

## || WEEKLY NEWS HIGHLIGHTS ||

### BANGLADESH ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE (BEI)

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

|| 03 December 2021 – 09 December 2021 ||

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

**Afghanistan** recorded a total of 156,000 cases of coronavirus since the beginning of the pandemic. Total death cases reported 7,234 as of 11 December.

**Bangladesh** reported no new death and 262 coronavirus cases on 10 December and has thus far recorded a total of 28,016 fatalities and 1,578,550 confirmed cases. Bangladesh has administered a total 106,575,146 Covid-19 vaccine doses, totaling 24.32% of the population.

**Bhutan** reported 6 new cases and no deaths as of 10 December. A total of 2,648 cases have been registered until 10 December, while 73.99% of Bhutan's population has been vaccinated.

**India** reported 624 deaths and 8,503 new coronavirus cases on 10 December bringing the total number of cases to 34,666,241 while the total number of deaths now stands at 474,111. Until 10 December, 36.02% of Indian population has been vaccinated.

**Maldives** reported 92,846 active cases and 256 deaths as of 11th December, 2021. 68.75% of the population is vaccinated.

**Myanmar** reported a total of 526,024 cases and 19,170 deaths as of 11th December.

**Nepal** on 11 December reported 363 new coronavirus cases taking the nationwide infection tally to 818,035. The countrywide death toll has reached to 11,438 since the beginning of the pandemic.

**Pakistan** recorded a total of 515 new cases of coronavirus on 11 December. Total 11 fatalities were also recorded according to the reports on 11 December.

**Sri Lanka** reported 571,426 active cases and 14,573 deaths as of 11th December. 63.18% of the population vaccinated.

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

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## BUSINESS AND INVESTMENT:

### **REFORMS A MUST TO PREVENT SCAMS, ADVANCE ECONOMY, SAY ECONOMISTS; FDI TO TRIPLE WITHIN COUPLE OF YEARS: HOPES SALMAN F RAHMAN; SHADOW BANKING BOOMS IN BANGLADESH AMID LAX MONITORING, FINDS BIBM STUDY**

On 7 December 2021, economists at a virtual international conference organized by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) called for conducting deep reforms to improve country's institutional capacity to clear the decks for economic advances and exploring regional trade opportunities to reach expected levels of export. The session, styled 'Bangladesh's Economic Transformation' was presided over by CPD Chairman Prof. Rehman Sobhan and Professor Dr. Wahiduddin Mahmud moderated the discussions. Dr Ahsan H. Mansur said that almost every institution is too weak in Bangladesh and the country cannot attain SDG goals having such weak institutions. While presenting the keynote paper, Dr Mustafizur Rahman said that Bangladesh has significant opportunities in the regional markets for both traditional and new export products.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister's private industry and investment adviser Salman F. Rahman expressed his optimism that the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to Bangladesh would increase two to three times within the next couple of years. The adviser expressed such hope when a high-level delegation, led by Hartwig Schafer, Vice-President, South Asia Region of the World Bank, held a meeting with him at his office. They also discussed various issues including expansion of trade and investment opportunities in Bangladesh and capital market development. Hartwig Schafer highly praised the inclusive growth achieved by Bangladesh in the last decade. The vice-president however drew the attention of the adviser to the lower GDP-FDI ratio of Bangladesh.

In other news, shadow banking is growing fast in Bangladesh partly because of a new normal created by the pandemic but its monitoring needs to be tightened to avert any chaos on the financial market. Bangladesh Institute of Bank Management (BIBM) makes the observations based on a study which were unveiled at a seminar on shadow banking in Bangladesh with special reference to new-normal scenarios. BIBM research paper states these types of banking in the economy are less or not regulated however, these are not illegal and unethical. The growth of such banking has been expanding across the globe due to the coronavirus pandemic. Some instruments of mobile financial services like bKash, Nagad, Upay are shadow products as they are controlled or operated by separate managements outside of banks. Similarly, agent banking is another example of shadow banking in Bangladesh as one part of the transaction is operated by people who are not banking people.

