

|| WEEKLY NEWS HIGHLIGHTS ||

BANGLADESH ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE (BEI)

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

|| JUNE 24 -JULY 2, 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 July 2.

Bangladesh reported 03 new deaths and 1280 coronavirus cases on 25 June and has thus far recorded a total of 29,138 fatalities and 1,963,493 confirmed cases. Bangladesh has administered a total 274,180,436 Covid-19 vaccine doses, totaling 84.10% of the population.

Bhutan reported no new case and no death on 25 June. A total of 59,674 cases have been registered until 25 June, while 87.16 % of Bhutan's population has been vaccinated.

India reported 25 deaths and 11,739 new coronavirus cases on 25 June, bringing the total number of cases to 43,389,973 while the total number of deaths now stands at 524,999. Until 25 June, 65.66% of Indian population has been vaccinated. Myanmar has recorded 613,553 Coronavirus cases 19,434 deaths

Maldives has recorded 180,384 and 300 deaths.

Nepal reported 10,687 new coronavirus cases on June 28 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 in the last week.

Sri Lanka has recorded 664,065 cases and 16,521 deaths.

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

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BUSINESS AND INVESTMENT: JATIYA SANGSAD PASSES TK 6,780B BUDGET FOR FY23; NEW MONETARY POLICY TO SEEK BALANCE BETWEEN CREDIT FLOW AND INFLATION; BANGLADESH CALLS FOR JOINT EFFORTS TO HARNESS MARINE RESOURCES; EXPORT EARNINGS CROSS \$50 BILLION IN FY22

The Jatiya Sangsad has passed Taka 6,78,064 crore national budget for FY23 which eyes to tame inflation amid facing six key challenges alongside the economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and other adverse global situation. Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal moved the Appropriations Bill, 2022 seeking a budgetary allocation of Taka 883751,81,97,000 crore which was passed by voice vote. Earlier, Parliament passed the Finance Bill 2022 with some changes.

Meanwhile, amid an eight-year high CPI in May and record devaluation of the currency, both policy hawks and doves at the Bangladesh Bank have their sight on the four key challenges in the upcoming fiscal year- addressing the soaring inflation, reining in the rising price of the US dollar, fattening up the depleted reserves and striking a balance between credit flow and inflation to keep the economy moving. These key four issues will be at the forefront of the upcoming monetary policy which will be announced soon.

Bangladesh has sought a joint blue economy approach to harness the untapped marine resources that can be used in tackling poverty, food insecurity, unemployment, energy crisis and ecological imbalances. Bangladesh, along with some other countries, co-hosted the event titled "Fostering international and regional cooperation in support of the sustainable development of the blue economy in LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS", organized by the International Seabed Authority (ISA) on the sidelines of the 2nd UN Ocean Conference being held in Lisbon, Portugal. The vice-president of Tanzania, foreign and tourism minister of Tonga, minister of international development of Norway, ministers, high representatives and experts from the member states also attended the event. Bangladesh emphasized the need of fostering international and regional cooperation to develop strategies in support of the sustainable development of the blue economy in LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS. In the meantime, according to an anonymous source at Export Promotion Bureau (EPB), the country's exports has crossed \$50 billion for the first time ever in the outgoing fiscal, thanks to a record year for the readymade garments sector. According to the EPB, the country earned \$47.17 billion from exporting goods and services during the July-May period of the current fiscal (2021-22). Bangladesh meanwhile became a member of the \$50-billion export income club by exporting goods and services around \$50.37 billion. The final export earnings will be released by EPB at the beginning of next month (July).

