

## || WEEKLY NEWS HIGHLIGHTS ||

### BANGLADESH ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE (BEI)

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

|| APRIL 22- APRIL 29 2022 ||

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

Afghanistan has recorded a total of 168,550 cases of coronavirus since the beginning of the pandemic. Total deaths reported stood at 7,465 as of April 29.

Bangladesh reported no new death and 25 coronavirus cases on 31 April and has thus far recorded a total of 29,127 fatalities and 1,952,716 confirmed cases. Bangladesh has administered a total 256,921,270 Covid-19 vaccine doses, totaling 78.80% of the population.

Bhutan reported 56 new cases and no death on 31 April. A total of 59,219 cases have been registered until 31 April, while 85.88 % of Bhutan's population has been vaccinated.

India reported deaths and 3,157 new coronavirus cases on 31 April, bringing the total number of cases to 43,082,345 while the total number of deaths now stands at 523,869. Until 31 April, 61.76% of Indian population has been vaccinated.

Maldives has confirmed 179,171 cases and 298 deaths.

Myanmar has confirmed 613,000 cases and 19,434 deaths so far

Nepal reported 10,687 new coronavirus cases on April 24 taking the nationwide infection tally to 970,462 since the beginning of the pandemic. To date, the total number of deaths stands at 11,852.

Pakistan reported 276 deaths and 31,812 positive cases till last week.

Sri Lanka has confirmed 663,362 and 16,504 deaths

Source: <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html> (John Hopkins University)

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- Sri Lanka: Mahinda Rajapaksa to be replaced as PM, new cabinet soon; strike cripples Sri Lanka

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## BUSINESS AND INVESTMENT: BRANDING BANGLADESH ABROAD: GOVT MOVES TO SHAPE STRATEGIES; KAMAL UPBEAT ABOUT 7.2PC GROWTH THIS FY

Government has taken a move to prepare strategies for branding Bangladesh abroad to present the country's image correctly including its overall economic strength as a nation. To this effect, a Terms of Reference has already been prepared in order to appoint a consultant or firm for shaping the strategies. The consultant or firm will prepare the strategies and also include necessary work plans to ensure implementation of the strategies. A twelve-member working group was formed at the third inter-ministerial sub-committee meeting on 'Branding Bangladesh Abroad' on Preparation, Planning, Implementation and Monitoring of Possible Challenges of Bangladesh in the context of graduation from Least Developed Countries (LDC) status on April 17. The working group will review details of the draft and report to the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA). Meanwhile, Finance Minister A H M Mustafa Kamal has expressed his optimism about achieving the government's 7.2 per cent economic-growth target in the current fiscal year (FY), 2021-22, although the economy is facing some global pressures like the Ukraine-Russia war. Replying to journalists following the lower growth forecasts by some international lending agencies- the World Bank (WB), the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)- in their latest global economic outlooks amid the Russia-Ukraine war, the finance minister said that the government will not revise its 7.2 per cent GDP (gross domestic product) growth target in the current FY and 7.5 per cent in the next FY. He added that if the economic trend goes downward, then the government may revise the growth projection. In their recent economic outlook, both the WB and the IMF projected that Bangladesh's GDP would grow at 6.4 per cent rate in the current FY (2022) while ADB projected a slightly higher economic growth at 6.9 per cent for the country.

<https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/economy/branding-bangladesh-abroad-govt-moves-to-shape-strategies-1650768362>

<https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/economy/bangladesh/kamal-upbeat-about-72pc-growth-this-fy-1651113366>

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## BANGLADESH: BANGLADESH WANTS TO PROCURE LNG FROM QATAR FOR LONGER PERIOD: PM TELLS NEW ENVOY; DENMARK CROWN PRINCESS VISITS ROHINGYA CAMPS IN UKHIYA; SANCTIONS ON RAB WON'T BE LIFTED WITHOUT CONCRETE ACTION: PETER HAAS; US WON'T PICK SIDES IN BANGLADESH'S ELECTION: US ENVOY

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has sought to continue procurement of LNG from Qatar for a long term period. The prime minister expressed the desire when the newly appointed ambassador of Qatar to Bangladesh Seraya Ali Al-Qahtani paid a courtesy call on her at Gono Bhaban. In reply, the Qatar envoy hinted the existing 15-year deal on LNG procurement with Bangladesh could be extended for a longer term. Welcoming the envoy of Qatar in Bangladesh, the PM hoped that the bilateral ties and cooperation between the two countries would further be consolidated in the days to come.

