

|| WEEKLY NEWS HIGHLIGHTS ||

BANGLADESH ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE (BEI)

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

|| September 10, 2021 – September 16, 2021 ||

SOUTH ASIA: COVID-19 CRISIS: AT A GLANCE

Afghanistan has reported a total of 154,532 coronavirus cases on 16 September 2021 since the beginning of the pandemic. The countrywide death toll has reached 7,195 to date.

Bangladesh has recorded 51 death toll and 1862 new cases of coronavirus on 17 September, 2021. The total caseload becomes 1,538,203 and the total death toll reached 27,109 till September 17, 2021. Bangladesh has administered a total of 35,861,843 doses which covered the country's total 8.77% population. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on 15 September 2021, has told the parliament that the government plans to gradually bring students aged 12 and above under the Covid vaccination coverage.

Bhutan has reported no new cases and no death toll on 17 September 2021, as the country reported a total of 3 death tolls due to Covid- 19. In Bhutan, 2,596 cases of coronavirus have been identified till September 17, 2021. 62.76% of Bhutanese got vaccinated as of September 17, 2021.

India has reported 320 death and 34,403 fresh cases due to coronavirus as of September 17, 2021. The country's total cases becomes 33,381,728 and the total death toll reached 444,248. 13.80% of Indians have been vaccinated till September 17, 2021.

The Maldives has reported 83,248 active cases and 227 deaths as of September 18, 2021. 61.43 percent of the population is vaccinated to date.

Myanmar has reported 440,741 active cases and 16869 deaths as of September 18, 2021.

Nepal has reported 1,086 new coronavirus cases on September 16, 2021, taking the nationwide infection tally to 783,075. The countrywide death toll has reached 11,012. The number of active cases stands at 25,497.

Pakistan has reported 3,012 new cases of coronavirus on 16 September 2021, taking the tally for confirmed cases to 1,215,821. Total 66 deaths have been reported taking the tally of death cases to 27,004 since the beginning of the pandemic.

Sri Lanka has reported 498,694 active cases and 11817 deaths as of September 18, 2021. 49.60 percent of the population is vaccinated. President declared to start inculcating children of fifteen years.

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

Source: *John Hopkins University*

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BUSINESS AND INVESTMENT: BANGLADESH, AUSTRALIA INK TRADE AND INVESTMENT FRAMEWORK (TIFA); BANGLADESH CAN SIGN FTA WITH SOUTH KOREA AFTER LDC GRADUATION: SOUTH KOREAN AMBASSADOR TO BANGLADESH SAID

Bangladesh and Australia on September 15, 2021, have inked a framework on trade and investment (TIFA) to enhance economic cooperation between the two countries. Commerce Minister Mr. Tipu Munshi and Australian Minister for Trade, Tourism, and Investment Mr. Dan Tehan have virtually signed the agreement which is expected to provide a platform for institutionalized economic interaction and to open newer opportunities for trade and investment between the two countries. In this regard, a joint working group will be formed under the TIFA agreement comprising of representation from relevant sectors and sub-sectors from both countries. At the agreement signing, Commerce Minister hoped that the TIFA would create a conducive atmosphere for greater trade and flow of investment. Australian Trade Minister said that Australia is working to energize and expand the trade and investment relationship between the two respective countries to support jobs and business opportunities in both countries.

In the meantime, South Korean ambassador to Bangladesh H. E. Lee Jang-Keun on September 9, 2021, suggested Bangladesh explore free trade agreement (FTA) with his country after LDC graduation. South Korea already has FTAs with around 70 countries, including China, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and Europe. However, Bangladesh and Korea have close trade ties.

Sources: <https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/trade/bd-australia-ink-trade-and-investment-framework-1631705853>
<https://en.prothomalo.com/business/local/bangladesh-can-sign-fta-with-south-korea-after-ldc-graduation-envoy>

BANGLADESH INTERNATIONAL INVESTMENT SUMMIT TO BE HELD ON NOVEMBER 28-29, 2021

The Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA), in association with the International Finance Corporation (IFC), will host the Bangladesh International Investment Summit (BIIS) 2021 on 28-29 November at Radisson Blue Dhaka Water Garden. The objective is to promote Bangladesh as attractive trading and FDI destination to global businesses, to extend global integration on trade and investment into new global reality, and to secure investment in diverse priority and emerging industries for mutual benefits. The BIIS 2021 will promote opportunities in high-growth thrust sectors by hosting both in-person and virtual participants. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will extend its all-out support to successfully host the week-long summit and representatives from Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong, China, the Netherlands, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), India, Turkey, Thailand, Malaysia, the United States, and the United Kingdom to be invited to the summit. At least 1,000 investors from different target countries, local policymakers, and investors are expected to participate in the conference.

