

|| WEEKLY NEWS HIGHLIGHTS ||

BANGLADESH ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE (BEI)

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

|| October 15, 2021 – October 21, 2021 ||

SOUTH ASIA: COVID-19 CRISIS: AT A GLANCE

Afghanistan has recorded a total of 156,000 cases of coronavirus since the beginning of the pandemic. Total deaths reported stood at 7,234 as of October 21, 2021.

Bangladesh reported 10 new deaths and 243 coronavirus cases, as of October 21, 2021, and has thus far recorded a total of 27,801 fatalities and 1,566,907 deaths. Bangladesh has administered a total 56,317,857 Covid-19 vaccine doses, totaling 11.49% of the population.

Bhutan reported no new cases or deaths as of 21 October, 2021. A total of 2,617 cases have been registered until October 21, 2021, while 65.82% of Bhutan's population has been vaccinated.

India reported 231 deaths and 15,786 new coronavirus cases bringing the total number of cases to 34,127,450, while the total number of deaths stands at 452,811. Up until 22 October 2021, India has recorded a total of one billion COVID-19 vaccinations.

Maldives reported 86,550 confirmed cases and 240 deaths as of 21 October, 2021. The country has vaccinated 65.81 % of its population. The government's Health Protection Agency stated that although the covid infection rate was low, people should continue to maintain strict health protocols.

Myanmar reported 491,584 number of coronavirus cases and 18465 deaths until 21 October, 2021.

Nepal reported 470 new coronavirus cases on October 21, 2021 taking the nationwide infection tally to 807,522 since the beginning of the pandemic. To date, the total number of deaths stands at 11,326.

Pakistan reported 16 deaths and 622 positive cases due to Coronavirus on October 21, 2021. Country's current positivity ratio is 1.40%.

Sri Lanka had recorded a total of 533,860 confirmed cases and 13,562 deaths. As of 21 October, 58.56% of the population has been fully vaccinated. The government has claimed that it will achieve the target by WHO to inculcate 70% of its population with two to three weeks.

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

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BANGLADESH BANK ALLOWED RECEIVING REMITTANCES THROUGH ONLINE PAYMENT GATEWAY; BANGLADESH BANK EASED RULES TO BRING FREELANCERS' INCOME TO MFS ACCOUNTS

The central bank has allowed incoming remittances from abroad through online payment gateway service providers (OPGSPs). A circular issued by the foreign exchange policy department of Bangladesh Bank has approved the authorized dealer banks to repatriate remittances through OPGSPs. The circular states that authorized dealer banks are required to enter into an arrangement with internationally recognized OPGSPs and maintain separate account that a bank holds in a foreign currency in another bank collection account for each OPGSP.

According to the same circular, Bangladesh Bank has simplified the rules for repatriation of incomes of Bangladeshi individuals including freelancers by allowing direct receipt of their incomes in their own mobile bank account. The circular also said that the service providers could maintain merchant accounts with international marketplaces or platforms and notional accounts with licensed payment service operators abroad. As per the circular, authorized dealer banks could facilitate repatriation of service incomes deposited in their nostro (an account that a bank holds in a foreign currency in another bank) accounts by international market places or platforms, including eligible payment operators.

<https://www.newagebd.net/article/152160/bb-eases-rules-to-bring-freelancers-incomes-to-mfs-accounts>

<https://www.tbsnews.net/economy/banking/bb-allows-receiving-remittances-through-payment-gateways-317758>

BANGLADESH TRADE AND INVESTMENT SUMMIT TO KICK OFF ON 26 OCTOBER; BIDA FORMED 27 TEAMS FOR ENSURING WORKERS' SAFETY

Bangladesh Trade & Investment Summit 2021 is ready to kick off on 26th October. Around 552 companies from 38 countries are participating in the summit. The Ministry of Commerce and Industries and Dhaka Chamber of Commerce & Industry (DCCI) is hosting the summit. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is the chief guest in the inaugural ceremony of the summit. In a joint press conference by the Ministry of Commerce and DCCI, Commerce Minister Mr. Tipu Munshi said that Bangladesh has made progress in the energy sector and infrastructure development. This summit will help attract more foreign investments in Bangladesh. Mr. Munshi added that his ministry has been relentlessly signing Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) and Preferential Trade Agreements (PTAs) to tackle the challenges of LDC graduation. He mentioned that this summit will be a great platform for businesses to connect with each other and open a door towards expanding other export focused-sectors rather than just relying on the RMG sector.

In the meantime, Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA) has formed 27 teams to primarily inspect around 1,900 factories in Narayanganj, Dhaka, Gazipur and Chattogram to ensure there is a safe working environment for workers. Apart from the primary inspection, 5,000 factories will be inspected and the number will be expanded with time. The initiative has been taken to prevent incidents similar to the fire in Hashem Food Factory on 8 July, killing more than 50 people in Rupganj upazila of Narayanganj.

