

BANGLADESH ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE (BEI)

A Brief Highlights on Contemporary Issues of South Asia ||
Updated from May 07, 2021 –May 13, 2021 ||

SOUTH ASIA: COVID-19 CRISIS AT A GLANCE

BANGLADESH reported a total death toll reached 12,000 with 33 new fatalities and the country logged a total of 7,76,257 with 1230 new cases, as of May 11. The mortality rate stands now 1.55 percent, the latest data shows.

BHUTAN recorded one death and total cases of 1241. The country did not face any surge of Covid cases to date.

INDIA's total death toll reached 2,49,992 and the total number of infections became 2,29,92,517. Supreme Court of India on 6th May warned about an impending third wave of Covid-19 and stressed vaccination and creating a stock of oxygen.

MALDIVES' Ministry of health declared the mortality rate is 0.24%. The government halted tourists from South Asian nations of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka from May 13th.

MYANMAR's reported a total of Covid cases 1,42,997 and deaths 3211 to date. Ethnic armed organization KIO has been administering Chinese Sinovac Biotech vaccines with the help of the Chinese Red Cross Society.

The country's health care system collapsed amidst the civil war following the military coup.

NEPAL is experiencing surge in Covid cases. It recorded 57 times as many cases as a month ago, with 44% of tests coming back positive, while only 1% of the country's population was fully vaccinated.

PAKISTAN reported a total of 867,438 cases with 19,210 dead, 771,692 recovered to date. The Sindh government in Karachi opened a massive facility of vaccination, said to be the largest in the country, where an estimated 25,000 people could be inoculated in a day with round-the-clock service.

SRILANKA has, to date, reported a total of nearly 148,000 cases with 868 deaths. The government imposed strict travel bans to prevent the rapidly spreading COVID-19 cases. Provinces are sealed off and travel restrictions have been extended till 30 May 2021.

AFGHANISTAN: KABUL GIRL'S SCHOOL BLOODBATH; INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE ASKED TO ASSESS TERRORIST

On 8 May, over 50 people, mostly schoolgirls, died due to a massive car bombing coupled with two back-to-back IED blasts near a girl's school in the western part of Kabul city. Most of the young pupils were below 16 years old. This bloody incident made injured 100 others – again most of them were school students, many of whom are now in critical health conditions. The Taliban, the international community, and the Former President, Hamid Karzai strongly condemned this brazen attack.

The families of the martyr students in a statement called on the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to conduct an independent inquiry and find out the culprits responsible for this attack. The statement also called on the Afghan leaders to undertake an impartial investigation of the attack and share it with the people. Before this, several educational centers, gyms, hospitals, and even mosques came under similar attacks in the west of Kabul that took the lives of innocent civilians.

Sources:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/08/world/asia/bombing-school-afghanistan.html>

<http://www.afghanistantimes.af/international-court-of-justice-asked-to-assess-terrorist-attack-on-kabul-school/>

<http://www.afghanistantimes.af/international-court-of-justice-asked-to-assess-terrorist-attack-on-kabul-school/>

AFGHANISTAN: TALIBAN ANNOUNCED THREE-DAY CEASEFIRE FOR EID-UL-FITR

The Taliban, the insurgent group in Afghanistan, has declared a three-day ceasefire on the occasion of the Eid-ul-Fitr this week marking the end of the Holy month of Ramadan. Though the people of Afghanistan have widely welcomed this decision and appeared to be happy feeling a release from violence at least for three days, it would not last longer or bring any positive change.

The Taliban has already instructed to halt all offensive operations against the enemy countrywide from the first until the third day of Eid. However, they reiterate, if the enemy conducts any assault or attack during these days, they will robustly protect and defend the territory. Similarly, the Afghan government ordered its troops to match the truce. The United States has welcomed the announcement by the Taliban.