<https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/economy/bangladesh/bangladesh-calls-for-joint-efforts-to-harness-marine-resources-1656596755>

<https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/economy/bangladesh/export-earnings-cross-50-billion-in-fy22-1656427839>

<https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/js-passes-tk-678064cr-budget-for-fy23>

<https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/economy/bangladesh/new-monetary-policy-to-seek-balance-between-credit-flow-and-inflation-1656301060>

AFGHANISTAN: UN LAUNCHED APPEAL FOR \$110 MILLION TO HELP QUAKE SURVIVORS; US, TALIBAN IN QATAR DISCUSSED FROZEN ASSETS, WOMEN'S RIGHTS; SITUATION OF AFGHAN WOMEN, GIRLS WORSENING, WARNS UN; RUSSIAN PRESIDENT VLADIMIR PUTIN SAYS RUSSIA IN CONTACT WITH ALL AFGHAN POLITICAL FORCES

The United Nations launched an emergency appeal for \$110 million to provide lifesaving assistance to more than 360,000 Afghans who were affected by earthquake in Paktika and Khost provinces. The funding is required over the next three months. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) said that the new appeal is part of this year's Humanitarian Response plan, which calls for \$4.4 billion, but is massively underfunded at just over one third.

The delegation of Taliban and the United States held a two-day talk in Qatar to discuss in detail US actions to preserve \$3.5 billion in Afghan central bank reserves for the benefit of the Afghan people as well as steps to build international confidence in Da Afghanistan Bank, according to a statement of the US State Department. US special representative for Afghanistan, Thomas West, led another senior interagency delegation including representatives from the Department of State, the Department of the Treasury, and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to continue discussions with senior Taliban representatives in Qatar. According to the statement, US special envoy West made clear the critical linkage between progress on the protection of Afghans' rights and steps toward normalizing America's ties with the Islamic Emirate.

The recent earthquake in Afghanistan has aggravated the already desperate situation facing the Afghan population, especially women and girls, says the United Nations human rights chief. Addressing a meeting of the UN Human Rights Council, Michelle Bachelet said hunger and food insecurity were affecting over 90 percent of women-headed households in Afghanistan. The Chilean politician noted growing domestic violence and harassment; attacks on women human rights de-

fenders, journalists, judges, lawyers and prosecutors. She also referred to the massive unemployment of women; restrictions on movement and dress and its impact on access to basic services and increasing depression.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has said that Moscow is keeping contacts with all Afghan political forces, stressing that all Afghan ethnic groups should be involved in running the country. At a meeting with his Tajik counterpart Emomali Rakhmon in Dushanbe, Putin said that Russia will "proceed from the assumption that all of Afghanistan's ethnic groups must have a say in running the nation." He also said Moscow was in contact with all Afghan political forces and will continue to work this way.

<https://www.afghanistantimes.af/un-launches-appeal-for-110-million-to-help-paktika-quake-survivors/>

<https://www.afghanistantimes.af/us-taliban-in-qatar-discuss-frozen-assets-womens-rights/>

<https://www.afghanistantimes.af/situation-of-afghan-women-girls-worsening-warns-un/>

<https://www.afghanistantimes.af/putin-says-russia-in-contact-with-all-afghan-political-forces/>

<https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-178629>

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BANGLADESH: BANGLADESH IS AN IMPORTANT COUNTRY: BIDEN; PREPARE WITH KNOWLEDGE OF SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, RESEARCH, PM HASINA TO YOUTH; MANY PEOPLE 'OVER-EXAGGERATING' IMPACT OF SANCTIONS: US AMBASSADOR; SEEKING ASYLUM IN EU: BANGLADESH AMONG TOP SIX COUNTRIES

Bangladesh Ambassador to the United States, M Shahidul Islam has met US president Joe Biden at the White House and conveyed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's invitation to visit the country. During the meeting, President Biden said that Bangladesh is an important country. Bangladesh and the United States had a series of bilateral meetings this year as both sides want to strengthen the ties addressing the challenges.

In the meantime, while addressing the award distribution ceremony among nationwide winners of Bangabandhu Talent Hunt Competition-2022, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has called upon the new generation to be prepared with the knowledge of science, technology and research to lead the country towards prosperity utilizing their hidden talents. Expressing her heartiest greetings to the winners, she said that the hidden talents inside the winners are the future of the country.

In an interview, US Ambassador to Bangladesh H.E. Peter Haas has told the Voice of America Bangla Service that he thinks many people are "over-exaggerating" the impact of the sanctions imposed on Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) and some of its current and former officials. He acknowledged that it did have an impact on the

overall relations between Bangladesh and the US. He also said that the sanction is one issue but they continue to work very closely under the security front. Ambassador Haas further said that the US stopped providing training to the RAB in 2018 because of concerns as they want to see accountability for the past human rights violations and to reform the RAB so that it does not repeat the same. Earlier, on 10 December 2021, the United States imposed sanctions on the Rapid Action Battalion and some of its serving as well as former officials.

