

## || WEEKLY NEWS HIGHLIGHTS ||

### BANGLADESH ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE (BEI)

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

|| AUGUST 14 -AUGUST 19, 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 22 August.

Bangladesh reported 01 new deaths and 178 coronavirus cases on 22 August and has thus far recorded a total of 29,316 fatalities and 2,010,148 confirmed cases. Bangladesh has administered a total 279,480,539 Covid-19 vaccine doses, totaling 85.70% of the population.

Bhutan reported 119 new cases and no deaths on 22 August. A total of 60,898 cases have been registered until 22 August, while 87.36 % of Bhutan's population has been vaccinated.

India reported 34 deaths and, 1,539 new coronavirus cases on 22 August, bringing the total number of cases to 44,348,960 while the total number of deaths now stands at 527,368. Until 22 August, 68.08% of Indian population has been vaccinated.

Myanmar reported total 19,437 deaths and 614,573 confirmed cases while 50.63 percent of population got vaccinated till 22 August.

Maldives has recorded 180,384 and 300 deaths since the beginning of pandemic.

Nepal reported 10,687 new coronavirus cases on 22 August 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 since the beginning of pandemic..

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

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## **BUSINESS AND INVESTMENT: PM HASINA FOR FINDING WAYS TO IMPORT FUEL OIL FROM RUSSIA; UK'S NEW TRADING SCHEME: BANGLADESH TO GET EASIER ACCESS TO UK MARKET IN POST-LDC ERA; INDIA WANTS TO START CEPA TALKS IN SEPT: SEEKS ANNOUNCEMENT DURING PM'S VISIT; LENDING DECISION ON BANGLADESH IN OCTOBER, SAYS IMF; SEVEN SUB-COMMITTEES FORMED TO ADDRESS CHALLENGES OF LDC GRADUATION**

Prime minister Sheikh Hasina has asked authorities concerned to find out a way for importing fuel oil from Russia amid fuel crisis in the country. She said that due to the Russia-Ukraine war, people are suffering because of the increase in global oil prices. She also said that in the current situation, India and other countries are buying oil from Russia therefore, Bangladesh need to explore the way of exporting fuel from Russia. Planning minister MA Mannan told the media after ECNEC meeting.

In the meantime, the United Kingdom (UK) has launched the Developing Countries Trading Scheme (DCTS), offering 65 developing countries, including Bangladesh, an easier market access to their market with reduced tariff rates and simpler terms of trade. British High Commissioner in Dhaka Robert Chatterton Dickson said that Bangladeshi businesses will have easier access to UK markets under the new scheme. He also said that even after Bangladesh graduates from the least developed country (LDC) status in 2026, it will retain duty-free access to the UK for 98 per cent of its products, including ready-made garments. DCTS will harness the power of trade and the private sector to enable developing countries like Bangladesh to grow and prosper. The UK is one of Bangladesh's biggest export markets with annual trade partnership worth over \$4.0 billion.

On the other hand, India wants to start negotiations with Bangladesh for signing a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) soon, preferably next month, as a joint study on the proposed pact was accepted by both the sides. Indian Commerce Secretary B V R Subrahmanyam placed the proposal to Bangladesh High Commissioner in New Delhi Muhammad Imran in a recent meeting. The secretary also insisted that the joint statement of premiers of the two countries, when Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina would visit New Delhi in the first week of September, can stipulate the start of CEPA negotiations. He highlighted that the CEPA negotiation should be done in a way where Bangladesh would be more benefited compared to India. Bangladesh and India first discussed the possibility of signing a CEPA deal in 2018 in a commerce secretary-level meeting for increasing bilateral trade and overall cooperation.

Bangladesh has to wait until October for the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to take a final call on its request to borrow funds from the Washington-based lending agency. Rahul Anand, head of IMF's Asia-Pacific Division, said there is now no dire situation in Bangladesh. In terms of foreign debt, the country has a different picture compared to other countries in the region, especially Sri Lanka. He also denied any connection of IMF loan conditions with the recent fuel price hike move of Bangladesh government. He added that Bangladesh's foreign debt is relatively small at around 14 per cent of gross domestic products (GDP). That is why the risk of the country going into default is low. Even, there is no reason to compare Bangladesh with Sri Lanka.

<https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/economy/lending-decision-on-bangladesh-in-october-says-imf-1660734013>

<https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/economy/seven-sub-committees->

## AFGHANISTAN: SCO CHIEF: AFGHAN SECURITY SITUATION IMPORTANT FOR REGION; WANG YU: CHINA WILL 'SUBSTANTIALLY ENHANCE' COOPERATION WITH AFGHANISTAN

The Tenth Moscow Conference on International Security took place in Moscow with the participation of several officials from Asian, African, and Latin American countries. In this conference, the secretary general of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) said that controlling the situation in Afghanistan is one of the crucial elements in keeping the region stable. Member countries support Afghanistan's wish to become an independent neutral democratic and peaceful country, said Zhang Ming, the secretary general of the SCO. Meanwhile, the Russian Defense Minister, Sergei Shoigu, emphasized that Russia, China, Iran, India and Pakistan can play a key role in the stability of the region.