Source: <https://www.tbsnews.net/economy/bangladesh-international-investment-summit-be-held-28-29-november-301279>

AFGHANISTAN: TALIBAN'S ACTING FOREIGN MINISTER URGED INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO RESUME AID FOR A LOOMING ECONOMIC CRISIS; CHINESE PRESIDENT SAID SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION SHOULD GUIDE AFGHANISTAN TO DEVELOP AN INCLUSIVE POLITICAL STRUCTURE; TALIBAN BROKE PROMISES ON RIGHTS: OUTGOING AFGHAN ENVOY TO UN; "EU HAS NO CHOICE BUT TO ENGAGE WITH TALIBAN", SAID FOREIGN POLICY CHIEF

Afghanistan's acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi said on September 14, 2021, that the group would not allow "any country" to impose sanctions or embargoes on Afghanistan. No government has yet agreed to formally recognize the Taliban-led administration in Kabul, which could further imperil the Afghan economy, which has been highly dependent on foreign aid for the last 20 years. According to the World Bank, foreign aid makes up some 40 percent of Afghanistan's gross domestic product. Muttaqi said the government was willing to work with any country, including the US, but said it will not be "dictated to" by any state. Last week, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said France "refuses to recognize or have any type of relationship" with a Taliban-led government in Afghanistan. Muttaqi urged countries around the world to open formal relations with the Taliban-led government, citing an end to the war in the country. "Security is being maintained across the country," he said and stressed that Afghanistan was open for foreign investment. Muttaqi also said the government would not allow Afghanistan to be used as a base for armed groups to launch attacks on other countries.

China's President Xi Jinping said the member nations of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) should help drive a smooth transition in Afghanistan. SCO member states should guide Afghanistan to develop an inclusive political structure and follow moderate internal and external policies, Xi said. Mr. Xi was addressing a meeting of the heads of state of the SCO in Tajikistan virtually. Xi

urged "relevant parties" in Afghanistan to eradicate "terrorism" and promised to provide more help to the war-torn nation, state news agency Xinhua said. Afghanistan should be guided to be more open and inclusive, and pursue moderate domestic and foreign policies, Xi said.

The Taliban has already broken its promises to safeguard women and protect human rights, and the international community must hold it to account, said the outgoing government's ambassador to the United Nations. "The Taliban have vowed to respect women's rights but women's rights are disappearing from the landscape," Nasir Ahmad Andisha, who remains accredited at UN bodies despite the collapse of the government he represents, told the Human Rights Council in Geneva on September 14, 2021.

The EU has no choice but to engage with the Taliban government in Afghanistan and will maintain a diplomatic presence in Kabul, the union's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, has said. In a speech in the European parliament, the EU's high representative for foreign affairs said the bloc could only influence future developments by engaging with the new regime.

Sources: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/17/chinas-xi-sco-states-should-help-drive-smooth-afghan-transition>

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/14/afghanistans-amir-khan-muttaqi-addresses-the-media>

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AFGHANISTAN: 10 MILLION AFGHAN CHILDREN NEED IMMEDIATE HELP- UNICEF; DONORS PLEDGED OVER \$1 BILLION IN AFGHANISTAN AID AS UN CHIEF URGES TALIBAN

The United Nations Child Fund (UNICEF) reported around 10 million children in Afghanistan need humanitarian assistance to survive, saying a lack of access to sufficient food, medicine, and drinking water are the challenges that Afghan children face. According to UNICEF, due to a lack of access to basic needs, many children are so malnourished they must lie in hospital beds. UNICEF said if the current situation continues, one million children under 5 in Afghanistan will suffer from severe acute malnutrition.