In the meantime, Crown princess of Denmark Mary Elizabeth has visited Kutupalong Refugee Camps in the Ukhiya upazila of Cox's Bazar and spent the day with the Rohingya refugees. The Danish princess interacted with Rohingya kids at the Kutupalong Camp-6 and spoke with a number of Rohingya families. Princess Mary Elizabeth vowed that Denmark will support the Rohingya refugees in their fight for an honorable repatriation.

While speaking at a seminar organized by Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) on "Bangladesh and the United States Relations: Moving towards Enhanced Cooperation and Partnership", the US ambassador to Bangladesh H. E. Peter Haas has said that US sanction on Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) would not be lifted if concrete actions are not taken and accountability not ensured. He also said that the US want to see a RAB that remains effective at combatting terrorism, but that does so while respecting basic human rights. The United States imposed

sanctions on RAB and its six current and former officials on the allegation of gross violation of human rights last December. Bangladesh has been requesting the US authorities lift the sanctions since then.

On the other hand, the US Ambassador said that the US will not take any side in the upcoming elections in Bangladesh and reiterated US commitment across the world to help countries strengthen democracy. The US Ambassador added that the relations between the two countries grew with a series of recent engagements.

<https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/diplomacy/news/bangladesh-wants-procure-lng-qatar-longer-period-pm-tells-new-envoy-3012261>

<https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/denmark-crown-princess-visits-rohingya-camps-in-ukhiya>

<https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/sanctions-on-rab-wont-be-lifted-without-concrete-action-peter-haas>

<https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/national/us-will-be-neutral-in-bangladesh-election-1650805434>

## AFGHANISTAN: UN CHIEF WARNED ABSENCE OF LIQUIDITY IN AFGHAN ECONOMY CAN HAVE DEVASTATED CONSEQUENCES; RUSSIA GAVE GREEN LIGHT FOR AFGHAN GOVERNMENT RECOGNITION IF INCLUSIVE SYSTEM FORMED; U.S. ON-BUDGET RECONSTRUCTION AID STOPPED, OFF-BUDGET AID CONTINUES

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said the absence of liquidity in the Afghan economy could have devastating consequences for the people of Afghanistan. Guterres made the remarks at a press conference with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. Guterres said that the UN is working with the US Department of Treasury to pave the way for the release of Afghan assets. Meanwhile, the Central Bank warned that the freezing of Afghan assets will have a severe impact on the value of Afghan currency against foreign currencies. Guterres also told the conference that the UN has brought \$500 million to Afghanistan.

Russia shined a green light for recognition of current Afghan government if the Islamic Emirate establishes an inclusive government in Afghanistan. Russia will move towards full diplomatic recognition. Sergei Viktorovich Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, said that the current government are all members of the Islamic Emirate and that inclusivity in the caretaker government will determine Moscow's next steps. Establishing an inclusive government, respecting women's rights and not using Afghan territory against other countries are also conditions for the international community to recognize the new government in Afghanistan.

The US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR),

released a report indicating that on-budget US reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan completely ceased with the fall of the previous government, but that Afghanistan continues to receive some reconstruction funds from the US through off-budget assistance and multilateral organizations. According to SIGAR's report, of the six US agencies that funded Afghan reconstruction in the 2021 fiscal year, four were operating in Afghanistan until October 1, 2021, when Washington's development aid to Kabul completely halted with the fall of the republic. Based on SIGAR's report, the 100 activities (off-budget and with multilateral organizations) have pledged more than \$670 million to Afghanistan and have provided \$ 470 million worth of food and health assistance to Afghanistan.