In the meantime, in a report, the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) has said that the European Union has received at least 648,000 applications seeking asylum last year, a 33 per cent rise from 2020. It also said that Bangladesh is among top six countries whose citizens are seeking asylum in the block. The report highlighted the situation of 2021 and early 2022, especially the impact of Russian invasion in Ukraine.

<https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/many-people-over-exaggerating-impact-of-sanctions-us-ambassador>

<https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/bangladesh-among-top-six-countries>

INDIA : POOR NEED SAME ENERGY RIGHTS, ACCESS AS RICH: PM MODI AT G-7 SUMMIT; INDIA JOINS G7, 4 OTHERS TO PROTECT FREE SPEECH, 'ONLINE AND OFFLINE'

Speaking at the G-7 summit in Germany, during a session on 'Investing in a better Future: Climate, Energy, Health', Prime Minister Narendra Modi has invoked the need for the poor to be able to access energy as much as the rich. He told this at a time when India is facing criticism from the West for its purchase of discounted oil from Russia amid the war in Ukraine.

Meanwhile, India, along with G7 countries and four invited countries, has signed the '2022 Resilient Democracies Statement' in which they committed to guarding the freedom, independence and

diversity of civil society actors and protecting the freedom of expression and opinion online and offline. The signatories said that democracies enable open public debate, independent and pluralistic media and the free flow of information online and offline, fostering legitimacy, transparency, responsibility and accountability for citizens and elected representatives alike.

<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/poor-need-same-energy-rights-access-as-rich-pm-modi-at-g-7-summit-7994910/>

NEPAL: NATIONAL ASSEMBLY PASSES BUDGET-RELATED BILLS

The National Assembly passed three separate bills related to the budget for the next fiscal year, amidst the boycott of the main opposition party, the CPN (UML). The Upper House of the Federal Parliament passed the Finance Bill, 2079 BS, the Bill to Mobilize National Loans, 2079 BS and the Loans and Guarantee (Twenty-fifth Amendment) Bill, 2079 BS. A meeting of the National Assembly passed by a majority a proposal presented by Finance Minister Janardan Sharma seeking the Upper House pass the budget-related three bills that have been received by the National Assembly with the message from the House of Representatives. These bills which have been passed by the Upper House have been sent to

the House of Representatives, the Lower House, along with the message. The Lower House will have to endorse the bills. The CPN (UML) lawmakers boycotted the meeting blaming that the tax rates in the budget were manipulated in collusion with an unauthorized person a day before presenting budget in the parliament.

<https://thehimalayantimes.com/kathmandu/national-assembly-passes-budget-related-bills>

PAKISTAN: PRIME MINISTER SEEKS DEEPER TIES WITH US; CHINA BACKED INDIA ON KEEPING PAKISTAN OUT OF BRICS PLUS EVENT

The new US ambassador Blome is deployed as the first full-time ambassador in Pakistan since 2018 as former president Donald Trump despite having good ties with then Prime Minister Imran Khan never appointed a full-time envoy to Islamabad. An official handout issued by the PM Office said Shehbaz congratulated the ambassador on his presentation of credentials and expressed the hope that the ambassador would devote his efforts to deepening and enhancing bilateral ties between the US and Pakistan. In this context, the prime minister highlighted the historic, longstanding ties between the two countries and underscored Pakistan's desire to further develop this relationship on the basis of mutual respect, trust, and interest.

