

## || WEEKLY NEWS HIGHLIGHTS ||

### BANGLADESH ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE (BEI)

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

|| 05 November 2021 – 11 November 2021 ||

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

**Afghanistan** has recorded a total of 156,000 cases of coronavirus since the beginning of the pandemic. Total death cases reported 7,234 as of 12 November, 2021.

**Bangladesh** has reported 1 new death and 237 coronavirus cases on 12 November 2021 and has thus far recorded a total of 27,907 fatalities and 1,571,906 confirmed cases. Bangladesh has administered a total 82,592,588 Covid-19 vaccine doses, totaling 19.79% of the population.

**Bhutan** has reported no new cases or deaths as of 12 November 2021. A total of 2,623 cases have been registered until 12 November 2021, while 73.36% of Bhutan's population has been vaccinated.

**India** has reported 501 deaths and 12,516 new coronavirus cases bringing the total number of cases to 34,414,186, while the total number of deaths now stands at 462,690. 26.05% of Indian population has been vaccinated until 12 November 2021.

**Maldives** has reported 89,529 active cases and 247 deaths as of 13 November, 2021. 67.83% of the population is vaccinated. Health Ministry covered expense of covid patients worth 4 billion MVR till 21<sup>st</sup> October, 2021.

**Myanmar** has reported a total of 511,717 cases and 18, 899 deaths as of 13 November, 2021.

**Nepal** has reported 174 new coronavirus cases on 12 November, 2021. The countrywide death toll has reached to 11,438 since the beginning of the pandemic.

**Pakistan** has recorded a total of 515 new cases of coronavirus on 12 November, 2021. Total 11 fatalities were also recorded according to the reports on 12 November, 2021.

**Sri Lanka** has reported 548,784 active cases and 13,950 deaths as of 13 November, 2021. 62.40% of the population vaccinated. Experts opined that a fourth wave of pandemic may hit the country.

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

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## BUSINESS AND INVESTMENT:

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### **SEVEN-DAY BANGLADESH TRADE AND INVESTMENT SUMMIT 2021 BROUGHT PROMISE OF \$1.16 BILLION FOREIGN INVESTMENT; JAPAN'S SOFTBANK TO BUY 20% STAKES OF BKASH; HOME APPLIANCE MARKET WILL GROW AT AN AVERAGE ANNUAL RATE OF 17% OVER THE ONGOING DECADE**

Bangladesh Trade and Investment Summit 2021 has ended with \$1.16b investment potential from foreign companies. Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) President Rizwan Rahman on 1 November 2021 said at a press conference that they have received a promise of foreign investment worth \$1.16 billion. The press conference was arranged at the DCCI auditorium to disseminate the outcome report of the summit, jointly organized by the Ministry of Commerce and DCCI from 26 October to 1 November. The DCCI president also informed that 552 local and foreign companies from 38 countries attended the summit while 369 business to business (B2B) sessions have been taken place and 20 companies from 13 countries showed their interest to do joint ventures. 26 products have been identified as potential for export during the summit.

Meanwhile, a 20% stake of bKash, one of the largest mobile financial service providers in Bangladesh, is going to be bought by Japanese multinational conglomerate SoftBank Group Corporation. Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE)'s website posted the disclosure of BRAC Bank taking the decision in its board meeting on 10 November 2021. Greg Moon, managing partner at SoftBank Investment Advisers, said that broadening access to financial services can be critical to building a robust economy.

On another note, UCB Asset Management has estimated that the home appliance market is set to grow to \$10bn. Bangladesh's fast growing electronic appliances market has tripled to nearly \$2.4 billion in a decade which has helped to create a strong consumer base. Experts forecast an increased demand amid more investments by homegrown and foreign brands for a gradual localization of their production to benefit from the government policy of lesser taxes and duties to reduce unit prices. The market for televisions, refrigerators, washing machines and other home appliances would quadruple to an annual size of \$10 billion by 2030.