<https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/economy/bangladesh/reforms-a-must-to-prevent-scams-advance-economy-say-economists-1638932109>

<https://en.prothomalo.com/business/fdi-to-triple-within-couple-of-years-hopes-salman>

<https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/economy/bangladesh/shadow-banking-booms-in-bangladesh-amid-lax-monitoring-finds-bibm-study-1638411980>

## AFGHANISTAN: EUROPEAN COUNTRIES TO OPEN A JOINT DIPLOMATIC MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN; QATAR AND TURKEY HELD TALKS TO WORK WITH TALIBAN GOVERNMENT AND WAYS TO DELIVER FURTHER HUMANITARIAN AID

French President Emmanuel Macron said several European countries would open a joint diplomatic mission in Afghanistan to send ambassadors to the country. Since, the fall of the previous government in Afghanistan and the establishment of the current government in the country, as well as the withdrawal of all foreign forces especially US forces, foreign countries have been struggling to interact with the Islamic Emirate. He also added that deploying these ambassadors would not mean recognizing the Taliban.

The Foreign Ministers of Turkey and Qatar have reviewed plans for the return to normal operations of Kabul's international airport in the wake of the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan. Mevlut Cavusoglu and his Qatari counterpart Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani on December 6, 2021 discussed options for their countries to jointly run the airport and ways to deliver further humanitarian aid to the Afghan people under conditions agreeable with the Taliban. Turkish troops have guarded the Afghan capital's airport for around six years, Red Crescent groups from Turkey and Qatar have been working to deliver aid to Afghans, and a Turkish overseas education foundation has kept its schools open for girls and boys. During a joint press conference in Doha, Sheikh Mohammed said Qatar and Turkey were ready to control Kabul airport if the Taliban agreed to it. The Foreign Ministers of both countries also reiterate strong ties and urge international community to provide necessary support and assistance to Afghanistan.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/4/macron-eu-afghanistan>

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/6/qatar-turkey-to-work-with-taliban-on-keeping-kabul-airport-open>

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## BANGLADESH: PRESIDENT ABDUL HAMID URGED WORLD LEADERS TO ENSURE EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL; PM SHEIKH HASINA STRESSES BUILDING PEACEFUL WORLD RELINQUISHING ARMS RACES; PROLONGED STAY OF ROHINGYAS TO JEOPARDISE PEACE AND SECURITY: FM

President Abdul Hamid has urged the world leaders to work for ending discriminations based on race, faith, color, religion and ethnicity and ensuring equal opportunities for all while inaugurating the "World Peace Conference-2021" on 4 December 2021. He also said that a fair international system is essential for people all over the world and it should not be forgotten that people now live on a shared planet and all have shared responsibilities too. He added that Bangladesh believes that peace around the world is the best guarantee for the country's national security following the constitutional obligations.

In the same event, while addressing the closing ceremony, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina stressed the need for building a peaceful world based on partnership urging all to use their resources in ensuring universal sustainable development abandoning arms races. At this critical juncture (during the Covid -19 period) in the world, she urged to use resources to achieve universal sustainable development without spending resources on

arms races and let the world go down in action, committed to universal peace.

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen also attended the event and has alerted the international community about the possible disruption of peace and security in the region due to the prolonged stay of the Rohingyas in Bangladesh. He added that as the crisis lingers, the desperation of these forcibly displaced people increases jeopardizing the peace and security of the region.

<https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/world-peace-conference-2021-ensure-equal-opportunities-2909686?amp>

<https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/pm-stresses-building-peaceful-world-relinquishing-arms-races>

<https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/prolonged-stay-rohingyas-jeopardise-peace-and-security-foreign-minister-2910336>

## DHAKA, DELHI COULD REAP BENEFIT FROM HYDROPOWER IN NEPAL, BHUTAN: PM HASINA; DESPITE GOOD RELATIONS, BORDER KILLINGS REMAIN AN ISSUE: MOMEN TO SHRINGLA; ROHINGYA SUE FACEBOOK FOR \$150BN OVER HATE SPEECH

Prime minister Sheikh Hasina on 8 December 2021 has said that Bangladesh-India can be benefited by generating hydropower in Nepal and Bhutan as it will be a clean energy and as well as cheaper. She made the statement to Indian foreign secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla while he was paying a courtesy call at her official residence Gonobhaban in Dhaka. Harsh Vardhan Shringla said that Bangladesh and India have settled down all major issues while some small issues along the border between the two countries can be solved through holding meetings between BGB and BSF. He further mentioned that India wanted to invest in renewable energy in Bangladesh. The Foreign Secretary also put emphasis on re-establishing Shiliguri-Parbotipur, Dhaka-Shiliguri and Dhaka-Jolpaiguri railway communication.