In a deft diplomatic move, India worked with China to block entry of Pakistan to BRICS plus event. Pakistan, in a surprise move, made attempts to enter the BRICS outreach event for emerging economies that included Algeria, Argentina, Cambo-

dia, Egypt, Ethiopia, Fiji, Indonesia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Senegal, Uzbekistan, Malaysia, and Thailand. However, India moved swiftly to block Islamabad. As the BRICS chair for 2022, China reportedly agreed to India, and prevented the entry of its "all-weather ally" to the BRICS outreach event, which was addressed by India's PM Narendra Modi.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2364213/pm-seeks-deeper-ties-with-us>

https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/china-backed-india-on-keeping-pakistan-out-of-brics-plus-event/articleshow/92555170.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

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SRI LANKA: JAPAN SAYS CLOSELY PAYING ATTENTION TO SL'S DIFFICULT ECONOMIC SITUATION, READY TO ASSIST; SL AMENDS LIMIT ON FOREIGN CURRENCY POSSESSION; GOVT. TO OFFER RS.7,500 ALLOWANCE TO WORST-HIT CITIZENS FROM WB, ADB FUND

Japanese Ambassador to Sri Lanka Mizukoshi Hideaki said that Japan is ready to provide continuous support to Sri Lanka while strengthening relations between the two countries, for Sri Lanka's economic program with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and for the development activities of the country. In a statement, the President's Media Division said that during discussions between President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and the Japanese Ambassador at the President's House in Colombo, today, Ambassador Mizukoshi Hideaki said that continuous efforts will be made to further strengthen the economic, social and cultural relations with Sri Lanka. President Rajapaksa had during the discussions expressed his deep appreciation to Japan for their support to Sri Lanka.

The Minister of Finance has issued an order to reduce the amount of foreign currency retained in possession by an individual in Sri Lanka from USD 15,000 to USD 10,000 or its equivalent in other foreign currency. The directive, issued pursuant to Section 08 of Foreign Exchange Act No. 12 of 2017, is effective from the 16th of June. In a statement, the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) said the decision was taken with the intention of attracting foreign currency in the hands of the public into the formal banking system. According to the CBSL, an amnesty period of 14 working days effective from the date of the Order (June 16, 2022) is granted for persons in, or resident in, Sri Lanka who

hold foreign currency notes in possession. At the end of the said amnesty period, the CBSL has the right to initiate actions against persons who hold foreign currency in possession by violating the Order, in terms of the provisions of the Foreign Exchange Act.

In a bid to support the people from the worsening economic crisis that has made it challenging to access food, fuel and gas, the government said it is gearing up to provide a fresh round of assistance to those severely impacted. From this month onwards (July), the government plans to roll out an allowance of Rs.7500 to those hit by the crisis, said Plantations Minister Ramesh Pathirana. The allowance will be extended from the funds received from the international donor agencies. Part of the allowance will be offered from the US \$ 200 million from the World Bank (WB), while part will be from the US \$ 200 million from the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Samurdhi beneficiaries, senior citizens and medical-related persons are those among who are eligible for the allowance.

https://www.dailymirror.lk/latest_news/Japan-says-closely-paying-attention-to-SLs-difficult-economic-situation-ready-to-assist/342-240179

https://www.dailymirror.lk/top_story/SL-amends-limit-on-foreign-currency-possession/155-239794

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BEI HIGHLIGHTS: BEI ORGANIZED 10 COMMUNITY DIALOGUES, 02 GROOMING SESSIONS IN RAJSHAHI UNDER YOUNG LEADERS FOR PROMOTING DEMOCRACY IN BANGLADESH PROJECT FROM 26 JUNE- 03 JULY 2022

Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI) in collaboration with National Endowment for Democracy (NED) organized ten community dialogues and two grooming sessions in Rajshahi Sadar and its adjacent Paba Upazila. Along with BEI trained youth, people from different age groups i.e. local journalists, teachers, women leaders, religious leaders and political leaders joined the events. The meetings took place between 26 June to 03 July 2022. The objective of the meeting was to promote democratic norms and values and social cohesion using social media platforms among the local people and to capacitate them on digital literacy and digital security.



BEI President's remarks to the participants at the community dialogue



Ms Nipa Gosh giving speech at the community dialogue

Participants were made aware on democratic norms and values, digital security, digital citizenship, digital literacy, digital divide, how to spot fake news and rumors, safe use of social media and how to use social media to maintain social harmony.



BEI trained youth giving speech at the community dialogue



Ashish Banik, Deputy Director, BEI giving speech at the community dialogue

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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. For more information about BEI and our work, please visit <https://www.bei-bd.org/>

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