

## || WEEKLY NEWS HIGHLIGHTS ||

# BANGLADESH ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE (BEI)

|| Brief Highlights on Current Issues of South Asia ||

|| September 17, 2021 – September 23, 2021 ||

### SOUTH ASIA: COVID-19 CRISIS: AT A GLANCE

**Afghanistan** has reported total 154,960 cases of coronavirus on September 23, 2021 since the beginning of the pandemic. Total 7198 deaths have been also reported till date.

**Bangladesh** recorded 24 deaths and 1144 new cases of coronavirus since September 24, 2021. Total caseload becomes 1,548,320 and the total death toll was 27,337 until September 24, 2021. Bangladesh has administered total 39,118,015 doses which have covered country's total 9.57% population till the date.

**Bhutan** reported no new cases and no deaths as of September 24, 2021. A total of 2,599 COV-19 cases has been registered until September 24, 2021. 64.7% of Bhutanese have been vaccinated as of September 24, 2021.

**India** reported 318 deaths and 31,382 new coronavirus cases due as of September 24, 2021. Total cases, until September 2, 2021, were 33,594,803 while the total number of deaths was 446,368. 15.81% of Indians have been vaccinated until September 24, 2021.

**Maldives** reported 84,290 confirmed cases and 231 deaths as of 26 September 2021. 62.84 percent of the total population is fully vaccinated. According to the latest statistics of the Health Protection Agency (HPA) the infection rate is decreasing and recovery rate is increasing.

**Myanmar's** official records confirmed 17465 deaths and 456,620 of active cases until 26 September 2021. The regime affirms to distribute covid vaccine to ethnic groups who applied for vaccine jabs and stated to prioritize the Arakan Army.

**Pakistan** reported 2,357 new cases of coronavirus on September 23, 2021, taking the tally of confirmed cases to 1,232,595. A total of 58 deaths due to the coronavirus was registered on the same day.

**Sri Lanka** confirmed 12,609 deaths and 512,531 active cases until 26 September 2021. The country has successfully vaccinated 52.80 percent of its population. However, authorities stated that youth of the country are reluctant to be vaccinated.

Source: <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>

Source: John Hopkins University

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## BUSINESS AND INVESTMENT: FOUR MORE PRODUCTS WILL RECEIVE CASH INCENTIVES AGAINST EXPORT, SAYS BANGLADESH BANK

The central bank has announced that from now on, locally produced tea, bicycle and its parts, MS Steel goods and cement sheet will receive cash incentives from the government in exchange for their exports. According to a Bangladesh Bank (BB) circular released by the foreign exchange policy department on September 20, 2021, these four products will receive monetary support at a rate of 4.0 percent over their export value. Currently, 38 local products are receiving cash incentives against export at various rates ranging from 1% to 20%. The circular also mentioned that cash incentives would also be provided for the export of products manufactured in categories A, B and C in export processing zones, economic zones and high-tech parks. In addition, export subsidies will be considered for float glass sheet, opal glass wire, cast iron and aluminum engineering products and light engineering products. Besides, high-tech products (compressors) and HCFC-free refrigerators, electronic products, electrical home, and kitchen appliance sectors will receive export subsidies.

Source: <https://www.newagebd.net/article/149662/42-products-sectors-to-get-govt-incentive-against-export>

## SAUDI ARABIA KEEN TO INVEST MORE IN BANGLADESH; KUWAIT PLANS TO BUILD AN OIL REFINERY IN BANGLADESH

Saudi Arabian Investment Minister Khalid Al-Falih on September 19, 2021 has said that there is a huge potential for more Saudi investment in Bangladesh as the country now enjoys an investment-friendly environment. The Saudi minister made the remark in Riyadh while meeting with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's Private Industry and Investment Adviser Mr. Salman F Rahman. According to a press release issued on September 20, 2021, the Saudi minister also stressed the importance of signing cooperation agreements or memoranda of understanding on specialized economic zone-based investments. Mr. Salman F Rahman apprised the Saudi minister for showing interest in investing further in Bangladesh. Mr. Al Falih informed the Adviser that the draft memorandum of understanding is in the final stages and he hoped that it would be signed soon.