<https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/economy/bangladesh/trade-and-investment-summit-ends-with-116b-investment-potential-1635771786>

<https://www.thedailystar.net/business/news/japans-softbank-buy-20-stakes-bkash-2227261>

<https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/home-appliance-market-set-grow-10bn-324997>

## AFGHANISTAN : PAKISTAN HOSTED 'TROIKA PLUS' CONFERENCE ON AFGHANISTAN; THE TALIBAN GOVERNMENT APPOINTED NEW GOVERNORS IN 17 PROVINCES

Pakistan hosted a "Troika Plus" conference on 12 November, 2021, where the representatives of US, Russia and China discussed the current challenges in Afghanistan. A delegation of Afghanistan, led by acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi left Kabul for Islamabad on 11 November, 2021. Mr. Muttaqi met his Pakistani counterpart, but did not take part in the Troika Plus conference. Speaking at the meeting, Mr. Qureshi expressed concerns over the economic meltdown in Afghanistan, saying that the country's economic crisis could cause instability in the whole region and beyond. Mr. Qureshi suggested that the Troika plus "engagement" with the Afghan government would pave the ground for peace and stability as well as "sustainable economic development. "The Pakistani Foreign Minister also called for the release of Afghanistan's bank assets. According to Qureshi, the next round of the Troika Plus conference would be held in Beijing, where the delegation of Afghanistan would also be invited.

The Taliban Government in its latest

move has appointed 43 new people to government positions as governors, deputy governors and police chiefs in various provinces. The new appointments included 17 new provincial governors, 15 deputy provincial governors, 10 provincial police chiefs, and one security chief for Herat's five districts of Shindand area. Zabihullah Mujahid, spokesman of the Islamic Emirate, said the new appointments have been made based a decree from Mullah Hebatullah Akhundzada, the leader of the Taliban. The new governors have been appointed for the provinces of Badakhshan, Paktia, Kabul, Kunduz, Baghlan, Logar, Paktika, Bamyan, Uruzgan, Farah, SarePul, Jawzjan, Faryab, Maidan Wardak, Zabul, Nimroz and Ghazni.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/11/pakistans-hosts-us-china-russia-to-discuss-afghanistan>  
<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/south-asia/taliban-appoint-43-members-to-government-positions-in-afghanistan/articleshow/87591319.cms>

## BANGLADESH : PRIME MINISTER SHEIKH HASINA AND FRENCH PRESIDENT MACRON DISCUSSED INDO-PACIFIC SECURITY; PM HASINA FOR CHANGING TRADITIONAL LENS OF BANGLADESH-UK RELATIONS; MOBILE DATA SUBSCRIBERS ARE EXPECTED TO MORE THAN DOUBLE BY 2030

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and French President Emmanuel Macron discussed geopolitical and security issues in the Indo-Pacific region. A statement issued from Macron's office mentioned that France and Bangladesh shared the same vision for a free, open, peaceful, secure and inclusive Indo-Pacific region, based on international law and with shared prosperity for all. In September this year, Australia had cancelled a deal with France's Naval Group, opting instead to build at least 12 nuclear-powered submarines in a deal with the United States and Britain. A high-profile delegation of the French business organization MEDEF and French defense minister Florence Parly also met with Prime Minister Hasina.

During her visit to the United Kingdom, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has said that the time had come to change the traditional lens of Bangladesh-UK bilateral relations. She stated this while addressing the British Parliament on the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh's independence titled 'Bangladesh at 50: The Resilient Delta' on 10 November 2021. She also said that the engagement between the two countries should now draw on their cooperation in peacekeeping, counter-terrorism, maritime and aviation security. The vibrant British-Bangladeshi diaspora

must remain at the center of partnership of the two countries. She takes pride in the Bangladeshi diaspora as five women from the community are among the increased representation at Westminster. She also discussed the Rohingya issues and the threats bulging among the displaced community. Moreover, she discussed the economic development of Bangladesh and climate change issue.

Meanwhile, UCB Asset Management has reported that Bangladesh's telecom sector is expected to thrive in the current decade thanks to a change in lifestyle during the coronavirus pandemic, rural inclusion, massive usage of social media, diverse digital content, peoples' higher income level. Bangladesh Telecom Sector Outlook said that as a result, unique mobile data subscribers may go up to 11.8 crore from 4.7 crore by 2030.