<https://www.tbsnews.net/economy/bangladesh-trade-and-investment-summit-2021-start-26-october-317152>

AFGHANISTAN: MOSCOW FORMAT MEETING ADOPTED JOINT STATEMENT TO RESPECT THE SOVEREIGNTY, INDEPENDENCE AND TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY OF AFGHANISTAN; U.N. SETS UP SPECIAL TRUST FUND FOR 'PEOPLE'S ECONOMY' IN AFGHANISTAN; IMF SAID AFGHAN ECONOMY TO CONTRACT UP TO 30%

Pakistan's Ambassador to Afghanistan, The third meeting of the Moscow format talks on Afghanistan concluded on October 20, 2021 with the adoption of a joint statement on Afghanistan formalizing the position and demands of the member countries to the Taliban. Above all, the Moscow format members - Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Iran, Pakistan, China, Turkmenistan, India, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan vowed to respect the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Afghanistan, the statement said. They also stressed that they view the Taliban as the new Afghan authorities despite the absence of official recognition and will interact with them respectfully. The Moscow format welcomed the Taliban's "reaffirmed commitment" to prevent the use of Afghan territory against other states and expressed readiness to provide assistance in fighting terrorist groups residing in Afghanistan, emphasizing that their activities remain a matter of concern for the member countries. Another reason for concern pointed out in the joint statement is the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. To address this problem, the sides proposed to convene "a broad-based international donor conference" under the auspices of the United Nations as soon as possible.

AFGHANISTAN ON AGENDA OF NATO DEFENSE MEETING; IRAN ANNOUNCED TO HOST MULTILATERAL CONFERENCE ON AFGHANISTAN; AFGHAN DELEGATION LED BY DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER VISITED UZBEKISTAN

Afghanistan's affairs will be on the agenda of the two-day meeting of the NATO defense ministers. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said that NATO would use diplomatic and political leverage on the "Taliban" to prevent the country from becoming a terrorist safe haven. A high-level meeting among the NATO members was held in Brussels on October 21-22. Iran announced that it would host a multilateral conference on October 27 on Afghanistan's neighbors plus Russia, which will include six foreign ministers. Iran's foreign ministry announced that in addition to Iran and Russia, the meeting will be attended by China, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, who all have land borders with Afghanistan. The six countries will be focused on how they can help form an inclusive government in Afghanistan with the presence of all ethnic groups, and how they can help shape a future

The UN said that it had set up a special trust fund to provide urgently needed cash directly to Afghans through a system that would tap into donor funds frozen since the Taliban takeover last August, 2021. Achim Steiner, the U.N. Development Programme (UNDP) administrator, said that Germany, a first contributor, had pledged \$58 million to the fund, and that it was in touch with other donors.

Afghanistan's economy is set to contract up to 30% this year and this is likely to further fuel a refugee crisis that will impact neighboring countries, Turkey and Europe, the International Monetary Fund said on October 19, 2021. With non-humanitarian aid halted and foreign assets largely frozen after the Taliban seized power in August, Afghanistan's aid-reliant economy "faces severe fiscal and balance-of-payments crises", it said in its regional economic outlook update.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/21/un-sets-up-trust-fund-for-peoples-economy-in-afghanistan>

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/20/russia-hosts-taliban-for-talks-but-warns-no-recognition-for-now>

with peace and security in Afghanistan.

An Afghan delegation led by Abdul Salam Hanafi, the acting Deputy Prime Minister, visited Uzbekistan on October 16, 2021. The delegation discussed on trade, transit, railway, electricity and other issues with Uzbek officials. Representatives from the administrative office, civil aviation authority, central bank, security sector, media and national traders were also part of the delegation. The two sides discussed expanding Afghanistan-Uzbekistan economic ties, electricity, railway and bilateral relations. This was the first official trip of the Taliban to Uzbekistan since they gained power on August 15, 2021.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/18/tehran-to-host-multilateral-conference-on-afghanistan>
<https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-175045>

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BANGLADESH: "REFRAIN FROM RELIGIOUS EXCESSES", PRIME MINISTER SHEIKH HASINA ON RECENT COMMUNAL VIOLENCE; PRIME SUSPECT IQBAL HOSSAIN DETAINED IN COX'S BAZAR

While addressing a discussion on the birth anniversary of Sheikh Russell, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on October 19, has asked all to refrain from religious excesses as the government wants to ensure peaceful co-existence of people across the religions. Earlier, she directed the home minister to hunt down those who were involved in the recent communal attacks in the country and take stern action against them. On October 21, police detained a man from Cox's Bazar who allegedly kept a copy of the Holy Quran at a Durga Puja mandap in Cumilla. The incident led to accusations against the Hindu community of desecrating the Quran and triggered communal violence across the country including Chandpur, Noakhali, Chattogram and Rangpur, leaving at least seven people dead and many injured. As of October 19, police said that total 72 cases of

communal violence had been registered and over 450 people arrested across the country.

