

|| WEEKLY NEWS HIGHLIGHTS ||

BANGLADESH ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE (BEI)

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

|| 18 February – 26 February 2022 ||

SOUTH ASIA: COVID-19 CRISIS: AT A GLANCE

Afghanistan has recorded a total of 168,550 cases of coronavirus since the beginning of the pandemic. Total deaths reported stood at 7,465 as of February 27.

Bangladesh reported 08 new deaths and 759 coronavirus cases on 26 February and has thus far recorded a total of 29,024 fatalities and 1,941,816 confirmed cases. Bangladesh has administered a total 184,605,792 Covid-19 vaccine doses, totaling 56.6%% of the population.

Bhutan reported 451 new cases and no death as of 26 February. A total of 11,820 cases have been registered until 26 February, while 75.01 % of Bhutan's population has been vaccinated.

India reported 243 deaths and 10,273 new coronavirus cases on 26 February, bringing the total number of cases to 42,916,117 while the total number of deaths now stands at 513,724. Until 26 February, 57.68 % of Indian population has been vaccinated.

Maldives has reported 169,148 confirmed Cases and 296 deaths so far. 887,178 doses have been administered and 370,710 people are fully vaccinate. 69.82% of the total population has been vaccinated.

Myanmar reported 584,239 confirmed cases and 19,360 deaths thus far.

Nepal reported 10,687 new coronavirus cases on February 27, 2022 taking the nationwide infection tally to 970,462 since the beginning of the pandemic. To date, the total number of deaths stands at 11,852.

Pakistan reported 276 deaths and 31,812 positive cases in the last week.

Sri Lanka reported 644,060 confirmed cases and 16,166 deaths so far.

Source: <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html> (John Hopkins University)

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BUSINESS AND INVESTMENT: SOUTH KOREA KEEN TO INVEST IN VARIOUS SECTORS IN BANGLADESH

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While making a courtesy call on President of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), Ambassador of the Republic of Korea H.E. Lee Hang-Keun has expressed his country's interest to develop Bangladesh-Korea's success in other sectors as well, apart from the RMG sector as Seoul wants to take the bilateral relations to a new level in 2022, marking the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh-South Korea diplomatic relations. FBCCI President Md Jashim Uddin called upon South Korea to invest more in the country's infrastructure sector and man-made fiber sector. He also said that the FBCCI would discuss with the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA) on organizing roadshows or investment summits in South Korea to highlight the investment opportunities in Bangladesh.

<https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/economy/south-korea-keen-to-invest-in-various-sectors-in-bangladesh-1645430585>

AFGHANISTAN: ENVOYS OF EU, CENTRAL ASIAN NATIONS CALL FOR INCLUSIVE GOVERNMENT IN AFGHANISTAN; UNICEF STIPEND FOR AFGHAN TEACHERS

A joint statement was issued by the EU Special Representative for Afghanistan, Central Asia Special Envoys for Afghanistan and the EU Special Representative for Central Asia, following a meeting in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. The statement called for the formation of an inclusive government in Afghanistan. On February 21, 2022, the EU Special Envoy Tomas Niklasson went to Tashkent with the EU Special Representative for Central Asia, Terhi Hakala to discuss Afghanistan's regional significance and how the EU can engage as a constructive partner. The representatives stressed a continuous need to ensure good governance and service delivery, promote and respect rule of law, universal human rights and fundamental freedoms of all Afghans, in particular of women and girls as well as children and persons belonging to ethnic groups and minorities, and the establishment of an inclusive and representative government through a credible and legitimate political process in which meaningful participation by all ethnic and political stakeholders, including women and minorities is respected. The participants also reaffirmed EU and Central Asia cooperation in support of the Afghan people as well as security and resilience in a wider region.

The United Nations children's agency would pay Afghan teachers a monthly stipend for at least two months, the organization said, with salaries unpaid for months as the country is plunged into economic crisis due to sanctions on the Taliban administration. According to the statement, the participants also reiterated their hope for a developed, stable, secure, independent and prosperous Afghanistan in which all Afghan women and men can enjoy the full rights and freedom afforded to them by the international commitments to which Afghanistan is a signatory, and that threats to others do not emanate from Afghanistan in line with the UN Security Council Resolution 2593, including freedom of movement, and provision of safe passage.