Harsh Vardhan Shringla also visited his counterpart Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul Momen. Mr. Momen underscored that the killing of Bangladesh nationals by the Indian border security forces continued to remain an irritant despite the goodwill and excellent relations between the two countries. He urged Indian Foreign Secretary to take up the matter with all the relevant agencies in India when Shringla met him at his office. He reiterated his hope over the early signing of the Teesta water-sharing deal and equitable comprehensive water-sharing agreement for other common rivers which, he thinks, may be seen as testimony of 'Good Neighborhood'.

In other news, Rohingya refugees sued Facebook on 6 December 2021, for \$150 billion over claims that the social network is failing to stem hate speech on its platform, exacerbating violence against the vulnerable minority. The complaint, lodged in a California court, states that the algorithms that power the US-based company promote disinformation and extremist thought that translates to real-world violence. The court document further states that Facebook is like a robot programmed with a singular mission to grow.

<https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/dhaka-delhi-could-rip-benefit-from-hydropower-in-nepal-bhutan-pm-hasina>

<https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/diplomacy/news/despite-good-relations-border-killings-remain-issue-momen-shringla-2911936>

<https://en.prothomalo.com/international/asia/rohingya-sue-facebook-for-150bn-over-hate-speech>

## INDIA: RUSSIAN PRESIDENT PUTIN VISITED INDIA, DISCUSSED TRADE, AFGHANISTAN, VOW TO BOOST RELATION; INDIA'S FIRST CHIEF OF STAFF GENERAL BIPIN RAWAT, HIS WIFE AND 11 OTHERS KILLED IN IAF CHOPPER CRASH

Russian president Vladimir Putin has visited India for a few hours on 6 December 2021 for the 21st bilateral Annual Summit. Foreign policy experts labeled the visit as symbolic and substantive attempting to restore strong Russia-India relations. During his visit, President Putin held a meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi after a two-year freeze on relations. Two countries signed 28 agreements covering bilateral defense and an Indian purchase of 600,000 Russian assault rifles. Both countries also held their first 2+2 ministerial talks involving defense and foreign ministers, and held a strategic dialogue to discuss reinforcing ties. Both countries also agreed to enhance cooperation and coordination on bilateral and multilateral issues, including trade and investment and the situation in Afghanistan and both sides have set a target of increasing bilateral trade to \$30 billion and bilateral investments to \$50 billion by 2025. The two countries will also look at long-term cooperation and arrangements for energy, inland waterways, civilian shipbuilding,

fertilizers, steel, coking coal, and supply of skilled manpower.

India's first chief of defence staff General Bipin Rawat along with his wife and 11 others were killed on 08 December 2021 noon in an Indian Air Force chopper crash near Coonoor in Tamil Nadu. General Rawat, 63, took charge as India's first Chief of Defence Staff in January 2020. The position was created to integrate the three services - the Army, the Navy and the Air Force. The Chief of Defence Staff is the Permanent Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee and has to be the main military adviser to the Defence Minister besides giving impartial advice to the political leadership.

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/modi-putin-discuss-trade-af-vow-to-boost-relations-101638816050661.html>

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/general-rawat-his-wife-and-11-others-killed-in-iaf-chopper-crash-101638969201110.html>

## MALDIVES: MALDIVES ESTABLISHED JOINT INTER AGENCY OPERATION CENTRE TO PREVENT AND COUNTER TERRORISM

The government of Maldives introduced the Joint Interagency Operations Centre (JIOC) with an objective to counter the increasing threats of radicalism, violent extremism and terrorism across the island nation. President Ibrahim Solih officially inaugurated the Joint Interagency Operations Centre (JIOC) on 7th December, 2021 at the Maldives National Defense Force (MNDF) Headquarters. The JIOC will serve as the primary operational hub that

connects all national institutions to coordinate the response efforts during terrorist attacks.