<https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/foreign-affairs/2021/11/10/pm-hasina-french-president-macron-discuss-indo-pacific-security>

<https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/pm-hasina-for-changing-traditional-lens-of-bangladesh-uk-relations>

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## BHUTAN : BHUTAN CSO CALLS FOR ENABLING LEGISLATIVE ENVIRONMENT

On 20 November 2021, Nepal's Civil Society Organization (CSO) conveyed their discontent regarding the Civil Society Act 2007 in the CSO government meeting which will be addressed in the upcoming session of the national assembly. The CSO (Amendment) bill was adopted by the National Council in June this year. The CSO government meets aims to provide a ground where civil society stakeholders and the government can address issues that involve civil society's work boundary, challenges, and opportunities. CSO members raised their concern focusing on tax exemption point by point. The CSO Act 2007

of Bhutan allows tax exemptions from payment of customs duties or other taxes besides income tax, on a case-by-case basis, in accordance with regulations and procedures issued jointly by the Authority and the Department of Revenue and Customs. Bhutan Toilet Organization's founder and executive director, Passang Tshering, said although there is a tax exemption for CSO, there is no clarity. He added that the Act should specify the exemptions.

<https://kuenselonline.com/cso-calls-for-enabling-legislative-environment/>

## INDIA : DELHI DIALOGUE ON AFGHANISTAN CALLS FOR OPEN AND INCLUSIVE GOVERNMENT IN KABUL; INDIA TO WORK TOWARDS ZERO-EMISSION CARS BY 2040

India's National Security Adviser (NSA) Ajit Doval, along with NSAs and security chiefs of Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan pitched for cooperation to tackle radicalization, extremism, separatism and drug trafficking in Afghanistan, according to a declaration issued at the Delhi Regional Security Dialogue on Afghanistan on 10 November 2021. Although this was the first such meeting on Afghanistan convened by India, the dialogue was the continuation of a mechanism whereby Iran hosted two meets in 2018 and 2019. Pakistan and China were invited to the meeting but opted not to participate. NSA Doval stated that they all have been keenly watching the developments in Afghanistan, and these had important implications not only for the people of Afghanistan, but also for its neighbors and the region. Iran's Security Adviser Shamkhani referred to the challenges of terrorism and a refugee crisis and said that the solution comes only through the formation of an inclusive

government with the participation of all ethnic groups. They also expressed concern at the suffering of the Afghan people because of the security situation and they condemned terror attacks in Kunduz, Kandahar and Kabul. On another note, India has joined over 30 other countries in signing a declaration that promises to work towards ensuring that only zero-emission cars and vans are sold by the year 2040. However, India has only promised to work on the adoption of zero-emission vehicles, and is not a legally-binding commitment.

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/indialed-summit-on-afghanistan-focuses-on-terrorism-and-inclusive-government-101636537879929.html>

<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-to-work-towards-zero-emission-cars-by-2040-7617406/>

## MALDIVES : MALDIVES BANS IMPORT, MARKETING AND MANUFACTURING OF SINGLE USE PLASTICS

In line with his commitment to phase out single-use plastics in the Maldives by the year 2023, during November 2020 Maldivian President, Ibrahim Solih on 10th November 2021 ratified the second amendment to the Environment Protection and Preservation Act of Maldives. The law mandates the importing,

manufacturing and marketing of all goods classified on the list of Single-Use Plastics (SUPs) listed by the government to be prohibited.

<https://raajje.mv/index.php/109332>

## MYANMAR : THAILAND STRUGGLES WITH ILLEGAL MIGRANTS FROM MYANMAR

Thousands of desperate people from the war-torn country, Myanmar were flocking into Thailand in search of a better living. More than 2,800 migrant workers have been detained for illegal entry on 1st November, 2021. In response to such crisis Thai Prime Minister, Prayut Chan-o-cha has instructed the Labor Ministry to resolve the issue soon. Labor Minister, Suchart Chomklin stated that they were considering the proposals submitted by business operators and non-governmental organizations on labor provision. Moreover, the Interior Ministry on 5th November, 2021, issued a ministerial announcement allowing certain groups of migrant workers to register and work legally. Thai

authorities have taken stringent measures to arrest the human traffickers of illegal migrant workers from Myanmar and seize their properties.