<https://tolonews.com/index.php/afghanistan-176849><https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/21/unicef-stipend-afghanistan-teachers-emergency-support>

BANGLADESH: DHAKA, DELHI EYE GREATER ENGAGEMENTS AHEAD OF PM HASINA'S LIKELY VISIT TO INDIA; INDIA, BANGLADESH WORKING ON FINALIZING AGREEMENTS ON

In an effort to give further impetus to Dhaka-Delhi relations, India and Bangladesh are now planning to have greater engagements, including preparation for Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to India this year. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has already extended an invitation to PM Sheikh Hasina to visit India in 2022 in commemoration of the golden jubilee of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the countries. The two countries witnessed momentum in their relations last year with a series of engagements, including high-level visits.

In the meantime, during an interaction with Bangladesh delegation at the 10th India-Bangladesh Friendship Dialogue in Shimla, Indian foreign

secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla has said that India and Bangladesh are now working on finalizing agreements for other rivers and exchanging best practices in the areas of river embankments and addressing salinity of rivers. He also said that both countries share 54 rivers which are part of their shared resources and responsibilities. He added that historic accord on Ganga water sharing has stood the test of time. Bangladesh's State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shariar Alam led the delegation including MPs and political leaders, diplomats, academics and intellectuals.

<https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/dhaka-delhi-eye-greater-engagements-ahead-of-pm-hasinas->

BANGLADESH: EX- SECRETARY KAZI HABIBUL AWAL MADE NEW CEC

Former senior secretary of the defense ministry, Kazi Habibul Awal, was appointed as the chief election commissioner (CEC) on 26 February 2022. The four other commissioners are retired district and sessions judge Begum Rashida Sultana, retired Brig Gen Ahsan Habib, former senior secretary Md Alamgir and Anisur Rahman. President Abdul Hamid appointed them for the next five years. The search committee constituted to form the next EC handed over the names of 10 persons to President Abdul Hamid on February 24. The EC has been formed under a law for the first time. The parliament passed 'CEC

and EC Appointment Bill 2022' on 27 January. A six-member search committee for recommending names to the president was formed on 5 February as the tenure of the previous election commission, led by Nurul Huda, expired on 14 February.

<https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/ex-secretary-kazi-habibul-awal-has-been-made-new-cec>

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BHUTAN: BHUTAN'S TIGER CONSERVATION EFFORT RECEIVES GLOBAL RECOGNITION

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The Royal Manas National Park and Jigme Singye Wangchuck National Park has been getting approval as Conservation Assured | Tiger Standards (CA|TS) sites in Bhutan which show the success of the country's tiger conservation system. CA|TS is a set of criteria that allows tiger sites to check if their management will lead to successful tiger conservation. The World Wildlife Fund's (WWF) Impact on Tiger Recovery 2010 to 2022 report published this

month shows that 21 sites have been CA|TS approved, which signifies the sites have reached globally agreed upon standards of management of wild tigers. According to the WWF, there are 103 tigers in the country and about 3,900 tigers in the world.

<https://kuenselonline.com/bhutans-tiger-conservation-effort-receives-global-recognition/>

INDIA: INDIA, UAE INK COMPREHENSIVE TRADE PACT, VOW TO JOINTLY FIGHT TERRORISM; INDIA ABSTAINS ON UNSC RESOLUTION CONDEMNING RUSSIA'S 'AGGRESSION' AGAINST UKRAINE

In a virtual summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan have committed to fight extremism and terrorism, enhancing maritime cooperation, promote e-payment solutions, set up an IIT in UAE and to set up a joint Hydrogen Task Force and an ambitious Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement. Referring to the recent terror attacks in the Gulf nation, PM Modi said that India and the UAE will closely work against terrorism. He also complimented the UAE for showing interest in investing in Jammu and Kashmir in logistics, healthcare and hospitality sector. Moreover, the two sides also inked a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) to further boost trade and investment ties in bidding to grow trade between the two countries from \$60 billion to \$100 billion in the next five years.

Russia's "aggression" against Ukraine and demanded "immediate, complete and unconditional" withdrawal of Russian forces from the neighboring country. Among 15 UNSC member countries, 11 member countries voted in favor of the resolution while three countries, including India, abstained. Earlier, India expressed "deep concern" over the escalation of tension along the Russia-Ukraine border after Russian President Vladimir Putin signed decrees to recognize Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics as independent. India believes that the issue can only be resolved through diplomatic dialogue and asked all sides to exert greater efforts to bridge divergent interests. In a statement, India said it has been closely following the evolving developments relating to Ukraine. However, it did not condemn Russia's actions and decision to send troops to Ukraine.