Donors pledged more than a billion dollars to help Afghanistan at a conference in Geneva on September 1, 2021. Poverty and hunger have spiraled and foreign aid has dried up since August 15, 2021, a desperate situation that

means the international community must engage with the Taliban to help the needy, according to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. After decades of war and suffering, Afghans are facing "perhaps their most perilous hour", Guterres said in his opening remarks to the Geneva donor conference. The UN chief said food supplies could run out by the end of this month, and the World Food Programme said 14 million people were on the brink of starvation.

Sources: <https://apnews.com/article/united-nations-6f75e853745a8cf2f20115e2e53145fe>

BANGLADESH: PRIME MINISTER SHEIKH HASINA LEFT DHAKA FOR USA TO JOIN 76TH UNGA, VACCINE EQUITY, ROHINGYA CRISIS AND CLIMATE CHANGE ISSUES ARE TOP PRIORITY

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has left Dhaka for New York on September 17, 2021, to attend the 76th United Nations, General Assembly. The prime minister will stay in New York from 19 to 24 September. Apart from UNGA, she will attend several high-level events

there. At the UNGA address on 24 September, Prime Minister is expected to focus on the issues relating to equity in vaccine sharing, sustainable recovery, climate change, and the Rohingya crisis. She will also highlight Bangladesh's development journey, inclusive economic development, and the success of her

government in the health sector. Alongside, Bangladesh will host an event on the Rohingya issue titled "Rohingya crisis: Imperatives for a sustainable solution" where many countries and organizations are expected to join voluntarily. Prime Minister is scheduled to leave Washington for Dhaka on September 30 and will return home on October 1, 2021, after a short stopover in Finland.

Source: <https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/national/bangladesh-pm-hasina-leaves-dhaka-to-join-un-general-assembly-1631857748>

BANGLADESH: FOURTH BANGLADESH-UK STRATEGIC DIALOGUE HELD IN LONDON, UK SEES BANGLADESH AS 'CRITICAL STABILITY PROVIDER'

The United Kingdom in the fourth UK-Bangladesh strategic dialogue has recognized Bangladesh's role as a 'critical stability provider' in the region and its particular relevance in the context of the UK's integrated foreign, trade, development, and security policy review with a focus on the Indo-Pacific. The Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO) of the United Kingdom and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) of Bangladesh have held the fourth UK-Bangladesh Strategic Dialogue on September 9, 2021, in London, UK. The delegations of the two countries discussed political and diplomatic relations, global and regional issues, economic and development partnerships as well as security and defense

issues. FCDO permanent Under-Secretary Sir Philip Barton and Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Ambassador H. E. Masud Bin Momen led the sides respectively. Bangladesh thanked the UK for supporting in Covid vaccine and the UK congratulated Bangladesh on rolling out the nationwide vaccination. Both sides also agreed on the importance of free and fair elections, vibrant CSOs, freedom of expression and religion as well as on deepening cooperation. Bangladesh and the UK agreed to remain engaged on a durable solution to the Rohingya crisis, together with relevant regional and international actors.

Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/fourth-bangladesh-uk-strategic-dialogue>

INDIA: “CONCERN ABOUT INCLUSIVENESS IN AFGHANISTAN, INDIA WILL STAND BY AFGHANS AS IT DID IN PAST”: EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTER; “UN RESOLUTION 2593 SHOULD SHAPE WORLD’S RESPONSE TO AFGHANISTAN”: FOREIGN SECRETARY

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar while addressing in a virtual UN high-level meeting on the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan has said that India will stand by Afghans just as it did in the past. Noting that Afghanistan is passing through a critical and challenging phase, the Minister also urged the international community to come forward to help the war-torn country. Emphasizing the multilateral platform in building global consensus, he added that India’s relation with Afghanistan has always been guided by the principle based on people to people relations and this will continue to be the case. At the India, Australia minister-level 2+2 dialogue held on September 11, 2021, the external affairs minister expressed concern about the inclusiveness of the dispensation, treatment of women and minorities in Afghanistan. In the meantime, Foreign Secretary Mr. Harsh Vardhan Shringla on September 14, 2021 said that the world community’s approach towards

Afghanistan should be in line with UN Security Council resolution 2593, adopted during India’s presidency of the Security Council last month, which demands Afghan soil shouldn’t be used in any way for terrorism and seeks an inclusive and negotiated settlement to the crisis.