In the meantime, Bangladesh and Kuwait has agreed to develop a comprehensive roadmap over the next five years to strengthen bilateral cooperation in various sectors, including investments and the construction of an oil refinery. Foreign Minister Dr. AK Abdul Momen said at a media conference that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Kuwaiti Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al Hamad Al Sabah discussed these issues on September 21, 2021 at the United Nations headquarters in New York.

<https://www.tbsnews.net/economy/saudi-arabia-keen-invest-more-bangladesh-305185>

<https://www.unb.com.bd/category/Bangladesh/bangladesh-kuwait-to-chart-out-roadmap-for-boosting-bilateral-cooperation-fm/79246>

## AFGHANISTAN: RUSSIA, CHINA AND PAKISTAN'S ENVOYS DISCUSSED INCLUSIVE GOVERNMENT WITH CARETAKER CABINET OF AFGHANISTAN; U.S. PRESIDENT DISCUSSED ON AFGHANISTAN WITH UK, AUSTRALIA'S PRIME MINISTERS IN WASHINGTON; IMF SUSPENDED FUNDS FOR AFGHANISTAN; "ECONOMIC SANCTIONS ON AFGHANISTAN MUST END": CHINESE FOREIGN MINISTER ON G20 FOREIGN MINISTERS MEETING

Pakistan's Ambassador to Afghanistan, on September 21, 2021 wrote on Twitter that Russia, China and Pakistan special envoys had met with Mullah Hassan Akhund, Prime Minister of the caretaker cabinet, and other senior leaders in Kabul and discussed peace, stability and an inclusive government. The envoys also met with Abdullah Abdullah, Chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation, and former president Hamid Karzai, and they also discussed peace and an inclusive government.

U.S. President Joe Biden held separate meetings with UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Australian Premier Scott Morrison, discussing the situation in Afghanistan. Mr. Biden and Morrison met in the sideline of the UN General Assembly session on September 21, 2021 and hosted Johnson in Washington. "The leaders also discussed our ongoing work on Afghanistan, as well as developments in the Indo-Pacific and the critical role of European allies and partners, including NATO and the EU, in the region," the White House said in a statement. During a speech at the 76th UN General Assembly, US President Joe Biden stressed for the first time in 20 years the US was not at war, alluding to the withdrawal of its troops from the now Taliban-controlled Afghanistan.

IMF's spokesman, Gerry Rice told the reporters that Afghanistan will not have access to \$650 billion special drawing rights allocated by the IMF to member countries. "Our engagement with Afghanistan has been suspended until there is clarity within the international community on the recognition of the government," he added. "We're guided by the international community in terms of the recognition of the government in Afghanistan, and we don't have that. So, the IMF program there, which you asked about, has been put on hold" according to his statement.

China's State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi said the various unilateral sanctions or restrictions on Afghanistan should be lifted as soon as possible. Economic sanctions on Afghanistan must end, the Chinese foreign ministry said in a statement, citing Mr. Wang at a virtual G20 foreign ministers meeting on Afghanistan on September 22, 2021. "Afghanistan's foreign exchange reserves are national assets that should belong to the country's people and be used by its own people, and not be used as a bargaining chip to exert political pressure on Afghanistan", he said.

