

BANGLADESH ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE (BEI)

A Brief Highlights on Contemporary Issues of South Asia

Date: April 30, 2021 – May 06, 2021

MYANMAR: NATIONAL UNION GOVERNMENT & UN SECURITY COUNCIL CONCERNS ON THE ASEAN-JUNTA CONSENSUS

The consensus made between ASEAN and the Junta leaders during last week to end the domestic turmoil in Myanmar has earned mixed views from various quarters, including the UN Security Council. The National Union Government (NUG), the coalition of pro-democratic forces in Myanmar, was very skeptical about this development which, in their view, had impeded their voice to be heard. Highlighting that the Military regime is the only perpetrator causing violence in the country, the NUG cast a doubt on the implementation of the consensus since it is not bound by any timeline. NUG denies dialogue until political prisoners are freed. The citizens and domestic media of Myanmar are also of the same view - that the consensus has failed to reflect the desire of the pro-democratic forces. However, the UN Security Council has called for immediate implementation of the consensus to cease violence, pave the way for peaceful discussions and provide sustainable solutions to resolve the political turmoil in the country. The council also requested that a special envoy is appointed by ASEAN to address the current crisis. Meanwhile, the ground situations has worsened throughout the country since the military takeover on 1 February. Local media reports had confirmed that a helicopter had been shot down at Moemaik in Kachin province by an ethnic rebel group and a junta-appointed official had been killed in the Tharketa district.

Source-

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmars-national-unity-government-disappointed-asean-consensus.html>

<https://www.thedailystar.net/world/news/no-dialogue-until-all-prisoners-are-freed-2085697>

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/25/scant-support-for-in-myanmar-asean-deal-with-military-coup-leader>

SRILANKA: SRILANKA MOVES TO BAN THE BURQA

The Sri Lankan Cabinet has recently imposed a ban on the burqa (outer veil worn by Muslim women) which is awaiting a debate at the legislature of the country. Public Security Minister, Sarath Weerasekar, termed the burqa as a sign of religious extremism and a threat to national security. The proposal has been widely criticized as it is being viewed as targeting and stigmatizing a minority group that constitutes only ten percent of the population. Reports published in various media outlets revealed that this burqa ban had raised concerns among Muslims of the country who viewed the law as an attack and deliberate attempt to demonize a particular community. The ban has aroused further suspicion as the decision has been taken at a time when the government has been urging all citizens to wear face masks due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Source-

<https://today.thefinancialexpress.com.bd/public/world/sri-lanka-moves-to-ban-face-veils-for-muslim-women-1619712977>

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/28/sri-lanka-cabinet-approves-proposed-ban-on-burqas-in-public>

AFGHANISTAN: PULLOUT OF US and NATO Forces FROM AFGHANISTAN: WARNING FROM THE TALIBAN

The Taliban has threatened US and NATO forces that it would resume targeting them in Afghanistan if they fail to withdraw all its troops by 1 May 2021, as per the agreement signed in Qatar with the Taliban. According to the agreement, the US is supposed to completely withdraw all of its troops from Afghanistan within six weeks. However, the White House has announced that the drawdown of troops would begin on 1 May and would be completed by September 11 this year. President Joe Biden has set May 1 as the official start of the withdrawal of the remaining forces — about 2,500-3,500 U.S. troops and about 7,000 NATO soldiers. To date, the U.S. and NATO have received no assurance from the Taliban that they will not attack troops during the pullout. However, the US will continue its diplomatic presence in Afghanistan after the military pullout, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on May 04, 2021.

