including office-goers who come to the capital from the surrounding districts.

Earlier on Monday, the government imposed restrictions on public and vehicular movement across Manikganj, Narayanganj, Munshiganj, Gazipur, Madaripur, Rajbari and Gopalganj till June 30, taking into account the deteriorating Covid situation in those districts.

These districts are supposed to be completely cut off from the rest of the country and nobody is allowed to enter or exit those except for emergency reasons, according to the directives from the Cabinet Division.

However, many commuters were seen avoiding the check posts on

highways. They took rickshaws or auto-rickshaws and also rented motorbikes to reach their destinations through alternative routes.

A number of them said they had to spend extra money to go to their workplaces as public transport was suspended, reports our correspondents from these districts.

Some of them said they had to change vehicles multiple times and even walk to their workplaces.

Markets and shops, except for medical stores, were mostly shut in these districts.

Many people, however, were seen flouting the health safety rules.

No vehicles other than ambulances and those used for emergency services were allowed to use ferries on three routes in Munshiganj and Manikganj.

Some commuters, however, forcibly boarded ferries at Shimulia terminal in Munshiganj to reach the capital.

"There are check points on highways. I came to my village to cast vote in the union parishad election. Now I am returning to the capital as I have to join work. I thought that the enforcement of the restrictions would be lax as in the past. But it's different this time," Md Alamin Hossain, employee of a private firm, told this newspaper at Shimulia ferry terminal yesterday.

32yrs on the run to avoid 7-yr sentence

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Police arrested a 60-year-old man who absconded for 32 years to avoid seven-year imprisonment awarded for abducting a minor boy in Joypurhat's Kalai upazila.

The arrestee is Abdul Motin, of Itail village of the upazila.

Selim Malik, officer-in-charge of Kalai Police Station, said acting on a tip-off, a police team held him from Jalshuka village of Bogura's Shajahanpur on Monday afternoon, with the help of Bogura police.

Motin was sent to jail through court yesterday afternoon.

OC Selim said Motin now has to be in jail for seven years from the date of his arrest.

According to the police, a seven-year-old boy of Itail village was abducted on June 25, 1989. Later, the father of the boy filed a case with the police station against two people -- Motin and Md Sakamuddin -- of the same village.

Police later arrested Sakamuddin.

But Motin went into hiding to avoid arrest. In December that year, the court sentenced both of them to seven years' imprisonment.

Sakimuddin was freed after completion of his jail term, but Motin had remained traceless since then.

Finally, police could arrest Motin on Monday.

In reply to a query of local journalists, Motin said he was on the run to escape arrest when he heard that the court sentenced him to seven years in prison. He never thought that police would be able to arrest him after 32 years.

Hasina places six points

FROM PAGE 1

take immediate collective and concerted action to help mitigate the impacts of the pandemic through expanding trade, business and investment for our common prosperity," she said in a pre-recorded message played in the three-day Qatar Economic Forum Virtual.

The six suggestions the PM put forward in the Forum include taking ambitious climate action to meet the goal of the Paris Agreement, leveraging science, technology, and innovation for closing the digital divide; and having targeted international support to revitalise global trade and export earnings.

The suggestions also include contributing to the reintegration plan of migrant workers highlighted as vulnerable group by the host countries, business leaders and investors in the region, ensuring new international support measures for the graduating LDCs to prevent any possible sliding back due to the pandemic, and having an inclusive, sustainable and holistic recovery plan for shared prosperity.

To ensure sustainable and equitable order after the pandemic, there is a need for a whole-of-the-world approach now.

Hasina said the Covid-19 pandemic has exposed the world to multiple setbacks and fragilities as it has already claimed millions of lives and battered the economies.

"We need a strong global cooperation to overcome this difficult time," she told the Forum themed "Reimagining the World".

She said the Qatar Economic Forum has provided the platform to identify opportunities, and share ideas and solutions to achieve that goal, and prepare for countering the future crises

efficiently.

Saying that the Covid-19 is a litmus test for global solidarity, Hasina said the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement, and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda can be the blueprint to overcome this crisis.

The PM said she firmly believed that the Covid-19 vaccines should be declared as global public goods. "And the developing countries and LDCs that have the capacity should be given the necessary support to produce the vaccines."

She also said over the past few years, the world has been observing the rise of populism, anti-globalisation sentiments and economic protectionism around the world. "We've to stand together to strengthen multilateralism. As a precondition for expanding economic activities, we need to ensure peace and stability everywhere in the world."

Talking about her own country, Hasina said Bangladesh has achieved sustained growth of more than 6 percent over the past decade.

The country received the final recommendation to graduate from the LDCs. While fighting the current pandemic, it has been trying to make a balance between lives and livelihoods, she added.

"Our government has so far announced various stimulus packages amounting to 15.1 billion US dollars. Despite the pandemic, our GDP growth reached 6.1 percent in 2020-2021, one of the highest in the world," the PM said.

Hasina said the Digital Bangladesh vision launched by the government 10 years back has helped the country adapt quickly with the new business and work environment triggered by Covid-19.

Highest daily infections

FROM PAGE 1

The high rate of positivity is an indication that many others in the community have the virus but are undetected, according to experts across the world.

In May last year, the World Health Organization recommended that governments should not lift restrictions unless the positivity rate stays below 5 percent for at least two straight weeks.

The number of reported deaths daily is also high. At least 76 people lost their lives to the virus taking the death toll to 13,702.

A total of 5,185 cases were recorded on April 14 and since then the number has not been this high.

With the latest number of infection, the total number of caseload in the

country is 861,150, said the bulletin.

The numbers of cases and deaths are high despite the countrywide movement restrictions.

In the first week of May, when the positivity rate was about 7 percent, the numbers began to fall amid travel restrictions across the country.