Sources:

<http://www.afghanistantimes.af/editorial-taliban-plan-3-day-ceasefire-perfect-if-undying/>

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/10/us-welcomes-taliban-ceasefire-eid-afghanistan>

<https://www.dw.com/en/afghanistan-taliban-declare-three-day-cease-fire-for-eid/a-57479724>



|| WEEKLY NEWS HIGHLIGHTS ||

BANGLADESH: "JOINING THE QUAD WILL DAMAGE TIES WITH BEIJING"-CHINESE AMBASSADOR; TRIPARTITE DISCUSSIONS ON ROHINGYA GOT BACKSLASHED

H. E. Mr. Li Jiming, Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh, warned Bangladesh that the bilateral relations would face serious difficulties if Bangladesh decides to join the US-led India-Australia-Japan grouping (commonly known as Quad) during a virtual meeting with the members of Diplomatic Correspondents Association Bangladesh (DCAB). China regards Quad as an anti-Beijing military pact.

Reacting to the Chinese Ambassador's remark, Bangladesh Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen said Dhaka had been maintaining a nonaligned and balanced foreign policy and would decide on any issues following those principles.

Regarding the Rohingya issue, Mr. Li Jiming states that the political situation in Myanmar is not suitable therefore, Bangladesh has to wait to resume the tripartite talks on Rohingya issue.

Sources:

<https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/bangladeshs-curt-reply-as-china-warns-it-against-joining-us-india-japan-australia-quad-alliance-2439486>

<https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/foreign-affairs/2021/05/10/beijing-wants-dhaka-not-to-join-quad>

<https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/news/beijing-wants-dhaka-not-join-quad-2091529>

BANGLADESH: BANGLADESH EXTENDS INDIA BORDER CLOSER; HALF A MILLION SINOPHARM VACCINE REACHED DHAKA

As the Covid-19 situation keeps worsening in India, the government of Bangladesh has decided to extend the closure of borders for another 14 days which started effectively on 26 April this year.

Meanwhile, the Chinese government handed over half a million Sinopharm Covid-19 vaccines on 12th May 2021 as a special gift to Bangladesh. H.E. Mr. AK Abdul Momen, Foreign Minister of Bangladesh, thanked the Chinese government and demanded a larger amount of vaccine from China. Acknowledging the production capacity of the Chinese, Dr. Momen also shared Bangladesh's interest to go for co-production in Bangladesh.

On 9th May, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs of Jatiyo Sangsad recommended the ministry to continue its effort to obtain the AstraZeneca vaccine from the US and India. As the coronavirus cases getting lower, experts warned of the high infection aftermath of Eid-ul-Fitr since millions of holidaymakers left Dhaka ignoring the government's restrictions on traveling to other districts.

Sources:

<https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2021/05/12/china-hands-over-half-a-million-doses-of-sinopharm-vaccine-to-bangladesh>

<https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2021/05/10/bangladesh-to-get-500k-doses-of-sinopharm-covid-19-vaccine-on-may-12>

<https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2021/05/09/parliamentary-panel-recommends-continued-effort-to-get-vaccine-from-usa-india>

BANGLADESH: || TRADE AND INVESTMENT HIGHLIGHTS || JASHIM UDDIN ELECTED NEW PRESIDENT OF FBCCI

Mr. Jashim Uddin has been elected the President of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FBCCI) for 2021-2023. He is the vice president of the Bengal Group, a leading group of industries in the country. All the vice presidents and directors of FBCCI, of the earlier session, have also been elected unopposed. Professor Ashraf Ali, Chairman of the Election Board, announced the results on 9th May 2021. The new committee will take charge on 19th May 2021. Mr. Jashim Uddin said that his board would sit with the government to negotiate the successful implementation of the stimulus packages, pledged by the government to support the ailing government during this pandemic, for the greater interest of the business community.