In other news, India has abstained from voting US-sponsored UN Security Council resolution that condemned

MYANMAR: MYANMAR ROHINGYA GENOCIDE CASE IS LEGITIMATE, GAMBIA TELLS UN'S TOP COURT; MYANMAR JUNTA ASKS UN'S TOP COURT TO DROP ROHINGYA GENOCIDE CASE AT HEARING IN THE HAGUE

Gambia insisted on Wednesday on the legitimacy of its allegations, brought before the UN's top court, that the Myanmar military committed genocide against Rohingya Muslims, after the Buddhist nation's ruling junta tried to get them dismissed. Gambia dragged Myanmar before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 2019, accusing it of genocide against the Rohingya Muslim minority following a bloody 2017 military crackdown. "We seek to protect not only the rights of the Rohingya, but our own rights as a state party to the genocide convention," Gambia's attorney general, Dawda Jallow, told the court. They were doing that "by holding Myanmar to its... obligation not to commit genocide, not to incite genocide and to prevent unpunished genocide," he added.

Meanwhile, Myanmar hit out Monday at a genocide case brought against it by Gambia for alleged persecution of Rohingya Muslims, urging the UN's highest court to drop the claim on legal grounds. Gambia dragged Myanmar before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 2019, accusing the predominantly Buddhist country of genocide against the Rohingya Muslim minority after a bloody 2017 military crackdown. When the case opened in December 2019, Myanmar's State Counselor DawAung San SuuKyi personally represented the country at the Hague-based ICJ, but she was ousted as the Asian country's civilian leader in a military coup last year.

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-rohingya-genocide-case-is-legitimate-gambia-tells-uns-top->

MYANMAR: MYANMAR IMPASSE CHALLENGES ASEAN; EU ADDS MORE MYANMAR COMPANIES, REGIME OFFICIALS TO SANCTIONS LIST

While the Myanmar quagmire will continue to dominate ASEAN's agenda under Cambodia and future chairs, the current chair is also required to deal with a myriad of challenges across all sectors of the grouping's ongoing cooperation. The much-awaited foreign ministerial retreat last Thursday has once again showed that ASEAN remains a closely knit, pragmatic family. This sentiment emerged after the chair's press statement was released. Even though the chair has the prerogative on the final wording, Cambodia invited all members to provide their input, which resulted in an ASEAN-centered statement for all to see. The tone is leaning toward "engagement" rather than "disengagement" with Myanmar. For the first time in nearly a decade, the statement's section on Myanmar took up more space than the South China Sea dispute. At the retreat, all members expressed support for the current chair's efforts including the headline-making visit by Prime

Minister Hun Sen to Myanmar early last month. ASEAN remains united in implementing the Five-Point Consensus.

In another news, the European Union added 22 officials from Myanmar's military junta and four companies tied to the regime to the bloc's sanctions list over an ongoing crackdown after the coup last year. The move takes the number of Myanmar officials targeted by EU asset freezes and visa bans to 65, and firms sanctioned to 10, since the military seized power in February 2021. Among those targeted by the latest round of sanctions were the ministers for investment, industry and information, officials at the election commission and senior members of the military. Two state mining and energy firms were also added to the list, along with two private firms linked to the junta.

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/opinion/guest-column/myanmar-impasse->

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MALDIVES: REAR ADMIRAL AZAD NEW BANGLADESH ENVOY TO MALDIVES

Rear Admiral Azad was commissioned in the Bangladesh Navy on July 1, 1987, said the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Wednesday. In his long and distinguished career, he has served in various staff, instructional and command appointments at different levels. He received the prestigious "Nou Gaurab Padak" for his professional excellence and exceptional service in the Bangladesh

Navy. Before joining the Foreign Ministry, he served as the Commander of the Bangladesh Navy Fleet.