In the last 24 hours, the highest number of deaths, 27, were recorded in Khulna division. A total of 14 people died in Dhaka and Rajshahi division each, six in Rangpur, two in Barishal and three in Sylhet division in the same period.

No death was reported in Mymensingh division.

Since the first three cases were reported in the country on March 8 last year, the highest 7,626 cases were reported on April 7.

Boat club in public interest?

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The Daily Star also found that the club compound was developed by filling up the flood-flow zone along the Dhaka flood protection embankment.

Under "special consideration", the committee for the Detailed Area Planning (DAP) of Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) in 2018 recommended showing the land out of the flood-flow zone.

The committee also issued a gazette notification in this regard, according to an official from the planning control section of Rajuk, a statutory body under the Ministry of Housing and Public Works.

The final approval came in 2019, said Bhuiyan, adding, "They have given permissions in phases. It's the system."

The building was constructed last year and inaugurated in February this year.

The club management also made an arrangement with Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authorities (BIWTA), as it was built right on the foreshore of the river, said an official on condition of anonymity.

According to lawyers and environmentalists, building any structure on the river foreshore is a clear violation of law.

The Water Act-2013 defines foreshore of a river as "any part of land thereof which is 50 metres extended from the highest level of water to river bank".

The High Court in 2009 directed the government to demarcate the original territory of the four Dhaka rivers -- Buriganga, Turag, Balu and Shitalakha -- and restore those rivers to their original state following the CS (Cadastral Survey) map.

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, chief executive of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association, said building any structure, like the boat club, so close to the river and filling up adjoining lowland are violations of the Open Space

Act-2000, Water Act-2013, Town Improvement Act-1973, and Dhaka Master Plan-1995.

Section 6 of the Playground, Open space, Park and Natural Water Reservoir Conservation Act-2000 says the government may permit any construction on a flood-flow zone if it does not hamper the Dhaka Master Plan.

Dr Adil Mohammed Khan, general secretary of the Bangladesh Institute of Planners, said, "The area where the boat club was built was kept reserved as the flood-flow zone in the Dhaka Master Plan."

About the process of giving permissions for the boat club, he said, "Usually, professional planners are not included in those committees. So, they mostly take politically motivated decisions."

Besides, questions can be raised about the 30-bigha land of BWDB as the Bangladesh Water Development Board Act-2000 allows it to lease out its land only when it is in the public interest.

Asked about the lease, Dr AKM Waheduddin Chowdhury, director general of BWDB, at first said, "I need to check papers before making any comment about it."

Later, he suggested contacting an additional chief engineer to talk about this. But the engineer did not respond to multiple calls.

Commodore Golem Sadeque, chairman of BIWTA, could not talk over the phone saying he was busy, and requested The Daily Star's correspondent to send him a message. A message regarding the boat club was then sent accordingly but he did not reply to it.

Contacted, former housing and public works minister Khandaker Mosharrif Hossain at first said he couldn't remember whether his ministry had given approval for the Dhaka Boat Club.

"I don't think that the boat club

got approval during my tenure," said Mosharrif, currently a lawmaker from Faridpur-3, who was in charge of that ministry from January 2014 to January 2019.

"Maybe the club was given approval before or after my tenure."

He again said the club perhaps took approval from the local authorities instead of the ministry.

SM Rezaul Karim, who was the minister for public works and housing from January 2019 to February 2020, said he was not even an MP, let alone a minister, when the boat club got approval from the DAP review committee.

He, however, said he is a member of the club.

IN WHOSE INTEREST ACTUALLY?

Contacted, Shafi Ul Haque, a member of the Rajuk's planning control, said the special committee for DAP had changed the land use plan -- from a flood-flow zone to an institutional plot.

Asked on what grounds the boat club was allowed to be built on land in a flood-flow zone, Ashrafur Islam, DAP project director of Rajuk, said the cabinet committee on DAP gave this permission. "It was four years ago; probably it was to develop a recreational facility."

Syeda Rizwana Hasan said the government can permit somebody to construct a structure on such land on the grounds of public interest. But constructing a social club is not in the public interest as it serves only the members, she added.

Dr Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of Transparency International of Bangladesh (TIB), said the boat club is not related with any public interest in any way.

"It is just a recreational facility for a few people. The government should have protected the flood-flow zone," he said.

Sharif Jamil, general secretary of the Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon,

said it is unfortunate that the people who set up the boat club filling up the foreshore and floodplain of the Turag were actually the people who were supposed to protect the rivers.

That is also the reason why BIWTA people do not hesitate to defend their illegal demarcation of pillars, he said.

According to Nizamul Hoque Bhuiyan, at least one minister from the current cabinet and another former minister are members of the club.

The chief of police, Benazir Ahmed, is the president of the club, which has around 1,800 members -- many of whom are government high officials, businessmen, university teachers, and judges.

Its 11-member executive committee comprises a president, an advisor, and nine executive members with different responsibilities.

A message from the club president on the website says DBC is primarily a boating club as its name suggests.

However, in addition to aquatic sports it will provide other sports facilities such as angling, tennis, squash, billiards and more. The club also seeks to serve "as an oasis to an exclusive group of families to come and spend their free time and meet likeminded people," the message states.

"Located on the pristine and lush shores of the river Turag, it is that kind of club -- where the flavours of fine life are to be savoured by enjoying the essence of the serene splendour of nature while inside Dhaka city," it also reads.

On June 14, police arrested five people, including Nasir U Mahmud, a member of the boat club, and businessman Tuhin Siddique Omi, after Pori Moni filed a case with Savar Police Station.

In a press conference, the film actor alleged that Nasir and Omi attempted to rape her at the boat club around midnight on June 9.