

## || WEEKLY NEWS HIGHLIGHTS ||

### BANGLADESH ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE (BEI)

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

|| October 04, 2021 – October 10, 2021 ||

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

**Afghanistan** reported a total of 155,000 positive COVID-19 cases as of 8 October 2021 since the beginning of the pandemic. Total 7,221 deaths have been recorded till date.

**Bangladesh**, on 10 October 2021, recorded 20 deaths and 415 new COVID-19 cases. The total number of cases stands at 1,561,878 while total deaths us 27,674. Bangladesh has thus far administered a total of 53,280,648 vaccine doses, totaling 10.86% of the population.

**Bhutan** reported no new cases and 3 deaths as of 10 October 2021; a total of 2,613 cases have been registered till the date, while 65.30% of Bhutan's population has been vaccinated.

**India** reported a total of 33,935,309 cases and 450,375 deaths as of 10 October 2021, 19.03% of Indians have been vaccinated

The **Maldives** on October 10, 2021, reported 46 new COVID-19 cases taking the nationwide infection figure to 85,394, the country recorded 233 deaths, and 64.81% of the population is fully vaccinated. The government announced that it had decided to donate surplus vaccines to its neighboring countries of Bangladesh and Nepal.

**Myanmar** recorded 1,466 new cases taking the tally for confirmed cases to 475,885 and 18,068 deaths were reported as of 10 October 2021.

**Nepal** reported 715 new s cases taking the nationwide infection tally to 800,997. The countrywide death toll has reached 11,200. The numbers of positive cases were 15,614 as of 8 October 2021.

**Pakistan** recorded 912 new COVID-19 cases on October 8, 2021, taking the tally for confirmed cases to 1,256,233. A total of 26 fatalities were reported on 8 October 2021 taking the total death toll to 28,058 since the beginning of the pandemic.

**Sri Lanka** reported 524,937 active cases and 13,267 deaths as of 10 October 2021. 55.60% of the population is vaccinated.

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

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- Myanmar : Asean may bar the state administrative council of myanmar from the next summit
- Nepal : Nepali congress delegation on visit to India
- Pakistan : Prime Minister Imran Khan asked bill gates to consider humanitarian assistance for afghans; pandora papers revealed top names of Prime Minister's cabinet, Imran Khan pledged to 'investigate wrongdoing'
- Sri lanka : The European union monitoring team visited Sri lanka

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## WORLD BANK INCREASED BANGLADESH'S ECONOMIC GROWTH PROJECTION TO 6.4%; EXPERTS SUGGESTED FOR CREATING A SEPARATE MINISTRY TO UNLOCK FULL POTENTIALS OF BLUE ECONOMY

The World Bank in its update of latest South Asia Economic Focus titled 'Shifting Gears: Digitization and Services-Led Development' has predicted Bangladesh's economic growth retreat 6.4 per cent in the fiscal year 2021- 2022, which is 1.3 per cent more than its earlier prediction for the same time period. In June this year, World Bank projected country's economic growth rate at 5.1 per cent for the current fiscal year. The report stated that continued recovery in export and consumption will make the growth rate at 6.4 per cent in 2021-2022 fiscal years although the government set its growth target at 7.2 per cent.

In the meantime, experts working on the field of blue economy have suggested creating a separate ministry to unlock the full potential of blue economy ranging from the sustainable development of marine fisheries to sea and coastal tourism. They have suggested for a new ministry because existing Blue Economy Cell under the Energy and Mineral Resources Division has not been successful to harness the real potential of blue economy.

<https://www.thedailystar.net/business/economy/news/world-bank-raises-bangladeshs-growth-forecast-64-2192766>  
<https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/economy/bangladesh/experts-suggest-creating-a-separate-ministry-to-unlock-full-potentials-of-blue-economy-1633261686P>

## AFGHANISTAN : BRITISH SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR AFGHANISTAN VISITED KABUL, HELD TALKS WITH TALIBAN; QATAR CALLED TALIBAN MOVES ON GIRLS' EDUCATION 'VERY DISAPPOINTING'; G20 MUST SEND TALIBAN MESSAGE ON RECOGNITION PRICE: FRANCE'S PRESIDENT EMMANUEL MACRON

Simon Gass, Britain's special representative for Afghanistan held talks with senior Taliban officials including Deputy Prime Ministers Abdul Ghani Baradar and Abdul Salam Hanafi in Kabul on October 5, 2021, the first since foreign forces evacuated from Afghanistan. The two sides discussed how Britain can help Afghanistan battle terrorism and a deepening humanitarian crisis and provide safe passage for those who want to leave the country. Abdul Qahar Balkhi, the Taliban's foreign ministry spokesman, said the meeting focused on reviving diplomatic relations between both countries. Western governments have warned that the Taliban must form an "inclusive" government and respect women's rights if they are to be formally recognized.