<https://www.afghanistantimes.af/un-chief-warns-absence-of-liquidity-in-afghan-economy-can->

[have-devastated-consequences/](https://www.afghanistantimes.af/moscow-gives-green-light-for-afghan-govt-recognition-if-incl-)

<https://www.afghanistantimes.af/moscow-gives-green-light-for-afghan-govt-recognition-if-incl->

[system-formed/](https://www.afghanistantimes.af/moscow-gives-green-light-for-afghan-govt-recognition-if-incl-)

<https://tolonews.com/index.php/afghanistan-177799>

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## INDIA: UK PM BORIS JOHNSON CALLS PM MODI 'KHAS DOST', SAYS INDIA-UK FREE TRADE PACT BY DIWALI; UKRAINE FOCUS AS EIGHT LEADERS FROM EUROPE VISIT INDIA; UKRAINE WAR WILL IMPACT INDO-PACIFIC: EU CHIEF URSULA VON DER LEYEN; INDIAN FM JAISHANKAR CONVEYS PM MODI'S INVITATION TO SHEIKH HASINA TO VISIT INDIA

Calling Prime Minister Narendra Modi his "khaas dost" (special friend), British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has said that they have asked negotiators to reach an agreement on a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) soon. He also said that as the next round of talks between the two countries begins soon, he told UK negotiators to get free trade pact done by Diwali in coming October and hoped for doubling trade and investment between the two countries. PM Modi also hoped that they will be able to conclude the pact by the end of this year.

Days after British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's visit to India, eight leaders and ministers from Europe have visited India, including Ursula von der Leyen, the President of the European Commission. European Commission president said that strengthening and energizing of the European Union (EU) and its partnership with New Delhi is a priority for the coming decade. She also said that both economies thrive in a world of common rules and fair competition and added that as vibrant democracies, India and the EU share fundamental values and common interests.

In the meantime, European Commission President described the killings in Bucha as "severe violations of international law" and said what is happening in Ukraine will impact the Indo-Pacific region. She also said that the outcome of the war will not only determine the future of Europe, but also deeply affect the Indo-Pacific region and the rest of the world.

External affairs minister S Jaishankar has conveyed Prime Minister Naren-

dra Modi's invitation to his Bangladesh counterpart Sheikh Hasina to visit India and said the two countries were looking at the resumption of cross-border bus and railway services. Mr. Jaishankar has paid a day-long visit to Bangladesh on April 28. EAM Jaishankar also exchanged views with the Bangladesh PM on bilateral, regional, and international issues of mutual interest. He also met his counterpart, Foreign Minister of Bangladesh, Dr. AK Abdul Momen and extended him an invitation to attend the next meeting of the Joint Consultative Commission to be held in India prior to the visit of PM Hasina.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-61175970>

<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/modi-vietnam-leader-hold-talks-on-ukraine-south-china-sea-7871382/>

<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-will-try-to-extend-all-possible-cooperation-to-sri-lanka-sitharaman-7875944/>

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/jaishankar-conveys-pm-modi-s-invitation-to-sheikh-hasina-to-visit-india-101651175482383.html>

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## MYANMAR: ETHNIC MINORITIES EYE AUTONOMY IN POST-JUNTA MYANMAR; MYANMAR JUNTA COURT CONVICTS SUU KYI OF CORRUPTION

Following the 2021 coup, there is no viable central government in Myanmar. The junta is illegal and illegitimate and unable to effectively deliver government services. Instead, a range of ethnic armed and other resistance organizations have emerged as viable and legitimate governance entities. Recent debates have questioned whether Myanmar is a failed state and if this concept is relevant.

However, Burma has never achieved credibility as a state with which the majority of its citizens can identify. As David Steinberg pointed out last year, political leaders have since independence failed to achieve a common sense of belonging among ethnic nations, especially between elites from the Burman majority and ethnic communities, which constitute at least a third of the population.

A Myanmar junta court on Wednesday found ousted civilian leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi guilty of corruption

and sentenced her to five years in prison, a source familiar with the matter said. Since a military coup deposed her government in February last year, plunging the country into upheaval, Suu Kyi has faced a barrage of criminal cases that could see her jailed for decades.

In the latest case, the Nobel laureate — who has been in military custody since the night of the coup — was accused of accepting a bribe of \$600,000 cash and gold bars.