Source-

<http://www.afghanistantimes.af/taliban-warns-of-attack-on-foreign-troops-as-withdrawal-deadline-violated/?fbclid=IwAR30xbB9MuW67KOJ36PgYKiiXv8GCfGLoXidDtULS-NYweA7GxKWmBU>



|| WEEKLY NEWS HIGHLIGHTS ||

AFGHANISTAN: DEADLY ATTACKS SURGE AS U.S. TROOPS PREPARE TO LEAVE
AFGHANISTAN: UNSC EXPRESSED DEEP CONCERNS

AS U.S. forces have been preparing to leave Afghanistan after two decades, attacks by the Taliban and other militant groups surged by 37% in the first quarter of 2021 compared to the same period last year, according to a report citing both U.S. forces and the United Nations. A spokesman for the Interior Ministry, Tariq Arian, said the Taliban had carried out at least six suicide bombings and planted 65 roadside bombs to target government troops in Afghanistan. He added that more than 60 civilians had been killed and 180 injured. Afghan security forces have been facing a resurgent Taliban which is responsible for launching attacks in various parts of the country. In a recent incident, Afghanistan's security forces fought back a Taliban offensive in southern Helmand province. Terrorist attacks also took place in Pul-e-Alam in the Logar Province during the month of Ramadan, which killed 24, mostly high school students, and wounded 110 others. The students, mostly killed during this attack, had come to Pul-e-Alam to attend university entrance exams. The United Nations Security Council expressed its deep concerns over increasing civilian casualties, the high level of violence, and the overall security situation in Afghanistan.

Source:

<https://www.dhakatribune.com/world/south-asia/2021/04/30/hundreds-die-in-surge-of-violence-in-afghanistan>

<http://www.afghanistantimes.af/106-militants-including-22-al-qaeda-linked-terrorists-killed-in-helmand-clashes/>

<http://www.afghanistantimes.af/unsc-condemns-afghan-civilian-causalities/>

NEPAL: NEPAL PRIME MINISTER SEEKING VOTE OF CONFIDENCE IN PARLIAMENT ON MAY 10; MAOIST CENTRE WITHDRAWING SUPPORT TO GOVERNMENT

Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli has sought a no-confidence motion on 10 May from the House of Representatives as the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) decided to withdraw its support to the KP Sharma Oli's government. Maoist Centre spokesperson Mr. Narayan Kaji Shrestha said that the members of the Standing Committee of the party had decided to withdraw their support. The decision has led the government to seek a vote of confidence in the House.

The government believes it will win the vote of confidence. However, if it fails to do so, steps will be taken to form a coalition government. The vote of confidence can be viewed as a litmus test for the ruling party due to the political developments in the provinces and the rise in COVID-19 cases throughout the country.

Source:

<https://kathmandupost.com/politics/2021/05/02/prime-minister-oli-says-he-will-look-for-vote-of-confidence-in-parliament-on-may-10>

<https://kathmandupost.com/politics/2021/05/04/maoist-centre-decides-to-withdraw-support-to-government>

PAKISTAN: IMRAN KHAN COMMITS TO IMPLEMENT CHINA-PAKISTAN ECONOMIC CORRIDOR PROJECTS (CPEC)

Prime Minister Imran Khan has expressed his determination to complete all projects that have been designed under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). In a meeting to review progress on the CPEC projects, PM Khan expressed his satisfaction over the pace of the ongoing projects and remarked that the projects would be completed "at all costs." The PM emphasized that the focus of industrialization should be export-oriented and policies should be framed accordingly. Media reports in Pakistan stated that the current government not only completed the ongoing projects started by the previous government but also undertook initiatives for other important projects during the past two-and-a-half years. The premier gave instructions to prepare youth to take on new jobs as a result of new industries and high-quality agriculture farms.

Source:

<https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/world/imran-khan-vows-to-implement-china-pakistan-economic-corridor-projects-1619880473>



|| WEEKLY NEWS HIGHLIGHTS ||

INDIA- WEST BENGAL ELECTION: MAMATA BANERJEE GOT LANDSLIDE VICTORY AND SWORN IN AS CM FOR 3RD CONSECUTIVE TERM

Mamata Banerjee was sworn in as the Chief Minister of West Bengal Chief for the third consecutive term on 5 May after a landslide victory in the West Bengal Assembly election. Mamata Banerjee told in her first appearance to people after her gigantic victory that Bengal saved the country and a result rescued the people of India. She also told that the result would be a milestone to defeat BJP in the 2024 National Election. Experts remarked that the result of the West Bengal election may influence the outcome of other Assembly Elections in other Indian states during the National Election that is due to take place in 2024.