Qatar's Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani said the Taliban's moves on girls' education in Afghanistan are "very disappointing" and "a step backwards", and called on the Taliban's leadership to look to Doha for how to run an Islamic system. In a joint press conference with High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, he was referring to, among other things, the Taliban's refusal to allow Afghan female secondary school students to resume their studies.

France's President Emmanuel Macron said the forthcoming G20 summit must send a clear message to the Taliban on the conditions for international recognition. In an interview on October 5, 2021, Macron said those conditions must include equality for women, access for foreign humanitarian operations and non-cooperation with Islamist terror groups.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/5/british-pms-envoy-holds-talks-with-taliban-in-afghanistan>  
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/30/qatar-taliban-afghanistan-eu-borrell>  
<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/macron-g20-must-send-taliban-clear-message-price-recognition-2021-10-05/>

## AFGHANISTAN : UNHCR CALLED TO IMPLEMENT SOLUTIONS TO CONTAIN AFGHAN CRISIS; PROVINCIAL HEALTHCARE CENTERS DECLINED ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE ACROSS THE COUNTRY, KABUL HOSPITALS OVER CROWDED

UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, who spoke at the 72nd session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Program, declared that some solutions need to be found to prevent an implosion of public services in Afghanistan. He said that "unconditional" humanitarian assistance must be mobilized in Afghanistan. In the meantime, internally displaced families have also raised their voices over the lack of humanitarian assistance and deteriorating living conditions in Kabul.

According to officials, the number of patients coming to Kabul's hospitals has increased after healthcare centers faced challenges in some provinces. The shortage of medicine and professional

staff are major challenges in Kabul city as well. At the same time, the World Health Organization (WHO) released an assessment and warned that Afghanistan's healthcare system is facing a crisis. The assessment says: "Only 17% of health facilities remain fully functional. Two thirds are experiencing stock-out of essential medicines. Without urgent action, they are at risk of closure." International organizations have repeatedly announced that Afghanistan's healthcare system is at risk of collapse. Some organizations like UNICEF have committed to continue aid to Afghanistan.

<https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-174903>  
<https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-174919>

## BANGLADESH : PRIME MINISTER SHEIKH HASINA URGED INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO PRESURIZE MYANMAR TO TAKE ROHINGYA BACK; ROHINGYA RELOCATION TO BHASAN CHAR: UN SET TO BE ON BOARD WITH GOVERNMENT'S PLAN

While addressing a press conference at her official residence Gano bhaban after her recent US visit, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on October 04, 2021 hoped that world community would continuously pressurize on Myanmar for the repatriation of Rohingyas as the issue was heavily discussed in the last United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). She also said the main focus of the recent UNGA was sustainable recovery from the pandemic, universal accessibility and availability of Covid vaccines, climate change, women's empowerment, equality and inclusion, racism, sustainable development goals and disarmament of nuclear weapons. In the meantime, the United Nations is going to get engaged government's initiative for Rohingya relocation to Bhasan Char as it has set to engage in humanitarian activities for Rohingyas there. Officials of the disaster

management and relief ministry said that the UNHCR and the Bangladesh government will sign a memorandum of understanding on UN involvement in the humanitarian activities shortly. According to the MoU, the UN will do the same humanitarian activities as it is doing in Cox's Bazar right now and UN's official engagement will be as early as possible. The decision from the UN came following an impasse of more than a year between the government and the UN regarding its technical assistance assessment of the housing facility for Rohingyas in the island.

<https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/global-pressure-on-myanmar-to-take-rohingya-back-to-continue-pm>  
<https://www.thedailystar.net/rohingya-influx/news/rohingya-relocation-bhasan-char-un-set-be-board-govts-plan-2192351>

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## INDIA : WEST BENGAL CHIEF MINISTER MAMATA BANERJEE WON BHABANIPUR BY POLL BY MASSIVE MARGIN

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Trinamool Congress leader Mamata Banerjee won the Bhabanipore bypoll on 30 September, securing 71.9% of the total votes cast. The bypoll slogan was 'B for Bhabanipore, B for Bharat' and support from non-Bengali voters played a key role in the election. Banerjee took oath as West Bengal chief minister on 5 May this year after her party's massive win in the Assembly elections. However, it was constitutional binding for her to get elected within six months to retain the post. In the last Assembly election, Trinamool Congress leader Sobhandeb Chattopadhyay had won Bhabanipore constituency and he was asked to step down from the seat so that Ms. Banerjee could contest from her old constituency.  
Bangladesh Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul

Momen congratulated Mamata Banerjee for her landslide victory in Bhabanipore bypoll. A foreign ministry press release stated that the Bangladesh foreign minister expressed hope that the relation between Bangladesh and West Bengal will be further strengthened for mutual prosperity and development.  
[https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/bhabanipur-bypoll-election-results-2021-live-vote-count-to-begin-in-must-win-by-election-for-mamata-121100300055\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/bhabanipur-bypoll-election-results-2021-live-vote-count-to-begin-in-must-win-by-election-for-mamata-121100300055_1.html)  
<https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/national/momen-congratulates-mamata-for-her-bypoll-win-1633338382>

## INDIA : EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTER AT US-INDIA STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP FORUM: INDIA, US AGREED ON ISSUES RELATING TO AFGHANISTAN CRISIS; INDIA, US REAFFIRMED COMMITMENT TO FREE, OPEN INDO-PACIFIC

While speaking virtually at the annual leadership summit of the US-India Strategic Partnership Forum (USISPF) on September 30, 2021, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has said that India was not taken into confidence on various aspects of the 2020 Doha deal signed by the US and the Taliban and the recent developments in Afghanistan will have very, very significant consequences for neighboring countries as well as for the world. He also said that India is concerned about the inclusiveness in Taliban government and Afghanistan's soil will not be used as a terrorist base. The Foreign Minister added that India is in no position to recognize Taliban government soon. Mr. Jaishankar also said that the Quad or Quadrilateral coalition comprising India, the US, Australia and Japan has not been created against any country and this alliance should not be seen as a negative initiative.

In the meantime, US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin described the recent visit of Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat to the Pentagon as historic and said they have reaffirmed their commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific. Indian Chief of Defence Staff's visit has been taken place week after the meeting between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Joe Biden at White House last month during which both leaders agreed to increase military-to-military cooperation between India and US.  
<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-us-on-same-page-on-many-issues-relating-to-afghanistan-jaishankar-7545415/>  
[https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/gen-rawat-s-us-visit-historic-says-us-def-sec-austin-101633286400739.html?utm\\_source=whatsapp](https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/gen-rawat-s-us-visit-historic-says-us-def-sec-austin-101633286400739.html?utm_source=whatsapp)

## MYANMAR : ASEAN MAY BAR THE STATE ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL OF MYANMAR FROM THE NEXT SUMMIT

The leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are contemplating excluding Myanmar from the upcoming summit to be held virtually from 26 to 28 October 2021. At a meeting on 4th October 2021, the ASEAN leaders expressed their disappointment over the reluctance of the State Administrative Council to comply with the five-point consensus and allow the meeting of ASEAN special envoy, Erywan Yusof with all the concerned parties in Myanmar. The military regime's spokesperson, Zaw Min Tun on 30 September 2021 stated that it would be difficult to allow the ASEAN envoy to meet with people facing trials. Malaysia's Foreign Minister, Saifuddin Abdullah told the lower house of the Malaysian Parliament that the country will consider holding talks with the shadow government, National Unity Government (NUG) if the military ruler fails to resolve the crisis in Myanmar.

<https://thediplomat.com/2021/10/myanmar-junta-could-be-excluded-from-asean-summit-malaysia/>  
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/4/asean-disappointed-with-myanmar-juntas-peace-commitment>  
<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/malaysia-to-talk-to-myanmars-parallel-govt-if-junta-fails-to-cooperate-with-asean.html>  
<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-junta-leader-could-be-excluded-from-asean-summit-malaysian-fm.html>  
<https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20211001-myanmar-junta-unlikely-to-grant-regional-envoy-meeting-with-suu-kyi-spokesman>

## NEPAL : NEPALI CONGRESS DELEGATION ON VISIT TO INDIA

A three-member delegation of the ruling Nepali Congress (NC) is on a four-day visit to India during which it is scheduled to call on External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and several leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party. The delegation is being led by former foreign minister and deputy general secretary of Nepali Congress Prakash Sharan Mahat. NC leaders Uday Shumsher Rana and Ajay Chaurasiya are accompanying him. The delegation arrived India on October 7, 2021 at the invitation of Vijay Chauthaiwale, the BJP's Foreign Affairs Department head. During the visit, the

Nepali Congress team is scheduled to call on Mr. Jaishankar, BJP President J.P. Nadda and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath among others.  
<https://kathmandupost.com/national/2021/10/06/deuba-sending-delegation-to-india-as-he-walks-diplomatic-tightrope>