China's ambassador said his country will expand relations with the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. "As Afghans are good neighbors, brothers and partners, China will stand firm on the concept of community with the shared future for mankind, guided by the global development initiative and global security initiative. China will substantially enhance bilateral cooperation in all areas," said Wang Yu. "It will be in the interest of Afghanistan if we expand our relations with China and China also acknowledges Afghanistan as an independent country and interacts with us," said Janat Fahim Chakari, an international relations specialist.

## BANGLADESH: ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES, EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLINGS: FORM INDEPENDENT BODY FOR INVESTIGATION: BACHELET TELLS GOVT; CONGRESSIONAL BANGLADESH CAUCUS EYES STRENGTHENING DHAKA-WASHINGTON TIES

UN high commissioner for human rights Michelle Bachelet has said that she has urged the government to form an independent and specialised mechanism to investigate enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings as her office is ready to advise on the formation of such a body in line with international standards. She made this remarks while addressing a press conference in the hotel InterContinental Dhaka after warping up her official visit to Bangladesh. During her visit, the UN rights chief met with prime minister Sheikh Hasina, several ministers including foreign and home ministers, government officials, National Human Rights Commission and representatives of civil society, members of the diplomatic community and academics. Michelle Bachelet also said that various UN human rights mechanisms- including the UN Committee Against Torture, have been raising concerns for several years about allegations of enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, torture, many of which have been attributed to the Rapid Action Battalion, and the lack of accountability for such violations.

In the meantime, newly inaugurated Congressional Bangladesh Caucus will promote "continued good relations" between Bangladesh and the United States. Congressman Joe Wilson of South Carolina in the House of Representatives who joined with his colleagues - Congressmen Gerry Connolly, Dwight Evans and Steve Chabot as a co-chair of the Congressional Bangladesh Caucus said that the US look forward to strengthening the United States-Bangladesh relationship on the basis of shared democratic values to address major issues, including climate change, human rights, and humanitarian challenges. Caucus Members will receive periodic updates on bilateral relationship, joint efforts to combat terrorism and promote human rights, as well as opportunities for high-level visits between the two countries, including with Ambassador M Shahidul Islam as they work to strengthen their relationship.

<https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/i297necuef>

<https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2022/08/18/>

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## INDIA: INDIA MONITORS ANY DEVELOPMENT IN ITS NEIGHBOURHOOD WHICH HAS BEARING ON ITS SECURITY: JAISHANKAR; TAIWAN AN INTERNAL QUESTION FOR BEIJING, DIFFERENT FROM LAC ISSUE: CHINA ENVOY; AJIT DOVAL MEETS RUSSIA'S NSA, DISCUSSES SECURITY

A day after Chinese ballistic missile and satellite tracking ship Yuan Wang 5 arrived at Hambantota port in Sri Lanka, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said that India monitors any development in its neighbourhood which has a bearing on its security. Jaishankar, who is in Bangkok to attend the 9th India-Thailand Joint Commission Meeting, made the remarks when asked about the docking of the ship at the Hambantota port. Earlier, China had said that the activities of its vessel will not affect the security of any country and should not be obstructed by any third party— a reference to India and its security concerns. Last Saturday, Sri Lanka, which had deferred the visit of the Chinese military vessel following concerns raised by India, made a U-turn and allowed the ship to dock at the Hambantota port from August 16 to 22.

On the other hand, China's ambassador to India, H.E. Sun Weidong has said in his first media interaction since the border standoff began two years ago that the Taiwan question is different from the boundary question between India and China. He also said both sides are continuously trying to bring the ties back on track. Calling the current border situation stable, he added that the two sides are working towards switching over

from emergency response to normal management of the situation. On the standoff, he said that India and China have met several times at diplomatic and military levels, and have agreed to maintain the dialogue in a "constructive and forward-looking manner". On infrastructure building and military exercises along Line of Actual Control, Sun said China always conducts normal exercises, and the two sides are working on the principle of mutual and equal security.

In his first visit to Moscow since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February this year, National Security Adviser Ajit Doval has met his Russian counterpart, Nikolai Patrushev, and discussed a wide range of issues of bilateral cooperation in the area of security. The two sides decided to continue the dialogue between the two countries' Security Councils, and also discussed bilateral and regional security situation. The Russian government said in its statement that a wide range of issues of bilateral cooperation in the area of security, as well as topical problems on the regional and international agenda were discussed. The two sides agreed to continue the dialogue between the two countries' Security Councils, having emphasized the progressive development of the Russian-Indian special and privileged strategic partnership.