On May 2, the election results of five states - West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Assam, and Puducherry - were released. Out of 292 seats in West Bengal, TMC won a total of 213 seats, BJP secured 77 seats, and the remaining two seats were equally divided between ISF and other parties. In Tamil Nadu, the DMK party along with the Left-leaning LDF party in Kerala. The BJP managed to retain power in Assam and won the polls in Puducherry. Experts said that the Bengal result will give a new life to anti - BJP politics but the opposition needs to provide greater clarity about their intent.

Source-

<https://www.dhakatribune.com/world/south-asia/2021/05/05/mamata-banerjee-sworn-in-as-west-bengal-chief-minister-for-third-consecutive-term>

<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/west-bengal-assembly-elections-2021-how-didi-won-personality-battle-7299723/>

BANGLADESH: VACCINE ISSUE AND COVID EFFECT: PRIME MINISTER SHEIKH HASINA ASSURES OF MASS VACCINATION AT ANY COST; 2.45 CRORE NEW POOR CREATED, STUDY SAYS

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Sunday said that government would procure vaccines at any cost to protect the lives of the citizens from the scourge of coronavirus. Similarly, Health Minister said on Monday that five lakh doses of the Covid 19 vaccine from China would reach Bangladesh by May 10. The government of Bangladesh has already approved the emergency use of the Sinopharm vaccine of China last week.

According to a recent survey conducted by PPRC and BIGD, the Covid-19 pandemic has pushed 14.75 percent of the country's population into poverty in the past year, and around 27.5 million have now emerged as a new poor during this pandemic. It also indicated that compared to the rural poor, urban poor have had to endure more miserable conditions. Another survey undertaken by BRAC revealed that nearly 48 percent of returnees who returned home last year had been dependent on loans and relative support in the absence of their regular source of income. About 98 percent of such returnees are now victims of severe anxiety, depression, and psychological disorders. Despite this, expatriate Bangladeshis sent \$20,672 million during the first 10 months of the FY21 which is 39 percent higher than the same period last year. The country's foreign exchange reserves hit a new record of \$45.1 billion on Monday, May 3. This indicates an upward trend in remittance and lower import payments.

Source-

<https://www.thedailystar.net/business/news/forex-reserve-hits-451b-new-record-2087585>

<https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/economy/bangladesh/remittance-inflow-witnesses-39pc-growth-in-10-months-1619964146>

<https://en.prothomalo.com/business/half-of-returnee-migrants-still-unemployed-28pc-in-debt-after-a-year>

SOUTH ASIA: COVID-19 CRISIS AT A GLANCE

BANGLADESH has been witnessing a declining trend in Covid cases for the past few days. On May 5, 50 deaths and 1,741 infected cases were reported by the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS). In order to curb the Covid-19 transmission Bangladesh extended the ongoing nationwide lockdown until May 16. This year's lockdown was initiated on April 5.

NEPAL recently records the highest single-day death toll and new cases after the COVID-19 surge. The Prime minister has appealed to the international community to urgently supply Nepal with vaccines as Covid-19 infections have sharply risen. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the country has recorded over 8,000 new infections, with 41 percent of total tests returning positive results, as of May 05.

INDIA reported a record of 3,780 death, the highest daily figure since the pandemic began, with around 3.82 lakh CV-19 cases on May 5. India's Supreme Court advised the central government as well as state governments to impose lockdowns to curb the transmission of fast-rising cases.

PAKISTAN's Minister for Information and Broadcasting Mr. Fawad Chaudhry state that Covid SOPs were not being properly implemented in Karachi, the whole country would soon be affected.

AFGHANISTAN fears the deepening of the COVID-19 crisis in recent weeks as the Public Health Ministry of Afghanistan has recorded an upward trend in COVID-19 cases, including the British variant of the COVID-19 virus.

SRILANKA reported 50% more COVID-19 cases and blamed the spike on the UK variant of the Coronavirus. The government imposed tough guidelines to prevent infections. The country received its first consignment of 15,000 doses of Russia's Sputnik V vaccine out of a total order of 13 million doses.