<https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/government/refrain-from-doing-religious-excesses-pm-hasina>

<https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/2021/10/21/comilla-attacks-prime-suspect-iqbal-arrested-from-cox-s-bazar>

PRIME MINISTER SHEIKH HASINA, "DISPLACED ROHINGYAS AND STRANDED PAKISTANIS ARE BURDEN FOR BANGLADESH"; SHEIKH HASINA CALLED FOR A GLOBAL CLIMATE PROSPERITY PLAN, NOT EMPTY PLEDGES

Newly appointed Ambassador of the Netherlands to Bangladesh H. E. Anne Gerard Van Leeuwen has paid a courtesy call to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. During the meeting, the Prime Minister stated that stranded Pakistanis and displaced Rohingyas had become a major burden for Bangladesh and were putting pressure on the economy of Bangladesh. She added that Rohingyas were destroying the environment of Cox's Bazar which was causing a major impact on the economy. The Netherlands Ambassador recognized that repatriating the Rohingya to Myanmar was the most effective solution.

is fated to face the worst impact of climate change. She noted that investing in a zero carbon future is the best way to create jobs and run a functioning economy while battling climate change.

<https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/national/displaced-rohingya-and-stranded-pakistanis-burden-for-bangladesh-pm-says-1634475065>

<https://www.tbsnews.net/dropped/industry/bida-forms-teams-ensure-safe-working-environment-317884>

The Prime Minister, meanwhile, called for realistic and urgent action on climate change from developed countries keeping the upcoming COP26, 2021 UN Climate Change Conference in mind. She wrote an article titled "A global climate prosperity plan, not empty pledges" in the Financial Times of UK where she described that Bangladesh is responsible for a fraction of the carbon emissions yet the country will cooperate towards a zero carbon emission future. She specially mentioned that this call for action is not because Bangladesh

BHUTAN: BHUTAN-CHINA SPEEDS UP BOUNDARY NEGOTIATIONS

On October 15, 2021, Foreign Minister Dr. Tandi Dorji and the Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs of China Wu Jianghao signed an MoU to speed up Bhutan-China boundary negotiations. At the 10th Expert Group Meeting held in Kunming, the two sides agreed to the mentioned negotiations in April, this year. In 1988, the two countries signed the Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the Boundary and in 1998, the Agreement on

the Maintenance of Peace, Tranquility and Status Quo in the Bhutan-China Border Areas.

<https://kuenselonline.com/bhutan-china-sign-mou-to-expedite-boundary-negotiations/>

INDIA: INDIAN EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTER VISITED ISRAEL FOR HIGH-LEVEL TALKS FOR FURTHER ENRICHING STRATEGIC TIES; INDIA, ISRAEL, UAE AND USA MET TO EXPAND COOPERATION AND TO STRENGTHEN MARITIME SECURITY

On October 17, External Affairs Minister of India, S Jaishankar arrived in Israel for a five-day visit to strengthen diplomatic ties between India and Israel. Jaishankar was later joined by his Israeli, US and UAE counterparts. The first meeting between these four foreign ministers emphasized economic cooperation, joint infrastructure projects in transportation and technology. The meeting was aimed at increasing economic and political cooperation in the Middle East and Asia to enhance maritime security.

In the bilateral meeting, Jaishankar and Lapid agreed on renewing negotiations on a free trade area (FTA) agreement from November. Both the ministers agreed on mutual recognition of Covid-19 vaccination certificates amid calls to ease foreign travel. They also agreed on expanding contributions on water and agriculture which have been key issues between the relationships of Israel and India. Jaishankar later tweeted the meeting with Israeli foreign minister to be productive.

https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/india-israel-uae-us-meet-to-expand-cooperation-maritime-security-101634613936348-amp.html?utm_source=whatsapp&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=ht AMP

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/external-affairs-minister-s-jaishankar-five-day-visit-to-israel/article37037055.ece>

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/my-friend-israeli-foreign-affairs-minister-lapid-thanks-jaishankar-for-visit-101634572978817.html>

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MALDIVES: MALDIVES ACHIEVED 90% OF ITS TOURIST ARRIVAL GOAL

Maldives has achieved its goal of receiving 90% of tourist arrivals which the government had set for 2021. Reports published by the Tourism Ministry of the archipelago affirms that the country hosted a total of 923,146 tourists from 1st January to 13th October, 2021. The statistics states that the tourist arrivals were 122.5% higher than last year. According to data, 23% tourists are from India, Russia and Germany, 19.4% from France, 6.3% from Kazakhstan and the rest are from Spain, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Maldives was forced to impose travel restrictions of six months during the first two waves of the pandemic. However, mass inoculation drive and strict implementation of the health protocols

helped the country to re-generate its tourism industry. With the peak season ahead, from November to December, the government is expecting to surpass its desired goal of welcoming one lac tourists in the current year.