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/thailand-struggles-with-myanmar-migrant-entry-dilemma.html>

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/thailand-cracks-down-on-trafficking-of-myanmar-other-workers.html>

## NEPAL : PRIME MINISTER SHER BAHADUR DEUBA HELD TALKS WITH INDIAN PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI IN GLASGOW

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba held talks with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the sidelines of the COP26 meet in Glasgow on **9 November, 2021**. The meeting was the first since Mr. Sher Bahadur Deuba was appointed by the Supreme Court of Nepal in an extraordinary judicial intervention in July 2021. The two leaders noted the cooperation between India and Nepal during the pandemic particularly through the supply of vaccines, medicines and medical equipment from India to Nepal as well as by ensuring the flow of goods across the borders. Nepal was part of the first group of countries to receive India's Covishield vaccine as part of New Delhi's vaccine diplomacy.

Mr. Modi had earlier spoken to Mr. Deuba in July, 2021 after the coalition government in Kathmandu had proved

its majority in the Nepalese Parliament. The meeting is being interpreted as a significant one as both sides are also in talks for exchange of high-level visits. Mr. Deuba had last month sent former Foreign Minister Prakash Sharan Mahat as his emissary to Delhi to reset ties between Delhi and Kathmandu.

<https://tkpo.st/3nVc1ro>

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## PAKISTAN : PAKISTAN COURT ASKED PRIME MINISTER IMRAN KHAN TO PROBE DEADLY SCHOOL ATTACK

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Pakistan's Supreme Court ordered Prime Minister Imran Khan to probe security lapses leading up to a deadly attack on a school by militants of a local Taliban affiliate seven years ago, even as his government holds peace talks with the militant group. In a rare move, the premier appeared before the court on **11 November, 2021** on the orders of a panel of justices headed by Chief Justice Gulzar Ahmed. Imran Khan was asked to explain his government's actions against officials involved in the school's security, information minister Fawad Chaudhry told reporters after the hearing. The

court gave Imran Khan four weeks to respond, he said.

<https://www.indiatoday.in/world/story/pakistan-supreme-court-grills-pm-imran-khan-2014-army-public-school-massacre-case-1875240-2021-11-10>

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## SRI LANKA : INDIA, SRI LANKA AND MALDIVES ENHANCE COOPERATION TO ENSURE MARITIME SECURITY

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India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives have taken major steps towards maritime security cooperation. The countries agreed to enhance intelligence sharing, conduct focused operations, cohere their assets and tackle common threats such as drug trafficking and terrorism in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

The decision was taken on the Goa Maritime Conclave-2021 held from 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> November 2021. The Indian Navy hosted Heads of Maritime forces of twelve countries comprising Bangladesh, Comoros, Indonesia, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Myanmar, Seychelles, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand. The conference was organized with an objective to foster a shared understanding of the emerging non-traditional threats in the maritime domain, to develop a common perspective and to build collective maritime competence.

<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1770089>  
<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-maldives-and-sri-lanka-to-share-intelligence-on-drug-trade-coordinate-action-against-trafficking/articleshow/87589961.cms>

## 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

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) held a three-day regional summit from 26 to 28 October 2021, without Myanmar, after the country's ruling junta refused to send veteran diplomat, Chan Aye as the nonpolitical representative to the meeting instead of its military leader, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing. The leaders of the Southeast Asian countries deplored Myanmar's nonattendance in the regional summit.

The President of United States, Joe Biden attended the summit virtually and expressed grave concerns about the crisis and violence in Myanmar. He then announced plans to provide funding of 102.7 million US dollar for the development of health, climate, economic and educational programs in the region and another fund of 40 million US dollars to help address the current COVID-19 pandemic and strengthen ASEAN's ability to prevent, detect and respond to future outbreaks of infectious diseases. Biden highlighted the importance of US-ASEAN cooperation and strategic partnership for a free and open Indo-Pacific, which had been the foundation for shared security and prosperity.

## 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



**BEI**

**Bangladesh Enterprise  
Institute**