Sources: <http://www.afghanistantimes.af/biden-discusses-afghanistan-with-uk-aus-pms/>

<http://www.afghanistantimes.af/imf-suspends-funds-for-afghanistan/>

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/23/pakistan-taliban-afghanistan-qureshi-interview>

<https://kathmandupost.com/world/2021/09/23/china-senior-diplomat-says-economic-sanctions-on-afghanistan-must-end>

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## AFGHANISTAN: TALIBAN ASKED TO SPEAK AT UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN NEW YORK; UAE PROVIDED 60 TONS HUMANITARIAN AID TO KABUL; UN RELEASED USD 45 MILLION

The Taliban have asked to address world leaders at the United Nations General Assembly happening in New York City. A UN committee will rule on the request but it is unlikely to happen during the current session of the body. The Taliban also nominated their Doha-based spokesperson, Suhail Shaheen, as Afghanistan's UN ambassador. The request to participate in the high-level debate is being considered by a credentials committee, whose nine members include the US, China and Russia, according to a UN spokesperson. But they are unlikely to meet before the end of the General Assembly session. Until then, under UN rules, Ghulam Isaczai will remain Afghanistan's Ambassador to the global body. He is expected to make a speech on the final day. However the Taliban said the Ambassador's mission "no longer represents Afghanistan".

A charity based in the United Arab Emirate donated 60-tonne essential living materials to Afghanistan. The Dubai Charity Comity has launched several humanitarian projects in Afghanistan in a bid to help vulnerable or war-affected Afghans. The Comity constructed a 200 house village for the disabled, four

mosques, two schools, a shopping center, a clinic and a professional training center. This comes as the international community announced to provide one billion dollar aid to the people of Afghanistan at a high-level meeting held in Geneva to address the ongoing situation in the country. The United Nations aid chief has released \$45m in emergency funds to Afghanistan in a bid to prevent Afghanistan's battered healthcare system from collapsing. Martin Griffiths, the UN's under-secretary-general for humanitarian affairs and emergency relief coordinator, said in a statement on September 22, 2021 that he was releasing funds from the UN's Central Emergency Response Fund to boost life-saving support in Afghanistan.

the end of this month, and the World Food Programme said 14 million people were on the brink of starvation.

Sources: <http://www.afghanistantimes.af/eu-remain-in-dilemma-over-engaging-with-taliban/>

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/22/taliban-asks-to-address-un-after-afghanistan->

## BANGLADESH: PRIME MINISTER SHEIKH HASINA DEMANDED 'UNIVERSAL, AFFORDABLE' VACCINE ACCESS TO ALL AT UNGA; PRIME MINISTER SHEIKH HASINA CALLS FOR GLOBAL ROADMAP

During her address at the during her address at 76th United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on September 24th, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina demanded collective measure for 'universal and affordable' vaccine access to all for Covid-free world. She also said that ongoing vaccine divide will only prolong the pandemic. She stressed on the need for a global roadmap to ensure permanent recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. The prime minister added that vaccine technologies must be transferred immediately all across the globe to ensure vaccine equity and she assured that Bangladesh is ready to produce vaccines in mass scale if technical know-how is shared and patent waiver is granted. She also discussed climate change, the Rohingya crisis, Palestine and Afghanistan in her speech.

Earlier, at the 9th Annual International Conference on Sustainable Development, the prime minister emphasized on ambitious global roadmap to attain the SDGs in due

course of time so that no countries left behind since pandemic has already pushed many countries behind from the right track. To pull back the countries which are way behind the track of attaining SDGs in right time, she proposed the following five specific points; ensuring vaccines for everyone and everywhere, closing the huge resource gap in implementing the 2030 Agenda, focusing on job creation, social protection, women empowerment, science and technology, innovation to deal with the impacts of the pandemic, making Covid-19 recovery measures complementary with climate actions and focusing on enhanced monitoring and support mechanism for SDGs implementation. The prime minister is expected to return to Dhaka on 01 October.