Source:

<https://today.thefinancialexpress.com.bd/public-first-page/jashim-uddin-elected-fbcci-president-1620582632>

ADB TO PROVIDE \$500M TO SUPPORT SOCIAL RESILIENCE, ECONOMIC RECOVERY

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) approves US\$500 million in loans to strengthen the social resilience and economic recovery of Bangladesh amid Covid -19 pandemic. Of the \$500m loans, ADB will provide \$250 million for strengthening the social resilience program, and another \$250 million is expected to be provided after successful implementation of the first phase. Dr. Pear Mohammad, Additional Secretary, Economic Relations Division (ERD) is expected to sign a credit deal with ADB by June 30 this year and the loan will be disbursed at the beginning of next FY2022. The Finance Division, social welfare ministry, health and family welfare ministry, disaster management, and relief ministry will work with the program.

Source:

<https://today.thefinancialexpress.com.bd/public-last-page/adb-to-provide-500m-to-support-social-resilience-economic-recovery-1620493618>



|| WEEKLY NEWS HIGHLIGHTS ||

INDIA: INDIA'S FOREIGN MINISTER JOINED G7 MEETING VIRTUALLY

H.E. Dr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, External Affairs Minister of India, joined the G7 foreign and development ministers meeting in London virtually on 5 May and focused on new ways to ensure foreign access to vaccine stockpiles and increase support for the global vaccine distribution program. Ministers of G-7 countries also talked about media freedom, arbitrary detention, and the importance of girl's education in the meeting.

Sources:

https://m.timesofindia.com/business/india-business/jaishankar-joins-g7-meeting-virtually/amp_articleshow/82406534.cms#aoh=16206307795960&referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com&_tf=From%20%251%24s

INDIA AND EU TO RESUME TRADE PACT TALKS AFTER EIGHT YEARS

India and European Union have agreed to resume talks for a comprehensive agreement on trade after eight years. Both sides also agreed on 8 May to begin negotiations for a standalone investment protection pact.

The developments have happened during a virtual summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the heads of state of government of all the 27 member states of the block with a focus on expanding overall cooperation in areas of trade, investment, and connectivity. The leaders also exchanged their views on the prevention of the Covid-19 pandemic and healthcare cooperation.

Source:

https://m.timesofindia.com/business/india-business/india-eu-to-resume-free-trade-pact-talks-after-8-years/amp_articleshow/82482430.cms

MYANMAR: MYANMAR JUNTA DESIGNATES SHADOW GOVERNMENT AS 'TERRORIST' GROUP

Marking the 100 days of the coup, the UN called the military junta to respect mass desire and act for the greater interest of the citizens to establish peace and stability in the country. The UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres encouraged the ASEAN to implement the agreed consensus of the recent summit. However, the Junta does not welcome the visit of the ASEAN envoy and adds they will co-operate with the representative after they secure a certain level of stability in the country.

Meanwhile, the National Union Government (NUG) announced to form "people's defense force" to save the anti-coup protestors from afflictions of police and military of the country and added that the new force would be a precursor to a Federal Union Army which will help to end the violence in the country. In response, the Myanmar Junta termed NUG as a terrorist group charging the allegations of bombing, violence, threats, and killings, etc. Under the new anti-terrorism act, the Junta has accused the NUG of treason, prohibits their membership, and restricts any contact with them. The NUG on the other hand stated junta as the terrorist force.

Source:

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/myanmars-junta-brands-rival-government-terrorist-group-2021-05-08/>

MALDIVES: CURRENT SPEAKER OF MALDIVES ATTACKED

The former President and current Speaker of the People's Majlis of Maldives, Mohamed Nasheed was attacked on 6th May with an IED bomb planted near his home in Male. The Speaker sustained critical injuries and underwent multiple surgeries. Latest reports stated that Nasheed had been recovering well. Since Nasheed was vocal against the surging religious extremism in the Maldives, speculation arose that the attack may have been undertaken by religious extremists. However, some officials of the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) presume that the act might be politically motivated to oppose his anti-corruption initiatives. A team from Australian Federal Police (AFP) has been assisting the government with the investigation of the blast.

