

## || WEEKLY NEWS HIGHLIGHTS ||

# BANGLADESH ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE (BEI)

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

|| 12 November- 18 November 2021 ||

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

**Afghanistan** has recorded a total of 156,000 cases of coronavirus since the beginning of the pandemic. Total death cases reported were 7,234 as of 17 November.

**Bangladesh** reported 5 new deaths and 244 coronavirus cases on 18 November 2021 and has thus far recorded a total of 27,939 fatalities and 1,573,458 confirmed cases. Bangladesh has administered a total 86,995,218 Covid-19 vaccine doses, totaling 20.85% of the population.

**Bhutan** has reported no new cases or deaths as of 18 November. A total of 2,629 cases have been registered until 18 November, while 73.36% of Bhutan's population has been vaccinated.

**India** has reported 459 deaths and 11,106 new coronavirus cases bringing the total number of cases to 34,489,623, while the total number of deaths now stands at 465,082. Until 18 November, 28.41% of Indian population has been vaccinated.

**Maldives** has reported 90,340 active cases and 248 deaths as of 19th November, 2021. 68.06% of the population is vaccinated.

**Myanmar** has reported, as of 19th November, a total of 516,146 cases and 18,989 deaths as of 19th November, 2021. Myanmar has opened borders with Thailand and China which was closed for travel restriction due to the high infection rate in Myanmar.

**Nepal**, on 17 November, reported 363 new coronavirus cases taking the nationwide infection tally to 818,035. The countrywide death toll stands 11,438 since the beginning of the pandemic.

**Pakistan** has recorded a total of 515 new cases of coronavirus on 17 November. Total 11 fatalities were also recorded according to the reports on 17 November.

**Sri Lanka** has reported 554,459 active cases and 14,072 deaths as of 19th November. 62.78% of the population vaccinated.

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

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- Acting foreign minister called on u.s. Congress to release funds; u.s. Envoy held talks afghan issues with indian and russian officials
- Pm for setting up 'knowledge centre' in bangladesh; strong partnership is a must for global good: pm to world leaders
- Bangladesh assumes iora chairmanship; bangladesh against single country dominance in indian ocean, says fm
- Deliveries of s-400 air defence systems have begun, said russian official; bengal assembly passed resolution demanding withdrawal of bsf's 50km order
- Joint parliamentary committee considering relaxations for social media firms in data law
- President of maldives ratifies 'foreign service act'; maldives foreign service will be established under the ministry of foreign affairs
- Parliament of maldives passed the hate crime bill
- 14th general convention of nepali congress is scheduled for 13-15 december, 2021
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## BUSINESS AND INVESTMENT:

### 1,395 BUYERS, 52 COUNTRIES TO TAKE PART IN BANGLADESH'S SOURCING FAIR; SOFTBANK INVESTMENT TO RAISE BKASH'S VALUATION TO \$2BN

Bangladesh's Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) has organized the "Sourcing Bangladesh-2021 Virtual Edition" where 1,395 buyers from 52 countries have registered their participation. Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi said that EPB has organized the virtual expo to keep the market activities rolling while trade fairs worldwide were suspended amid the coronavirus pandemic. The Minister inaugurated the fair at the EPB office on 15 November. He added that some 60 reputed exporters of Bangladesh, from 13 sectors were taking part in the virtual expo, while a notable number of potential buyers and visitors from North America, Latin America, South East Asia, Middle East, Central Asia and Africa have also registered.

Meanwhile, Dr Ahsan H Mansur, chairman of BRAC Bank, the majority stakeholder in the country's leading mobile financial services (MFS) provider, said that SoftBank Vision Fund II is injecting \$250 million for more than 10% stake in bKash. The development has already raised bKash's valuation to over \$1,700mn and as soon as the Japanese tech investment giant's subscription for the fresh shares completes, the valuation would increase to around \$2 billion, equivalent to more than Tk17,000 crore. The BRAC Bank board on Wednesday approved the share subscription agreement between bKash and the incoming foreign investor alongside the share purchase agreement among the existing stakeholders and the new investor on 10 November.

<https://www.tbsnews.net/economy/52-countries-take-part-bangladeshs-sourcing-fair-329923>

<https://www.tbsnews.net/economy/softbank-investment-raise-bkashes-valuation-2bn-329299>

### ATTAINING GSP PLUS NOT 'A PICNIC' FOR BANGLADESH: EU ENVOY

European Union ambassador in Bangladesh Charles Whiteley has emphasized that Bangladesh should implement the relevant international conventions on maintaining human rights, environmental protections and labor standards for attaining GSP plus facilities on trade under the EU mechanism at a function styled as DCAB talk organized by Diplomatic Correspondents Association, Bangladesh in Dhaka on 15 November 2021. He added that it is not going to be a picnic, in terms of the GSP plus. For Bangladesh attaining GSP plus is not easy and not an automatic process, and important that Bangladesh intends to move to the GSP plus.