Source: <https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/home/pm-demands-universal-affordable-vaccine-access-to-all-1632549837?amp=true>

<https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2021/09/21/prime-minister->

## INDIA: PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI TO FOCUS ON COUNTER-RADICALIZATION AT UNGA TO FIGHT EXTREMISM; PRIME MINISTER MODI MET LEADING AMERICAN CEOS TO ENCOURAGE THEM TO INVEST IN INDIA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed at the 76th session of UNGA on September 25, 2021 focusing on the pressing global challenges including the Covid-19 pandemic, the need to combat terrorism, climate change and other important issues. In his USA visit, the Prime Minister held bilateral meetings with US President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris. He also met his Australian counterpart Scott Morrison and Japanese PM Yoshihide Suga. He also participated in the first in-person Quad meeting after Covid-19 and also held meetings with five global CEOs for potential investment in India. In his meeting with President Joe Biden, Prime Minister Narendra Modi discussed on Covid-19 pandemic, climate change and a free and open Indo-Pacific. During his discussion with US Vice President Kamala Harris at the White House, the prime minister described India and America as "natural partners" where they decided to further cement the Indo-US strategic

partnership and discussed global issues of common interest, including threats to democracy, Afghanistan and the Indo-Pacific.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi also met a group of five top American corporate leaders from a range of diverse sectors ranging from drones to 5G, semiconductor and solar, and encouraged them to increase their investment in India including in the telecommunications and electronics sectors.

Source: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/pm-modi-to-focus-on-counter-radicalisation-at-unga-to-fight-extremist-ideologies-101632191284445.html>

<https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/pm-modi-meets-leading-american-ceos-encourages-them->

## INDIA: INDIA'S EXPORTS TO EU DECLINED IN THE LAST 20 YEARS

India's exports have seen a steady increase in the last six months but its export to European Union (EU), which is the second largest export marketplace for India after the USA has recorded a steady decline. According to MVIRDC WTC Mumbai, the share of the European Union in India's merchandise exports has declined within the last 20 years. India's overall goods export to EU market declined from 18% in 2001 to 14% in 2020, even though there was growth in the absolute value of shipments. India's export to EU market has been stagnated since 2011 and now India's share to EU accounts for .90 per cent which displays untapped export potential on this market. However, in spite of decline in EU market, India's share in Asian market

grew from 38% to 46%, in Center East Asia market grew from 13% to 15.6%, in African market grew from 6.4% to 9.5% and in Latin American and Caribbean market grew from 2.4% to 4.5%. The share of North America (USA, Canada & Mexico) in India's items exports remained around 20% within the last 20 years.

Source: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/small-biz/trade/exports/insights/indias-exports-to-eu-declined-in-the-last-20-years-accounts-for-mere-0-9-of-the-total-imports-of-eu/articleshow/86446392.cms?from=mdr>

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## MALDIVES: PRESIDENT IBRAHIM MOHAMED SOLIH ADDRESSED THE 76TH UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih addressed the general debate of the 76th session of the United Nations General Assembly on 21st September, 2021. He cited the economic and social effects of the pandemic and urged the international community for inclusive efforts to rebuild economies, share financial burdens and return to normal life.

Mr. Solih then raised concerns about the global warming and climate change. As the leader of the climate vulnerable small archipelago, Maldivian president called all the countries to address the climate emergency and not prioritize business interests which currently dominate the climate change advocacy regimes. The developed countries should take strict measures to curb their emissions, adopt smarter technologies for their energy usage and help the vulnerable countries in capacity building, technology transfers and financial resources to ramp up their defenses in the climate fight.

Speaking as the head of a small island state, President Solih endorsed the recognition of Palestine as an independent State and stated that despite the efforts of United Nations, the Palestinian people have yet to see justice. He then expressed his concerns in regard to the peace and stability of its South Asian neighbor, Afghanistan. President

Solih then requested the regime to form an inclusive, representative government and manifest its commitment build a peaceful country ensuring people's security and women rights.

He also participated in a number of bilateral meetings with the Premiers of Bangladesh, Kuwait, Guyana, Cabo Verde, Palau, Switzerland and multilateral meetings like Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) Leaders' Summit 2021, anniversary event of the Durban Declaration etc. in the sidelines of United Nations General Assembly.