Sources: <https://m.economictimes.com/news/india/india-will-stand-by-afghans-as-it-did-in-past-external-affairs-minister-jaishankar/articleshow/86171479.cms>

https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/unscc-resolution-should-guide-world-s-response-to-afghan-crisis-india-121091401483_1.html

INDIA: INDIAN EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTER AND CHINESE FOREIGN MINISTER MET IN SCO MEETING IN DUSHANBE, DISCUSSED DISENGAGEMENT AT LAC

India and China have agreed that military and diplomatic officials from both sides will meet again and continue discussions to speedily resolve issues related to the withdrawal of military standoff on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) at eastern Ladakh. External Affairs Minister tweeted that the decision came out of the meeting between him and his Chinese counterpart Mr. Wang Yi on the eve of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Summit held at Dushanbe, Tajikistan. In the last meeting between the two leaders on 14 July this year, the Chinese Foreign Minister had said that India-China relations were at low ebb and both sides had agreed that prolongation of the existing situation was

not in the interest of either side. During the meeting, the external affairs minister emphasized early resolution of the remaining issues along the LAC abiding by bilateral agreements and protocols to restore peace and tranquility along the LAC.

Source: <https://www.news18.com/news/india/jaishankar-meets-his-chinese-counterpart-in-dushanbe-discusses-disengagement-in-border-areas-4214543.html>

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MALDIVES: MALDIVIAN FOREIGN MINISTER, ABDULLA SHAHID SWORN IN THE PRESIDENCY OF THE 76TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Maldivian Foreign Minister, Abdulla Shahid assumed the office of the 76th session of the United Nations General Assembly President on September 14, 2021. In his speech at the opening of the 76th Session of United Nations General Assembly, Shahid noted that he was elected to the UNGA based on his agenda the 'Presidency of Hope' and he believes that "this is what this moment in time calls for". Addressing the assembly he stated. "Let us dare to dream and let us dare, to hope, to embrace, the Presidency of Hope". Shahid expressed keen interest to work with the United Nations Secretary-

General Antonio Guterres, adding that he is well aware of his priorities of "Restoring Trust and Inspiring Hope". He then reiterates agendas his Presidency, which prioritizes five 'rays of hope' that is, recovering from COVID-19, rebuilding sustainably, responding to the needs of the planet, respecting the rights of all, and reforming the UN.

Sources:

<https://raajje.mv/106499>
<https://en.sun.mv/69108>

MYANMAR: UNGA PRESIDENT ELECT ATTENDED THE FIFTH WORLD CONFERENCE OF SPEAKERS OF PARLIAMENT DIPLOMATIC PACT BLOCKED STATE ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL FROM UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The United States and China have brokered an agreement that effectively blocked Myanmar's military rulers from addressing the United Nations General Assembly. The agreement states that the current serving UN ambassador to Myanmar, U Kyaw Moe Tun can neither support the National Unity Government nor denounce the military regime, State Administrative Council; rather he will maintain a low profile in the assembly. The decision would delay the effort of the military regime to press for U.N. membership and to be recognized as the legitimate government in Myanmar, until November of the current year. According to the Foreign Policy report, a nine-member

committee has informally endorsed the deal, which includes Russia, the European Union, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Sources:

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmars-un-ambassador-to-stay-on-un-sources.html>
<https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/09/13/myanmar-ung-general-assembly/>

MYANMAR: COMMUNIST PARTY OF CHINA INVITED NATIONAL LEAGUE FOR DEMOCRACY AT THE VIRTUAL MEETING OF ASIAN POLITICAL PARTIES

The Communist Party of China (CPC) invited National League for Democracy (NLD) to a virtual meeting titled "Political Parties' Cooperation in Joint Pursuit of Economic Development," which will bring together parties from across South and Southeast Asia. Besides National League for Democracy (NLD), its main military-backed rival the Union Solidarity and Development Party, and the Arakan National Party were also invited. Chinese Political analyst, Dr. Hla Kyaw Zaw opined that Beijing wants to convey the message to State Administrative Council that it does not want National Democracy League (NLD) to be disbanded

and that China wants stability in Myanmar because it is concerned about its interests in the country.