<https://www.newagebd.net/article/154712/attaining-gsp-plus-not-a-picnic-for-bangladesh-eu-envoy-start-26-october-317152>

## AFGHANISTAN:

### ACTING FOREIGN MINISTER CALLED ON U.S. CONGRESS TO RELEASE FUNDS; U.S. ENVOY HELD TALKS AFGHAN ISSUES WITH INDIAN AND RUSSIAN OFFICIALS

Amir Khan Muttaqi, the Acting Foreign Minister asked for the release of Afghanistan's central bank assets frozen by the U.S. government. Mr. Muttaqi said that following the signing of the Doha Agreement, Afghanistan and the U.S. is no longer in direct conflict or in military opposition. The foreign ministry in the letter said if the Afghan assets remain frozen, problems in Afghanistan will increase given that winter is fast approaching. It urged the U.S. Congress and the U.S. government to review its decision and release the assets. "The Afghan government and people will face problems and will become a cause for mass migration in the region and world which will consequently create further humanitarian and economic issues for the world," the letter reads. The letter states that Afghanistan wants good relations with all countries, including the U.S. Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, Deputy Prime Minister, also met with the Director of the UN Development Program (UNDP), Achim Steiner, on 15 November 2021 in Doha, Qatar. The two sides discussed the current situation of Afghanistan, economic challenges and treatment for drug addicts. Earlier the officials of the Taliban government held talks with five top officials of the United Nations, calling for the release of Afghanistan's assets and the continuation of humanitarian assistance.

Thomas West, U.S. Special Envoy for Afghanistan on 15 November 2021 held high-level talks with Indian National Security Advisor Ajit Doval

and the country's Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla in the New Delhi. After the two meetings, Indian External Affairs Ministry said that the top officials exchanged views on recent developments and issues of common interest in Afghanistan. Later, Mr. Thomas West visited Moscow to discuss Afghanistan with Russian officials. Mr. West said that he met with Vladimir Putin's Special Representative for Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov and Russia's Security Council Deputy Secretary Alexander Venediktov, and discussed the shared interests of the U.S. and Russia in Afghanistan. According to Mr. West, they also discussed the need for Afghanistan to fulfill the commitments they made to the international community.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/17/taliban-calls-on-us-congress-to-release-afghan-assets>

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/new-us-special-representative-for-afghanistan-meets-nsa-foreign-secretary-101637085330513.html>

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- Bangladesh assumes IORA chairmanship; Bangladesh against single country dominance in Indian Ocean, says FM
- Deliveries of S-400 air defence systems have begun, said Russian official; Bengal assembly passed resolution demanding withdrawal of BSF's 50km order
- Joint parliamentary committee considering relaxations for social media firms in data law
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### PM FOR SETTING UP 'KNOWLEDGE CENTRE' IN BANGLADESH; STRONG PARTNERSHIP IS A MUST FOR GLOBAL GOOD: PM TO WORLD LEADERS by Deputy Prime Minister Visited Uzbekistan

Prime minister Sheikh Hasina, in a speech in Paris on 12 November, sought international support for setting up a 'South-South Knowledge and Innovation Centre' in Bangladesh to act as a platform of technological solutions to development challenges in the Global South. She said, previously Bangladesh offered to set up a 'South-South Knowledge and Innovation Centre' in 2019. It would ideally serve as a platform for co-creating technological solutions to development challenges in the South. She urged the UN, G20 and OECD to consider investing in such forward-looking proposals.

Prime minister Sheikh Hasina made the call while addressing the 4th Edition of Paris Peace Forum at Grande Halle de la Villette. She said that on the home front, as Bangladesh graduates from the LDC status, the country aims to work on setting up its own platform for international economic and technical cooperation. The platform will help coordinate and expand the work of its value-based diplomacy, and the multiple ways it contributes to international development, peacekeeping and humanitarian efforts. She added that many developed countries still fall behind their internationally agreed development commitments, supporting South-South development cooperation programs

can be one way of realizing their own commitments.

Meanwhile, on 12 November, addressing a function at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris on the occasion of the 75th founding anniversary of the UN body, Prime Minister Hasina urged the world community to forge a strong partnership for the common good of global humanity amid the current Covid-19 situation. She added that Bangladesh government has been disseminating the message of peace through instilling tolerance and respect and to do this, the country had chosen education, science, culture and communications as effective tools.