Sources: [http://www.maldivesmission.com/statements/unofficial\\_translation\\_of\\_the\\_statement\\_by\\_his\\_excellency\\_ibrahim\\_mohamed\\_solih\\_president\\_of\\_the\\_republic\\_of\\_maldives\\_at\\_the\\_general\\_debate\\_of\\_the\\_76th\\_session\\_of\\_the\\_united\\_nations\\_general\\_assembly](http://www.maldivesmission.com/statements/unofficial_translation_of_the_statement_by_his_excellency_ibrahim_mohamed_solih_president_of_the_republic_of_maldives_at_the_general_debate_of_the_76th_session_of_the_united_nations_general_assembly)  
<https://presidency.gov.mv/Press/Article/25259>  
<https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/world/death-sentence-low-lying-nations-urge-faster-action-on-climate-1632450895>  
<https://timesofaddu.com/2021/09/22/palestine-thanks-maldives-for-taking-a-stand-at-76th-un-general-assembly/>

## NEPAL: NEPAL'S PRIME MINISTER EXPANDED THE CABINET, COALITION PARTNERS DISAGREED ON CABINET EXPANSION

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba on September 22, 2021 "expanded" his Cabinet, by adding one more member, Narayan Khadka as foreign minister. "The Maoist Centre, however, neither has made its conditions public nor sent the list of ministers to Mr. Deuba. The party on September 22, 2021 held a meeting of its Standing Committee to "select" ministers to be inducted into Deuba's Cabinet. As of now, there are two ministers from the party - Janardan Sharma (finance) and PamphaBhusal (Energy) - in the Cabinet. On September 22, 2021, the ruling coalition also held a meeting to discuss Cabinet expansion. Also, the Nepali Congress held a meeting of party office bearers. "During the

meeting, the prime minister said that he is also increasingly worried about the delay in Cabinet expansion," PrakashSharanMahat, a Congress joint general secretary told. "He said that the coalition partners have not forwarded the names, thereby causing the delay." Prime Minister Deuba said that the coalition partners are having some issues within their parties.

Sources: <https://kathmandupost.com/politics/2021/09/12/coalition-partners-fail-to-agree-on-cabinet-expansion>

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## PAKISTAN: PAKISTAN'S PRIME MINISTER IMRAN KHAN WARNED OF A CIVIL WAR IF AN INCLUSIVE GOVERNMENT IS NOT FORMED IN AFGHANISTAN; "STOPPING WOMEN FROM ACCESSING EDUCATION UN-ISLAMIC": PRIME MINISTER IMRAN KHAN; PAKISTAN'S FOREIGN MINISTER STRESSED ON PROVISION OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO

Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan stated in an interview with the BBC said Afghanistan's neighbors will make a collective decision regarding recognizing or not recognizing the Taliban government. He warned of another civil war in Afghanistan if an inclusive government was not formed. He added that preventing women from accessing education in Afghanistan would be un-Islamic, but he hoped that the Taliban leadership would soon allow women to resume studies.

Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi stressed the importance of providing humanitarian and development assistance to the Afghan people and again urged the international community to engage

with the country. The remarks by the foreign minister came during a meeting with the president of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Peter Maurer, on the sidelines of the 76th session of the UN General Assembly in New York. The foreign minister outlined the contributions made by Pakistan towards the mitigation of the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, especially through its support for the establishment of a humanitarian corridor and provision of assistance comprising food and medical supplies.

Source: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/22/pakistan-imran-khan-civil-war-afghanistan-taliban>

## SRI LANKA: PRESIDENT GOTABAYA RAJAPAKSA ADRESSED THE 76TH UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The President of Sri Lanka, Gotabaya Rajapaksa addressed the general debate of the 76th session of the United Nations General Assembly on 22nd September, 2021. He marked several important issues and highlighted key progress made by his country.