Source:

<https://unb.com.bd/category/Bangladesh/rear-admiral-azad-new-bangladesh-envoy-to-maldives/88069>

NEPAL: A \$500M US GRANT HAS TRIGGERED POLITICAL STORM IN NEPAL; NEPAL OPPOSED USE OF FORCE AGAINST ANY SOVEREIGN COUNTRY: GOVERNMENT ON RUSSIA-UKRAINE CRISIS

Nepal is caught in a dilemma over whether to ratify through parliament the Millennium Challenge Corporation-Nepal Compact, a \$500 million US grant to Nepal to be used in construction of electricity transmission lines and road maintenance. The US Government's Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), an independent bilateral foreign agency, has approved 37 compacts worth \$13 billion for 29 countries, as of 2019. MCC signed a \$500 million compact with Kathmandu in 2017. Nepal apparently had met 16 out of 20 policy parameters, becoming the first country in South Asia to qualify for the grant. According to reports, Washington has urged Nepal to endorse the MCC-Nepal Compact by the end of this month. The compact aims to maintain road quality, increase the availability and reliability of electricity, and facilitate cross-border electricity trade between Nepal and India—helping to spur investments, accelerate economic growth, and reduce poverty, according to the MCC official website. Nepal will contribute \$130

million in support of the compact, the largest up-front partner country contribution in MCC's history will enable even greater impact and benefits for the Nepali people.

The Government of Nepal has issued its reaction to the tension in East Europe after Russian President Vladimir Putin authorized a military operation in eastern Ukraine. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that the Nepal government is closely following the developments in Ukraine and has called on all concerned parties to exercise maximum restraint. Nepal views that the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity as enshrined in the UN Charter are sacrosanct and must be fully respected by all member states. Furthermore, the MoFA also condemned Russia's move to recognize the separatist movements in Ukraine.

<https://tkpo.st/3LRmlMt>

<https://tkpo.st/3JPbBfM>

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PAKISTAN: PAKISTAN KEEN TO FORGE 'LONG-TERM, MULTIDIMENSIONAL' TIES WITH RUSSIA; PAKISTAN PRIME MINISTER IMRAN KHAN ADVISED 'DEFT DIPLOMACY' DURING RUSSIA VISIT

Russian President Vladimir Putin met Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan in the Kremlin on 24 February in his first face-to-face talks since the start of a special Russian military operation in eastern Ukraine. The two leaders discussed the main aspects of bilateral cooperation and exchanged views on current regional topics, including developments in South Asia. Prime Minister Khan, who arrived in Russia on 23 February on a two-day visit, the first by a Pakistani premier in over two decades began his engagements in Moscow. During the meeting in the Kremlin, the leaders of the two

countries discussed the main aspects of bilateral cooperation and exchanged views on current regional topics, including developments in South Asia, said a brief statement issued by the Russian President's office. During the meeting, President Putin and Prime Minister Khan reviewed the entire gamut of bilateral relations, including economic and energy cooperation, particularly the Pakistan Stream gas pipeline.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2345291/pakistan-seeks-to-restore-russian-ties-to-pre-1979-era>

SRI LANKA: SRI LANKA FOREIGN MINISTER BRIEFS INDIA-BASED ENVOYS ON HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES AHEAD OF UNHRC SESSION

Sri Lanka has taken "substantial steps" with a view to "accountability, restorative justice and meaningful reconciliation" related to human rights and reconciliation in the country, Foreign Minister GL Peiris said on Tuesday, as he briefed India-based diplomats ahead of the 49th session of the UNHRC. Peiris addressed the 83 Heads of Mission accredited to Sri Lanka who are based in New Delhi through a virtual session and shared information on progress related to human rights and reconciliation, according to a Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry press release. The UN Human Rights Council session is scheduled from February 28 to April 1 in Geneva, with the dialogue on Sri Lanka scheduled on March 3. The Sri Lankan government has been accused of

human rights violations during the brutal three-decade civil war it fought against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Source:

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/sri-lanka-foreign-minister-briefs-india-based-envoys-on-human-rights-issues-ahead-of-unhrc-session/articleshow/89754840.cms>

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BANGLADESH ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE ORGANIZED A DAY LONG LESSONS LEARNED MEETING AND FACEBOOK LIVE DISCUSSION IN MYMENSINGH AND SYLHET

On 14th February 2022, BEI organized an half day-long Lessons Learned meeting in Mymensingh to present the survey findings, conducted by the trainees of the ongoing project titled 'Building Capacity of CSOs/NGOs and Media to Promote Accountability in Governance and Influence Elite Opinion'. Subsequent to their training in September 2021, the trainees were engaged in a participatory research named 'Accountability and Transparency Ensuring Good Governance during the COVID 19 pandemic: Stakeholders Perception' and developed a report based on the field research activity. Trainees of Mymensingh shared their knowledge, experiences and challenges faced during the project tenure while engaging with the local stakeholders. Fifty local stakeholders, which included government officials, elected representatives, members of civil society, non-profit organizations and media attended the meeting. The timely initiative of Bangladesh Enterprise Institute was widely applauded and featured by the local media with much importance.