<https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/hasina-for-setting-up-knowledge-centre-in-bangladesh>

<https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/strong-partnership-must-global-good-pm-world-leaders-2228311>

### BANGLADESH ASSUMES IORA CHAIRMANSHIP; BANGLADESH AGAINST SINGLE COUNTRY DOMINANCE IN INDIAN OCEAN, SAYS FM

Bangladesh has assumed the chairmanship of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) for the next two years with the theme "Harnessing the opportunities of the Indian Ocean sustainably for inclusive development." Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul Momen said that the event has been very special to Bangladesh while briefing reporters on the outcome of the 21st Meeting of the Council of Ministers (COM) held on 17 November. He added that the theme, selected by Bangladesh, was "profusely appreciated" by the member countries and the dialogue partners of the IORA.

Furthermore, Salman Al Farisi from Indonesia has been nominated as the new secretary general of the IORA who will take over the charge from January 1 next year. The IORA decided to take up Russia as a dialogue partner in the Council of Ministers.

On a related note, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen said at a ministerial meeting of the Indian Ocean Rim Association on 14 November that Bangladesh was against the dominance of a single country or a group of countries in the Indian Ocean. He added that the general principle of Bangladesh was to maintain an open, free, secured, peaceful and inclusive Indian Ocean based on international law.

<https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2021/11/17/bangladesh-assumes-iora-chairmanship-eyes-inclusive-development>

<https://www.newagebd.net/article/154668/bangladesh-against-single-country-dominance-in-indian-ocean-says-fm>

## INDIA:

### DELIVERIES OF S-400 AIR DEFENCE SYSTEMS HAVE BEGUN, SAIDRUSSIAN OFFICIAL; BENGAL ASSEMBLY PASSED RESOLUTION DEMANDINGWITHDRWAL OF BSF'S 50KM ORDER

Russia has begun delivery of S-400 air defence systems to India ahead of Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to India in December. This arms transaction by the two countries risks the possibility of sanctions by the United States under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA). The US has so far remained silent on the latest move between Moscow and New Delhi. Against this backdrop, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on 13 November, met a high-power U.S. Congressional delegation and discussed issues related to developments in South Asia and the Indo-Pacific region. In October 2018, India and Russia signed a \$5.43 billion deal for five S-400 regiments.

In the meantime, the West Bengal legislative assembly on 17 November passed a resolution against the central government's decision to extend the jurisdiction of the Border Security Force (BSF)

from 15 to 50 km of the international border in the state. Bengal is the second border state after Punjab where such a resolution has been passed. Bengal's border with Bangladesh runs along 10 of the state's 23 districts. Bengal's ruling party said that the BSF's new jurisdiction will cover more than 30% of Bengal's territory including many important towns and goes against the federal structure where law and order is the state's responsibility.

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/russia-starts-delivery-of-s-400-missile-systems-to-india-says-russian-official/article37487108.ece>

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/withdraw-bsf-s-50km-order-says-bengal-assembly-resolution-on-centre-s-move-101637066788337.html>

### JOINT PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE CONSIDERING RELAXATIONS FOR SOCIAL MEDIA FIRMS IN DATA LAW

India's Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) is considering amendments of its first Personal Data Protection Bill to reduce penalties against defaulting social media companies and to remove the provision treating social media as publishers. The committee proposed to remove clauses from section 28 that treat social media companies as publishers in case they altered any content. In addition, clauses that dealt with the civil penalties to be

imposed upon the social media companies have been reduced from 4%, which is the bar for EU GDPR.

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/jpcconsiders-relaxations-for-social-media-firms-in-data-law-101636751950509.html>

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## MALDIVES:

### PRESIDENT OF MALDIVES RATIFIES 'FOREIGN SERVICE ACT'; MALDIVES FOREIGN SERVICE WILL BE ESTABLISH UNDER THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih ratified the 'Foreign Service Act' on 14th November. The Maldives Foreign Service Act was issued in the Government Gazette and shall come into effect within six months from ratification.

According to the act, a separate entity named 'Maldives Foreign Service' representing the Foreign Ministry, will be established with an aim to implement the foreign policy of the country, oversee all Maldivian missions and consular posts and augment diplomatic relations of Maldives with other countries.

The president will be the highest authority of the institution and shall appoint a Foreign Secretary, the highest-ranking member of the Foreign Service staff. The Foreign Secretary will assist the Foreign Minister to reinforce Foreign Service duties of Maldivian Government.