<https://presidency.gov.mv/Press/Article/25924>

<https://raajje.mv/110600>

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## MYANMAR: STATE ADMINISTRATION COUNCIL OF MYANMAR ACCUSED OF CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY BEFORE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT

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A United Kingdom based advocacy group, Myanmar Accountability Project (MAP) filed a case against the Myanmar's military regime and urged the Hague tribunal, International Criminal Court (ICC) to open a criminal investigation of the widespread and systematic use of torture as part of the violent crackdown against the pro democracy movement of its people. In their case submission under Article 15 of the Rome Statute, Myanmar Accountability Project (MAP) stated that the leader of the illegal coup is criminally responsible for the security forces under his command committing mass atrocity crimes.

According to the head of the UN investigating body, Nicholas Koumjian, more than 219,000 items of information have been collected since the coup to support the allegations. Earlier in the United Nations characterized the military

government's tactic against dissenters "as a brute force terror campaign".

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/uk-group-hands-icc-evidence-of-crimes-against-humanity-by-myanmar-regime.html>

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## NEPAL: THE 10TH NATIONAL CONVENTION OF THE CPN-UML HELD

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*The 10th national convention of the CPN-UML, the main opposition party held in Chitwan. Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and other key leaders of various parties were present at the inaugural session of the convention. Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal, did not attend the meeting. The UML has not invited CPN (Unified Socialist) chair Madhav Kumar Nepal. Nepal formed his own party after splitting from the UML following a months-long struggle against Oli. The convention*

*is also being attended by foreign delegates from various countries, including India.*

<https://bit.ly/3p4SAgj>

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## PAKISTAN: PAKISTAN DECIDED TO SKIP U.S. DEMOCRACY SUMMIT INVITATION

Pakistan has declined to participate in the Summit for Democracy, which is being held virtually on December 9-10, 2021 and is being hosted by US President Joe Biden. The country pulled out of the summit on December 9, 2021, in a moment that was abruptly announced by the Foreign Ministry, without giving a reason. US President Biden has invited 110 leaders from government, civil society, and the private sector. The summit will focus on

challenges and opportunities facing democracies and will provide a platform for leaders to announce both individual and collective commitments, reforms, and initiatives to defend democracy and human rights at home and abroad, said the US State Department.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2333005/pakistan-declines-us-democracy-summit-invitation>

## SRI LANKA: SRI LANKAN GOVERNMENT EFFORT TO INCREASE FOREX RESERVE

Sri Lanka's net foreign assets worth was 1.507 billion US dollars as of November 2021. However, State Minister Shehan Semasinghe in his statement on 9th December 2021, discussed about several initiatives of the Government to mitigate the declining foreign reserves in Sri Lanka.

A currency swap of a billion dollar was to be signed between the Central Banks of Qatar and Sri Lanka. Four hundred million currency swaps has been received from the Reserve Bank of India under the financial assistance program of the South Asian Association for Regional

Cooperation (SAARC). The Finance Ministry had taken measures for commercial banks to carry out foreign currency exchange programmes amounting to five hundred million US dollars. Moreover, the country has facilitated foreign remittances amounting to five hundred million US dollars through the monetary transactions of Sri Lankan migrant workers. Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa had signed agreements with India on the importation of crude, essential goods, and medicines.

<https://economynext.com/sri-lanka-eyeing-billion-us->

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Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI), in collaboration with The Asia Foundation, is implementing a project titled "Building Capacity of CSOs/NGOs and Media to Promote Accountability in Governance and Influence Elite Opinion". As part of this project, BEI held several contact building meetings with government officials on 05 December 2021, organized an inception meeting on 06 December 2021 at "Zilla Parishad, Faridpur" followed by a three day-long training workshop for the members of local CSOs/NGOs and Media personnel of district of Faridpur under Dhaka division at BURO Bangladesh, Faridpur. A total of 20 participants were trained on good governance tools enacted by the Government of Bangladesh (Right To Information act-RTI, National Integrity Strategy- NIS and Annual Performance Agreement-APA) from 07--09 December 2021. A team consisting of five members from BEI carried out the activities in the district of Faridpur in the first week of December 2021.



Contact Building with DC, Faridpur



Inception Meeting-Faridpur



Training Session-Faridpur



Training Group Photo-Faridpur

## 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/>.

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