Following the lesson learned meeting, a "Online Live Discussion" was held on 14th February 2022 with the participation of five selected trainees of Mymensingh. The program was live in the evening on "Angor TV" (a local IP TV)) to reach out to the wider audience of the local community. The trainees shared their opinions, suggestions and current situation of the Right of Information (RTI) act, National Integrity Strategy (NIS) and Annual Performance Agreement (APA). Amb. Humayun Kabir also joined the online session to share his opinion on the project outcomes and answered a few questions that came through the live program at that time, answered a few questions that came through the live program at that time and highlighted the key achievements of this project to the audience.

The Live program link is also shared here:
Angor TV - https://fb.watch/bq-vUy_p71/



Image: A glimpse of the Lessons-Learned Meeting in Mymensingh on 14 February 2022

Image: Participants posed for a photo during the Online Meeting (live) on Angor TV in Mymensingh of 14 February 2022

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- Myanmar: Myanmar impasse challenges ASEAN; EU adds more Myanmar companies, regime officials to sanctions list
- Maldives: Rear Admiral Azad new Bangladesh envoy to Maldives
- Nepal: a \$500m us grant has triggered political storm in Nepal; Nepal opposed use of force against any sovereign country; government on Russia-Ukraine crisis
- Pakistan: Pakistan keen to forge 'long-term, multidimensional' ties with Russia; Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan advised 'deft diplomacy' during Russia visit
- Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka foreign minister briefs India-based envoys on human rights issues ahead of UNHRC session
- BEI Activities

On 17th February 2022, BEI organized another half day-long Lessons Learned meeting in Sylhet to present the survey findings, conducted by the trainees of the ongoing project titled 'Building Capacity of CSOs/NGOs and Media to Promote Accountability in Governance and Influence Elite Opinion'. Subsequent to their training in September 2021, the trainees were engaged in a participatory research named 'Accountability and Transparency Ensuring Good Governance during the COVID 19 pandemic: Stakeholders Perception' and developed a report based on the field research activity. Trainees of Mymensingh shared their knowledge, experiences and challenges faced during the project tenure while engaging with the local stakeholders.

Forty two local stakeholders, which included government officials, elected representatives, members of civil society, non-profit organizations and media attended the meeting. The timely initiative of Bangladesh Enterprise Institute was widely applauded and featured by the local media with much importance.

Following the lesson learned meeting, an "Online Live Discussion" was held in the evening on 17th February 2022 with the participation of five selected trainees of Sylhet. The program was live in the evening on "Banglaview TV" (a local IP TV) and another top ranking online community platform "Voice of Sylhet" to reach out to the wider audience of the local community. The trainees shared their opinions, suggestions and current situation of the Right of Information (RTI) act, National Integrity Strategy (NIS) and Annual Performance Agreement (APA). Amb. Humayun Kabir also joined the online session to share his opinion on the project outcomes, answered a few questions that came through the live program at that time and highlighted the key achievements of this project to the audience.

The Live program links are also shared here:

Banglaview TV- https://fb.watch/bq-MJ_rfRY/

Voice of Sylhet- <https://fb.watch/bq-pb2nQrT/>



Image: A glimpse of the Lessons-Learned Meeting in Sylhet on 17 February 2022

Image: Participants posed for a photo during the Online Meeting (live) on "Banglaview TV" and "Voice of Sylhet in Sylhet in the evening of 17 February 2022

BEI ACTIVITIES

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BANGLADESH ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE ORGANIZED ONE ROUNDTABLE AND ONE FGD IN RANGPUR AND GAIBANDHA

Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI) in collaboration with Global Center on Cooperative Security (GCCS), is implementing a project titled 'Developing National Action Plan for Preventing Violent Extremism'. As part of the project, BEI organized two roundtable meeting to solicit views from the participants for developing a set of recommendations for the development of National Action Plan on 23rd and 24th February 2022 at BRAC Learning Center, Rangpur and Sadullahpur, Gaibandha respectively where 30 and 20 participants attended in each meeting. Representatives from civil society, private sector, religious leaders and local NGO were invited to the program. The FGD was conducted among the local elected representatives.



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 Companies, Bangladesh, under the Societies Registration Act.

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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