MALDIVES imposed a 7-hour curfew in the capital as infection rates rose and the number of deaths climbed to 75. The government directed educational institutes, offices, parks to be closed.

MYANMAR's healthcare workers of 70 medical units went strike to express their solidarity with pro-democracy protestors. Medics stated that they would not cooperate with a regime that perpetuates violence. These developments have caused much uncertainty regarding Myanmar's Covid response and vaccination program.



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BEI WATCH ||

Ongoing Project Activities

THE ASIA FOUNDATION PROJECT

Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI) in association with The Asia Foundation has been implementing a project entitled, “Building Capacity of CSOs/NGOs and Media to Promote Accountability in Governance and Influence Elite Opinion” to enhance the capacity of the civil society and media participation in improving public sector accountability and transparency for strengthening the governance system. Six divisions - Rajshahi, Khulna, Mymensingh, Sylhet, Dhaka and Chattogram - have been selected to undertake this project. Two inception meetings and training programs were arranged in two project locations - Khulna and Rajshahi during January - March 2021. Both the programs were organized following strict health guidelines and directives from the government.

SOUTH ASIA GRANT PROGRAM (SAGP) NETWORKING EVENT

Under the invention associated with the Asia Foundation, BEI participated in the “SAGP Networking Event”, organized by South Asia Grant Program Team Sri Lanka for the four partnering countries (Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh) on April 27, 2021. The objective of the event was to share and discuss the activities of each organization. Ambassador M. Humayun Kabir, President, BEI, shared his views, experience and understanding of contemporary issues during two breakout sessions of the networking event. Over 100 participants from the partnering countries participated in the meeting where the BEI project team also discussed the current state of project implementation, civic space, impact of COVID-19 on work, and suggested creative and innovative responses to this global pandemic to move forward with project activities in Bangladesh. This networking event has created a positive impression among partner organizations and pushed everyone to work for the betterment of society.

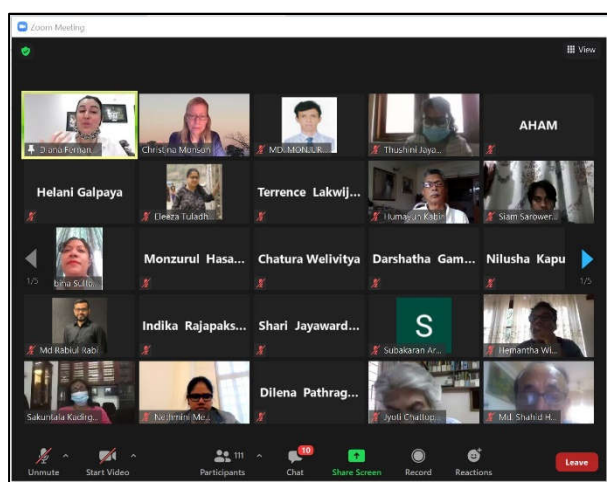


Image 01: Online Meeting of SAGP project team of The Asia Foundation and Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI)

QUARTERLY PROGRESS SHARING MEETING WITH SAGP PROJECT TEAM OF THE ASIA FOUNDATION

A quarterly progress meeting on the current project status was held virtually with the SAGP project team of Asia Foundation and Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI) on May 04, 2021. BEI President Ambassador M. Humayun Kabir, along with BEI project staff participated in the online meeting. The objective of the meeting was to discuss the overall work plan for the April-June quarter, generate few ideas on how to utilize the lockdown time effectively to implement programme activities amid the COVID-19 pandemic. BEI shared updates on the field research activity to be undertaken by the 20 selected CSOs/NGOs and Media outlets in the divisions of Rajshahi and Khulna. BEI also provided suggestions about future programming and some alternatives if the country's pandemic situation was to worsen. Ambassador Kabir welcomed the initiative to learn the status of partners and their shared experiences on recent project activities amidst the pandemic. The SAGP team affirmed their full support regarding project activities and looked forward to extending their cooperation as and when required