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- Four more Products will receive cash incentives against export, says Bangladesh Bank
- Saudi Arabia keen to invest more in Bangladesh; Kuwait plans to build an oil refinery in Bangladesh
- Russia, China, Pakistan's envoys discussed inclusive government with caretaker cabinet of Afghanistan; U.S. President discussed on Afghanistan with UK, Australia's Prime Ministers in Washington; IMF suspended funds for Afghanistan; "economic sanctions on Afghanistan must end": Chinese foreign minister on G20 foreign ministers meeting
- Taliban asked to speak at UN General Assembly in New York; UAE provided 60 tons humanitarian aid to Kabul; un released USD 45 million to save Afghan health system from collapse
- Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina demanded 'universal, affordable' vaccine access to all at UNGA; Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina calls for global roadmap to achieve SDGs
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi to focus on counter-radicalization at UNGA to fight extremism; Prime Minister Modi met leading American CEOs to encourage them to invest in India
- India's exports to EU declined in the last 20 years
- President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih addressed the 76th United Nations General Assembly
- Nepal's Prime Minister expanded the cabinet, coalition partners disagreed on cabinet expansion
- Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan warned of a civil war if an inclusive government is not formed in Afghanistan; "stopping women from accessing education un-Islamic": Prime Minister Imran Khan; Pakistan's foreign minister stressed on provision of humanitarian assistance to Afghans
- President Gotabaya Rajapaksa addressed the 76th United Nations General Assembly

## PAKISTAN : PRIME MINISTER IMRAN KHAN ASKED BILL GATES TO CONSIDER HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE FOR AFGHANS; PANDORA PAPERS REVEALED TOP NAMES OF PRIME MINISTER'S CABINET, IMRAN KHAN PLEDGED TO 'INVESTIGATE WRONGDOING'

Prime Minister Imran Khan has urged Microsoft co-founder and billionaire philanthropist Bill Gates to consider providing humanitarian assistance to poverty-stricken people in Afghanistan. In a telephonic conversation on October 5, 2021, the Prime Minister highlighted that more than half the population in Afghanistan was living below the poverty line and in dire need of financial assistance. The two leaders shared their concerns regarding the health system in Afghanistan - the only other country in the world that is polio-endemic along with Pakistan, according to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan has said his government will investigate citizens linked to a massive leak on hidden global wealth. The Pandora Papers link hundreds of Pakistanis, including members of Prime Minister's cabinet, to wealth secretly moved through offshore companies. They rank

among history's biggest financial leaks, exposing dealings of global business and political figures. Mr. Imran Khan said he would take action if any wrongdoing was established. The secret assets were uncovered by a global investigation based on 12 million files leaked to the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), which has been working with more than 140 media organizations worldwide. According to Pakistani media reports, more than 700 people in the country were named in the papers, among them two members of the cabinet.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1650446/pm-imran-urges-bill-gates-to-provide-humanitarian-assistance-to-afghan-people>  
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/4/pandora-papers-wealth-pakistan-pm-imran-khan-allies-military>

## SRI LANKA : THE EUROPEAN UNION MONITORING TEAM VISITED SRI LANKA

A five-member monitoring team of the European Union visited Sri Lanka to review the implementation of 27 international conventions prerequisite to avail the Generalised System of Preferences Plus (GSP+) scheme. The delegation was led by Senior Adviser, Directorate-General for Trade of the European Commission Nikolaos Zaimis and Head of Division for South Asia of the European External Action Service (EEAS) Ioannis Giogkarakis-Argyropoulos met representatives of the government, including President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, Opposition Leader, chief of minority parties, members of civil society, and other relevant stakeholders during their stay from 27 September to 5 October 2021.

The monitoring mission focused on issues impacting human rights and the rule of law, reviewed drugs policy, environment and climate change, corruption including the status of the country's economic, social, cultural and labor rights. The delegation reiterated that the amendment of the controversial Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) was a

key commitment in readmitting Sri Lanka to the GSP+ scheme in 2017. The European Union Ambassador, Denis Chaibi stated that Sri Lanka needs to comply with the international agreements on human rights, labor conditions, protection of the environment and good governance for the privileged access to European Union markets and that the engagement will be the subject of regular reports to the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers.

[https://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking\\_news/EU-GSP-Monitoring-Mission-concludes-visit-to-Sri-Lanka/108-221856](https://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking_news/EU-GSP-Monitoring-Mission-concludes-visit-to-Sri-Lanka/108-221856)  
<https://www.outlookindia.com/newscroll/sri-lanka-must-reform-terror-law-to-keep-eu-trade-deal-statement/2173702>

## 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/>

## Contact Us

Phone :

+(88 02) 2222 62645  
+(88 02) 2222 92662  
+(88 02) 2222 96805  
+(88 02) 2222 92663

Fax : +(88 02) 2222 88583

Email : [bei@bol-online.com](mailto:bei@bol-online.com)

Address 1 :

Apt.: 2B, House: 2D, Road: 73-G, Gulshan 2, Dhaka-1212, Bangladesh

Address 2 :

Ground Floor, House No. 3/A, Road No. 84, Gulshan 2, Dhaka-1212, Bangladesh



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Institute**