He extended his condolences to the families lost their loved ones in the pandemic and acknowledged the frontline workers and International organizations for their relentless support in the crisis period. He stated that the world must recognize the challenges faced by the developing countries and requested the global bodies to ensure mass vaccinations, development funds and debt relief through International mechanisms.

The economic impact of the pandemic was severe on the developing countries including Sri Lanka, which risked the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal. The tourism industry, businesses etc. are affected the most. His government has provided interest moratoriums, grants of cash and dry rations following to substantial increase of state expenditure consequently hindering development programs. Sri Lanka intends to make optimum use of the country's geostrategic location, robust institutions, strong social infrastructure, and skilled workforce to attract international investment and broaden trade relationships. He expressed gratitude towards the international community as they are helping to revive the country's economy and carrying out its national development programs.

He raised concerns about the unprecedented effects of human activities on earth and urged all the countries to take proactive actions to focus on the climate change crisis. Being a climate vulnerable country, Sri Lanka has taken measures to cater seventy percent energy requirements through renewable energy by 2030 and shall be a carbon

neutral country by 2050. The government is encouraging small businesses, community organizations etc. to invest in the seven thousand small scale solar projects and welcomes large scale investments in renewable energy, particularly in solar, wind and biomass. He believes that the upcoming United Nation Food Summit will result achievable outcomes and promote healthier, sustainable and equitable food system globally.

Rajapaksa stated that terrorism was a global challenge which required international cooperation, especially on matters like intelligence sharing. Sri Lanka had endured violence caused by extremist groups and his government was committed to building a prosperous, stable and secure future for all Sri Lankans, regardless of their ethnicity, religion or gender. Sri Lanka, he stated, was fostering greater accountability, restorative justice and meaningful reconciliation through domestic institutions because lasting results could only be attained through home-grown institutions reflecting the aspirations of its people. He then urged the United Nations and the international community to ensure the protection of the Buddhist heritage of Afghanistan under the Taliban regime.

Finally, he called on the United Nations member states to work together in the spirit of mutual respect and goodwill to build a better and sustainable future for the humanity.

Source: <https://mfa.gov.lk/speech-sl-president-76th-un/>  
<https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/president-gotabaya-rajapaksa-full-speech-to-the-un-general-assembly/>  
<https://www.newindianexpress.com/world/2021/sep/23/buddhist-heritage-of-afghanistan-must-be-protected-rajapaksa-at-un-2362742.html>  
<https://www.dailynews.lk/2021/09/25/>

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Bangladesh Enterprise Institute is a non-profit, non-political research centre. Established in October 2000, the Institute has established for itself a reputation for excellence in its research and advocacy work focusing on the growth of private enterprise in Bangladesh. The Institute promotes issues of importance to the private sector and seeks to initiate essential measures and influence policy for the development of a market-oriented economy. Through the promotion of sustainable growth in domestic trade, commerce and industry, BEI hopes to address the enormous challenge for Bangladesh in securing a fair share of the global market.

BEI has a particular interest in the support and growth of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs), which have the potential to be the engine of economic growth in Bangladesh. BEI also undertakes research and policy advocacy work focusing on the issues of foreign policy and security, particularly those of terrorism impacting Bangladesh and South Asia.

Being conscious of the enormous challenge to securing a fair share for Bangladesh in the global market as well as to address issues of trade and investment promotion, the Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI) was established under the initiative of some leading business personalities of the country. Salman F. Rahman, Deputy Chairman of the BEXIMCO Group, has been working as the Chairman of the Board of Governors, Ambassador Farooq Sobhan, former Foreign Secretary and Ambassador, and past Executive Chairman of the Board of Investment, has been working as a Distinguished Fellow and Member of the Board of Governors of the institute and M Humayun Kabir, former Ambassador, has been working as the President and Chief Executive of the institute.

The institute is registered with the Registrar of Joint Stock.

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