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/opinion/analysis/ethnic-minorities-eye-autonomy-in-post-junta-myanmar.html>

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-junta-court-convicts-suu-kyi-of-corruption-source.html>

## NEPAL: NEPAL SEEKS OVERSEAS NATIONALS HELP TO BUILD UP FOREX RESERVES AMID ECONOMIC WOES

Nepal is asking citizens living abroad to deposit funds in domestic banks as part of efforts to ensure the financial system has enough liquidity and to preserve foreign exchange reserves, Finance Minister Janardan Sharma said. Speaking to Reuters, he denied Nepal was facing an economic crisis despite the impact of soaring commodity prices as the tourist industry, a key source of revenues, struggles to recover after the COVID-19 pandemic.

[https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/nepal-seeks-overseas-nationals-help-to-build-up-forex-reserves-amid-economic-woes/articleshow/90880293.cms?utm\\_source=contentofinterest&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=cppst](https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/nepal-seeks-overseas-nationals-help-to-build-up-forex-reserves-amid-economic-woes/articleshow/90880293.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst)

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## PAKISTAN: BILAWAL BHUTTO-ZARDARI, LATE PRIME MINISTER BENAZIR BHUTTO'S SON IS PAKISTAN'S NEW FOREIGN MINISTER; PAKISTAN SEEKS MORE FUNDS FROM IMF; PAKISTAN'S PRIME MINISTER, SAUDI CROWN PRINCE DISCUSS TO FURTHER INCREASE BILATERAL ECONOMIC, TRADE TIES

President Arif Alvi administered oath to PPP Chairperson Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari who joined Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's cabinet as a Federal Minister. Thirty-three-year-old Bilawal was first elected to the National Assembly in 2018. This is the first time he will be serving as a member of the federal cabinet. The Cabinet Division later issued a notification appointing him as the foreign minister. Assuming charge as the foreign minister, Bilawal was welcomed at the Foreign Office by Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Hina Rabbani Khar and Foreign Secretary Sohail Mahmood. During his visit, Bilawal interacted with senior ministry officials.

Pakistan has sought an increase in the size and duration of its \$6 billion International Monetary Fund (IMF) program, the country's Finance Minister, Miftah Ismail, said. Ismail made the comments in a video statement following talks with the IMF in Washington. It came after the fund said Islamabad has agreed to roll back subsidies to the oil and power sectors ahead of a resumption next month of a review of the IMF's support for the country.

Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif and Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman discussed to further strengthen the bilateral economic, investment and trade ties.

During the visit of Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif at Saudi Arabia, Mr. Sharif held a meeting at the Royal Palace and discussed issues of mutual interest, global and regional issues to increase bilateral economic, trade ties.

The Ministry of Finance said that economic growth was slowing down to 4%, as the economy confronted inflation risks and external sector pressures, endorsing the viewpoint that had long been held by the international lenders. In its monthly Economic Outlook for April, the economic advisory wing of the finance ministry also projected elevated inflation levels, forecasting a reading of up to 12.5% for the current month.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/4/28/late-pm-benazir-bhuttos-son-is-pakistans-new-foreign-minister>

<https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2022/4/25/pakistan-seeks-more-funds-from-imf>

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1687474/pm-in-jeddah-for-talks-with-saudi-leadership-to-boost-bilateral-ties>

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## SRI LANKA: MAHINDA RAJAPAKSA TO BE REPLACED AS PM, NEW CABINET SOON; STRIKE CRIPPLES SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka's president has agreed to replace his older brother as prime minister in a proposed interim government to solve a political impasse caused by the country's worst economic crisis in decades, a prominent lawmaker said last week.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa agreed that a national council will be appointed to name a new prime minister and Cabinet comprised of all parties in Parliament, lawmaker Maithripala Sirisena said after meeting with the president.

Millions of workers staged a crippling strike in Sri Lanka yesterday, adding to pressure on President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and his ruling family to quit over the country's worst-ever economic crisis. The island nation of 22 million people has been hit by months of acute shortages of food, fuel and medicines,

prompting widespread protests. Last week's nationwide strike was the first time the entire country had been brought to a standstill since the demonstrations began, with both state and private sector employees taking part.

<https://www.thedailystar.net/news/asia/south-asia/news/sri-lanka-crisis-mahinda-rajapaksa-be-replaced-pm-new-cabinet-soon-3015106>

<https://www.thedailystar.net/news/asia/south-asia/news/strike-cripples-sri-lanka-3014681>

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- about vote to oust government

## 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 Companies, Bangladesh, under the Societies Registration Act.

## 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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