<https://presidency.gov.mv/Press/Article/25787>

<https://raajje.mv/109498>

### PARLIAMENT OF MALDIVES PASSED THE HATE CRIME BILL

The Maldivian Parliament, the People's Majlis unanimously passed a bill to criminalize both religiously motivated hate crimes and the mockery of Islam on 16th November. The Judiciary Committee of the Parliament proposed major amendments to the original bill to criminalize hate crimes by combining the bills to criminalize religiously motivated hate crimes, accusing individuals of violating

Islam and criminalizes the travesty or disrespect of Islam and published a report detailing the amendments.

<https://en.sun.mv/70468>

<https://timesofaddu.com/2021/11/16/parliament-unanimously-greenlights-bill-to-criminalize-hate-crimes/>

### TAZAKISTAN AUTHORIZED ON ARRIVAL VISAS TO MALDIVIAN

Tazakistan granted on arrival visas for Maldivian Travelers from 1st January, 2022. Maldivian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abdullah Shahid stated that this step was aimed to boost cultural and civilizational links between our countries.

travelers to India, Sri Lanka, Russia, Morocco, Thailand and Saudi Arabia.

<https://raajje.mv/109384>

Meanwhile, visa facilitations had also been announced for Maldivian

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## NEPAL:

### 14TH GENERAL CONVENTION OF NEPALI CONGRESS IS SCHEDULED FOR 13-15 DECEMBER, 2021

The 14th general convention of Nepali Congress is scheduled for 13-15 December 2021 to elect central committee members and portfolios. Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba is facing a stiff challenge from his long-time aide and party Vice-president Bimalendra Nidhi in his bid for the party presidency.

The Nepali Congress is all set to complete the district level conventions by November 26, electing over 4,000 general convention representatives who will pick the party's new leadership in the general convention. Those 4,000 plus voters elected from 165 election constituencies will elect party office bearers and 135 central working committee members.

Thirty-three more persons will be appointed as central working committee members from various clusters. On 15 November 2021, Mr. Deuba held a meeting with 40 central working committee members and discussed his faction's strategy for the upcoming general conventions. Deuba also deployed seven senior leaders to all seven provinces to shore up support for his candidacy, according to a leader who attended the meeting.

<https://kathmandupost.com/politics/2021/11/04/parties-mum-on-judiciary-crisis-but-lawyers-affiliated-to-them-speak-up>

## PAKISTAN:

### AFGHAN FOREIGN MINISTER CONFIRMED MEDIATING TALKS BETWEEN PAKISTAN, TTP

The Taliban is acting as a mediator between the Pakistani government and TTP, stated Afghanistan's Acting Foreign Minister, Amir Khan Muttaqi. He added that the Afghan Taliban had stepped in at the "request" of both parties. Last month, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan revealed that Pakistan had begun negotiations with the TTP after the Taliban takeover of Kabul in August, 2021. Tens of

thousands of civilians, security forces and fighters have been killed during the past 14 years of armed rebellion waged by the TTP.

[https://www.business-standard.com/article/international/afghan-taliban-mediating-between-imran-govt-pakistani-taliban-fm-muttaqi-121111400353\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/article/international/afghan-taliban-mediating-between-imran-govt-pakistani-taliban-fm-muttaqi-121111400353_1.html)

## SRI LANKA:

### FOREIGN MINISTER OF SRI LANKA VISITED BANGLADESH; DISCUSSED COOPERATION IN BILATERAL TRADE AND SHIPPING

Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka, Prof Gamini Lakshman Peiris visited Bangladesh to attend the 21st meeting of Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) Council of Ministers' (COM). During his visit he paid courtesy calls on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, his Bangladeshi counterpart Foreign Minister, Dr. AK Abdul Momen and State Minister for Shipping, Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury.

Association, maritime security, blue economy, climate change and prevention of over-exploitation of marine resources explored the possibility of preferential trade agreement (PTA) and enhancement of bilateral trade. Highlighting Bangladesh's success in the pharmaceuticals sector, Minister Momen urged Colombo to import pharmaceutical products from Bangladesh.

<https://dailynews.lk/2021/11/18/local/265001/foreign-minister-calls-prime-minister-bangladesh>

<https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/foreign-minister-his-sri-lankan-counterpart-stress-strong-bilateral-relations-330109>

<https://economynext.com/sri-lanka-bangladesh-discuss-cooperation-in-shipping->

## 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](mailto:bei@bol-online.com). For more information about BEI and our work, please visit <https://www.bei-bd.org/>

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