Sources:

<https://www.thedailystar.net/world/news/maldives-ex-leader-critical-state-2090161>

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/8/who-tried-to-kill-mohamed-nasheed>

<https://www.thedailystar.net/world/news/nasheed-feeling-good-after-surviving-bomb-blast-2090737>



|| WEEKLY NEWS HIGHLIGHTS ||

NEPAL: NEPAL IN FRESH POLITICAL TURMOIL; PM LOSES VOTE OF CONFIDENCE IN PARLIAMENT

Nepal faces a fresh political crisis on top of a deepening coronavirus crisis. Nepal Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli loses the vote of confidence in Parliament on 10th May 2021. In the context of this development, the Nepali Congress' plan to stake claim to a coalition government after Oli lost his confidence motion, seems to fail because a section of the Janata Samajbadi Party, led by Mr. Mahantha Thakur, has made its position clear—that it would not participate in any government formation process.

It was largely believed that the Congress, which has 61 votes, backed by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre), which has 49 votes, would take the lead in forming a new government after President Bidya Devi Bhandari on 10th May evening asked parties to initiate the process to replace the current government. However, the President has given until 9 pm, 13th May 2021 to stake claim to a coalition government.

Sources:

<https://kathmandupost.com/politics/2021/05/12/nepal-faces-fresh-political-crisis-on-top-of-a-deepening-coronavirus-crisis>

<https://www.reuters.com/world/india/nepal-pm-oli-loses-confidence-vote-parliament-speaker-2021-05-10/>

PAKISTAN: PRIME MINISTER VISITS TO SAUDI ARABIA TO RESET TIES

Prime Minister Imran Khan's arrival in Riyadh on 7th May 2021 at the invitation of Mohammed bin Salman, the crown prince of Saudi Arabia, holds much significance. While Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have historically been close allies, their strong ties have suffered several setbacks during recent times. The two countries remain important geostrategic partners and a stable relationship between Islamabad and Riyadh is expected to continue.

Pointing to the importance of Khan's visit, Pakistan's army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa arrived in Saudi Arabia earlier on 4th May ahead of the prime minister's arrival. While discussing the situation in Afghanistan, the Pakistan and Saudi leadership agreed to continue mutual consultations on the Afghan peace process. The two sides have to a consensus to strengthen coordination to safeguard mutual interests and to continue supporting each other at multilateral fora. They underlined the importance of the commitment by all states to the UN Charter, the principles and decisions of international legitimacy, as well as adherence to the principles of good neighborly relations, respect for the unity and sovereignty of states, non-interference in their internal affairs, and the endeavor to resolve disputes by peaceful means.

Source:

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/pakistan-pm-khan-saudi-arabia-discuss-relations-2021-05-07/>

SRILANKA: SRI LANKA BEGINS ADMINISTERING SINOPHARM VACCINES

Sri Lanka's Health Ministry began administering China's Sinopharm vaccines on 8th May. The country received a batch of Sinopharm vaccines in March, as a special grant by the Chinese government to the Sri Lankan Health Ministry. At the vaccination drive, the State Minister of Production, Supply, and Regulation of Pharmaceuticals Channa Jayasumana expressed gratitude to the Chinese government for sending the vaccines and added that it would help the government to achieve the goal to vaccinate 70% of its population by the end of this year.

Sources:

http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-04/01/c_139850390.htm

http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-05/08/c_139932993.htm

[N.B: In compiling this weekly news update, BEI has attempted to include the most relevant news accounts from the past week concerning South Asian Region. From time to time, news beyond South Asia has also been included if it finds relevance on any issues to the region. We recognize that some developments may have been overlooked, and that some sources may not be viewed by all as credible or balanced. Inclusion of a news story and its summary does not constitute any kind of endorsement or position taken by BEI, and the text and positions included in the above are solely extracted from various news articles published in the print media in various countries in South Asia and beyond. If you have any comments or feedback for us regarding this digest, please email at bei@bol-online.com. For more information about BEI and our work, please visit <https://www.bei-bd.org/>]