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/travel/travel-news/maldives-witnesses-more-than-905000-tourist-footfall-in-2021/as86990740.cms>

<https://edition.mv/travel/23234>

http://www.news.cn/english/2021-10/19/c_1310256079.htm
<https://www.islandchief.com/news/view/53568>

MYANMAR: ASEAN EXCLUDED STATE ADMINISTRATION COUNCIL FROM LEADER'S SUMMIT

The Foreign Ministers of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) at an emergency meeting held on 14th October, 2021 unanimously decided to bar the military regime of Myanmar from the upcoming summit on 26-28 October. Myanmar expressed its deep disappointment and accused the regional bloc of being influenced by foreign nations. The Foreign Ministry of the State Administration Council (SAC) stated in a press release said that it rejected ASEAN's decision to invite an apolitical representative from Myanmar adding that the SAC had equal and complete right to attend ASEAN summits. However, the National Unity Government (NUG) welcomed the decision of ASEAN and requested to choose a representative who can voice the aspirations of the masses.

The Senior Director of East Asia and Oceania at the White House National Security Council, Edgard Kagan termed the decision of the regional bloc as a significant step, however he added that the crisis needed to be addressed more effectively. The State Department Counselor Derek Chollet, was in the region to discuss Myanmar ahead of the

ASEAN summits, he stated through his social media account that he had a productive meeting with Monetary Authority of Singapore to limit the Tatmadaw's access to international financial assets.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/asean-chair-brunei-confirms-junta-leader-not-invited-summit-2021-10-16/>

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/myanmar-rejects-asean-decision-exclude-junta-leader-summit-2021-10-22/>

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/in-person/interview/myanmar-junta-chiefs-exclusion-from-asean-summit-a-huge-blow-to-regime.html>

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/asean-summit-without-myanmar-leader-significant-not-enough-us-2021-10-20/>

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PAKISTAN: THE PAKISTANI FOREIGN MINISTER ON VISIT TO KABUL TO DISCUSS ON AFGHAN-PAKISTANI TRADE; PAKISTAN'S FDI JUMPED TO 11 MONTH HIGH IN SEPTEMBER

Shah Mahmood Qureshi, the Pakistani Foreign Minister paid a visit to Kabul on October 21, 2021, where he held talks with the head of the Islamic Emirate cabinet and other top officials. The discussion focused on trade, the reopening of gates (along the de facto border), border problems, and the problems that Afghan and Pakistan's traders are facing. Mr. Qureshi also held a meeting with Afghanistan's interim Prime Minister Mullah Hassan Akhund. This is the foreign minister's first visit to Kabul since the Taliban took over.

Pakistan's FDI jumped to an 11-month high at \$236 million in September 2021, reflecting a revival of confidence among long-term global investors. Investment has centred around IT and telecommunication, power, oil and gas exploration, and financial sectors. Surprisingly, multinational companies (MNCs) from the United States made the largest investment of \$68.7 million in different sectors of Pakistan's economy in September. FDI

increased 16% to \$236 million in September 2021 compared to \$202.8 million in the same month of last year, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2325451/fdi-soars-to-11-month-high-in-sept>

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2325741/pakistan-desires-durable-peace-stability-in-afghanistan-qureshi>

SRI LANKA: SRI LANKA RANKED 65th IN GLOBAL HUNGER

The Concern Worldwide and Welthungerhilfe, jointly published the annual Global Hunger Index 2021 on 14th October. The report is based on four indicators i.e. undernourishment, children under the age of 5 having lower weight in ratio to their heights, having lower weight compared to their age and child mortality.

Sri Lanka ranked 65th out of 116 countries with a score of 16.0. Myanmar, Bangladesh and Nepal are among the moderate hunger level countries ranked 71st, 76th and 77th respectively. While Pakistan and India were ranked at an alarming level, at 92nd and 101st respectively.

<https://www.newsfirst.lk/2021/10/17/sri-lanka-ranks-65-in-global-hunger-index/>

<https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2021/10/15/global-hunger-index-2021-bangladesh-now-moderate-from-serious-in-hunger-levels>

About Us

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.

DISCLAIMER

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/>

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