## MYANMAR: MYANMAR REGIME SENTENCES SUU KYI TO A FURTHER SIX YEARS IN PRISON ON CORRUPTION CHARGES

A Myanmar junta court sentenced the country's ousted leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to an additional six years in prison, finding her guilty of further corruption charges, relating to a charity she founded in memory of her late mother. In the four corruption cases, a special court in Naypyitaw Prison said that the 77-year old leader of the National League for Democracy Party misused her power to rent public land at below market prices and to build a residence with donations intended for Suu Kyi's charity, the Daw Khin Kyi Foundation. Sources close to the court said Daw Aung San Suu Kyi complained that the verdict was unfair and has asked

her lawyers to appeal. Since her arrest following last year's coup, the military regime has filed 20 charges against Suu Kyi, including 13 corruption cases. She faces a potential combined prison term of 164 years if found guilty of all 20 charges, with the regime seemingly determined to ensure that their politically-motivated charges keep Suu Kyi behind bars for the rest of her life. So far, she has been sentenced to 17 years in jail on six charges.

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-regime-sentences-suu-kyi-to-a-further-six-years-in-prison-on-corruption-charges.html>

## NEPAL: NEPAL AIMS 100 PERCENT ELECTRICITY ACCESS BY 2024; LOWER HOUSE PASSES BILL ON CITIZENSHIP ACT, RETURNED BY PRESIDENT, WITHOUT CHANGE

Nepal Electricity Authority announced its plan to achieve 100 percent access to electricity within the next two years, well ahead of the target year of 2030 set by the Sustainable Development Goal 7. Goal 7 is one of 17 Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015. It aims to "ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all". The electricity access has reached 92.52 percent of the population in the country by the end of the last fiscal year ended mid-July, said Kul Man Ghising, managing director of Nepal Electricity Authority, addressing the 37th anniversary of the utility.

The House of Representatives endorsed the bill to amend the Citizenship Act 2006, which was returned by President Bidya Devi Bhandari for a review, without any changes. The bill

that was endorsed with a majority vote will be sent to the President's Office again for authentication after it gets through the National Assembly. After sitting on the bill for 14 days, Bhandari returned it to the lower house with a 15-point message and comments on seven provisions of the bill, urging Parliament to review it. However, the House didn't review it as the ruling parties decided to resend it for authentication without any changes.

<https://tkpo.st/3T0cl7a>

<https://kathmandupost.com/national/2022/08/18/lower-house-passes-bill-on-citizenship-act-returned-by-president-without-change>

## PAKISTAN: IMRAN URGES 'NEUTRALS' TO REVIEW DECISIONS TO BRING STABILITY TO COUNTRY; US COMMANDER LAUDS PAKISTAN ARMY'S 'COMMENDABLE' EFFORTS IN WAR ON TERROR

Former Prime Minister and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan urged the "neutrals", a tacit reference to the establishment to review their policies, saying stability would not come to the country unless free and fair elections were held. Imran Khan said that the country's economy cannot be fixed by borrowing loans and without wealth creation. He said that political and economic stability would come to the country only through free and fair elections.

General Michael Erik Kurilla, Commander US CENTCOM along with a delegation visited GHQ and held one-on-one meeting with the Chief of Army Staff (COAS) and discussed the matters of mutual interest, regional security situation & stability, defence and security cooperation particularly military to military ties during the

meeting. The one-on-one call was followed by delegation level meeting. Pakistan Army's counter terrorism efforts and significant contributions towards regional peace and stability were discussed. Pakistan-US military training exchange programme also came under discussion. The visiting dignitary acknowledged Pakistan Army's commendable efforts in fight against terrorism, counter terrorism experiences and efforts for regional peace and stability. Later, the visiting dignitary also visited Army Museum and took keen interest in various historical enclosures.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2371842/imran-urges-neutrals-to-review-decisions-to-bring-stability-to-country>

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2371846/us-commander-lauds->

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## SRI LANKA: CHINESE SURVEY SHIP DOCKS IN SRI LANKA AFTER DIPLOMATIC STANDOFF

A Chinese research ship has docked at a Sri Lankan port after a days-long delay, reportedly because of concerns raised by India and the United States. The Yuan Wang 5 entered Sri Lanka's Hambantota port and was welcomed by Chinese diplomats and port officials, according to the Colombo Gazette. The satellite tracking ship was initially scheduled to arrive in Hambantota port, a facility built and leased by Chinese companies and located on the southern tip of Sri Lanka, on August 11. But the Sri Lankan foreign ministry deferred the five-day replenishment visit on Au-

gust 8, citing "certain concerns", apparently due to protests from New Delhi and Washington, according to media reports.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/8/16/chinese-survey-ship-docks-in-sri-lanka-after-diplomatic-standoff>

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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](mailto:bei@bol-online.com). For more information about BEI and our work, please visit <https://www.bei-bd.org/>

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