Sources:

<https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/china-09132021160956.html>
<https://www.irrawaddy.com/in-person/interview/why-beijing-backs-myanmar-junta-while-holding-out-olive-branch-to-nld.html>

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- Pakistan: Pakistan's PM Imran Khan and Russia's President Vladimir Putin hold talks 'focused on the need for peace and stability' in Afghanistan; "U.S. to reassess ties with Pakistan over Afghanistan future", US Secretary Of State; PM Imran Khan invited Tajik investors to Pakistan In SCO Summit
- Sri Lanka: International rights agencies raised concerns on the human rights situation in Sri Lanka

NEPAL: NEPAL FACES FINANCIAL STALEMATE AS BUDGET STUCK IN PARLIAMENT; A SHUTDOWN SITUATION AS NO SPENDING ALLOWED AND FURTHER DELAY COULD LEAD TO A CRISIS

Nepal is at the risk of facing a financial deadlock as its annual budget has failed to get approved by the parliament on September 14, 2021, due to the main opposition, the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist), obstructing proceedings. The new government tabled the replacement budget bill on July 18, 2021, and it had a deadline of 60 days for approval that expired on September 15, 2021, Gopal Nath Yogi, a secretary at the House of Representatives told. House speaker Agni Sapkota on September 14, 2021, allowed the finance minister to present the bill, resorting to using marshals

to contain the obstruction from the opposition. "As the replacement bill was not passed on time, the government expenditure will be stopped from September 15, 2021," Sharma told a press meet on September 14, 2021, immediately after the parliament sitting. As per the law, the bill to replace the budget ordinance must be passed by the parliament within 60 days of the parliament functioning. The house has now been adjourned till September 19, 2021.

Source:

<https://kathmandupost.com/politics/2021/09/14/house-obstructions-if->

PAKISTAN: PAKISTAN'S PM IMRAN KHAN, RUSSIA'S PRESIDENT VLADIMIR PUTIN HOLD TALKS 'FOCUSED ON THE NEED FOR PEACE AND STABILITY' IN AFGHANISTAN; PM IMRAN KHAN INVITED TAJIK INVESTORS TO PAKISTAN IN SCO SUMMIT

The leaders of Pakistan and Russia have held telephone conversations to "coordinate" their position on the situation in Afghanistan, statements from both governments were said on September 14, 2021, the statements said. The Pakistani statement on the meeting also said "close coordination and consultations between Pakistan and Russia on the evolving situation in Afghanistan were of crucial importance". The US is going to be looking at its ties with Pakistan in the coming weeks to formulate the role America wants Islamabad to play in the future of Afghanistan, Secretary of State Antony Blinken informed Congress. Prime Minister Imran Khan on September 16, 2021, invited the business community of Tajikistan in the 20th

Shanghai Cooperation Organization's (SCO's) Heads of State Summit in Dushanbe to invest in Pakistan, assuring them of facilitation by his government. After arriving in Dushanbe, the prime minister inaugurated the maiden meeting of the Pakistan-Tajikistan Business Forum, for which a group of Pakistani businessmen has also traveled to Tajikistan. The joint business forum will catalyze growing trade and investment relations and promote business-to-business contacts between the trading communities of both countries.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/afghanistan-cant-be-controlled-from-outside-pak-pm-khan-at-sco-summit/article36511623.ece>

SRI LANKA: INTERNATIONAL RIGHTS AGENCIES RAISED CONCERNS ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN SRI LANKA

The Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparations, and guarantees of non-recurrence, Fabian Salvioli told the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on September 15, 2021, stated that there is a lack of accountability and transparency which jeopardizes the transitional justice process in the country. The Human Rights Watch stated that the United Nations Human Rights Council should keep Sri Lanka under strict surveillance for worsening human rights situations and press for genuine improvements. The European Union also stressed the need for continued efforts for reconciliation, accountability, and human rights according to the Council resolution 46/1 and urged to amend the Prevention of Terrorism Act, bringing it in line with international norms and human rights

standards. Furthermore, European Union stated that fully empowered, resilient, and inclusive civil societies, as well as independent media, are crucial for democracy.

However, the Sri Lankan mission in Geneva said that the government is committed to implementing its commitments under human rights treaties that it is a party to, as well as the country's voluntary undertakings. And added that Sri Lanka had always complied with the UN-mandated human rights system and briefed on the progress of commitments undertaken, including the continuity of the existing reconciliation mechanisms.

Source: https://www.dailymirror.lk/latest_news/UN-expert-draws-bleak-picture-of-Sri-Lanka/342-220531

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.

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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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