

## || WEEKLY NEWS HIGHLIGHTS ||

### BANGLADESH ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE (BEI)

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

|| AUGUST 20 -AUGUST 27, 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 30 August. Bangladesh reported no new deaths and 172 coronavirus cases on 30 August and has thus far recorded a total of 29,323 fatalities and 2,011,732 confirmed cases. Bangladesh has administered a total 279,480,539 Covid-19 vaccine doses, totaling 85.70% of the population.

Bhutan reported no new cases and no deaths on 30 August. A total of 61,076 cases have been registered until 30 August, while 87.36 % of Bhutan's population has been vaccinated.

India reported 34 deaths and 7,231 new coronavirus cases on 30 August, bringing the total number of cases to 44,415,723 while the total number of deaths now stands at 527,799. Until 30 August, 68.27% of Indian population has been vaccinated.

Myanmar reported total 19,437 deaths and 615,117 confirmed cases while 50.63 percent of population got vaccinated till 30 August.

Maldives has recorded 180,384 and 300 deaths since the beginning of pandemic. Nepal reported 10,687 new coronavirus cases on 30 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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## AFGHANISTAN : TALIBAN TO PROCURE OIL AND GAS FROM RUSSIA; INDIA SUPPORTS “PEACEFUL, SECURE AND STABLE” AFGHANISTAN, SAYS INDIAN DEFENSE MINISTER

The Taliban administration is in the final stages of talks in Moscow over the terms of a contract for Afghanistan to purchase gasoline and benzene from Russia. Habiburrahman Habib, the spokesperson for Afghanistan's Ministry of Economy confirmed that an official delegation chaired by the commerce ministry was in the Russian capital and finalizing contracts for supplies of wheat, gas and oil.

Afghanistan’s sovereign territory should not be misused to intimidate or attack any other country, Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said in Tashkent. Addressing the defense chiefs’ meet at the 24th edition of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in the Uzbekistan capital, Singh further reiterated India’s support for a “peaceful, secure and stable” Afghanistan, in light of the Taliban’s takeover of the war-torn nation in August 2021.

<https://www.afghanistantimes.af/taliban-to-procure-oil-and-gas-from-russia/>

<https://www.afghanistantimes.af/india-supports-peaceful-secure-and-stable-afghanistan-says-indian-defense-minister/>

## JRC MEETING: BANGLADESH, INDIA REACH CONSENSUS ON KUSHIYARA WATER SHARING-OKAY

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) on withdrawal of water from the upstream of the Kushiyara River is expected to be signed in the upcoming India visit of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Bangladesh and India have initially reached a consensus over the issue at the secretary-level meeting of the joint river commission (JRC) and it is likely to be finalized at a ministerial meeting at Delhi. The authorities have already started preparing for the MoU signing between the two neighboring nations. According to diplomatic sources, the secretary-level meeting discussed issues related to cooperation in sharing water of common rivers. Later, the both sides reached an initial consensus over sharing water of Kushiyara River. They also reviewed the agenda of the ministerial meeting. Water Resources Secretary Kabir Bin Anwar led the Bangladesh delegation at the meeting while his Indian counterpart Pankaj Kumar represented his country.

<https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/e4rwt0pdsn>

## **BANGLADESH : FIVE YEARS OF ROHINGYA CRISIS: UN CHIEF SEEKS DURABLE SOLUTION TO ROHINGYA CRISIS; ROHINGYAS TO BE REHABILITATED IN US: BLINKEN; MYANMAR SHOULD ALLOW INGOS TO WORK IN RAKHINE: PM**

The United Nations secretary general Antonio Guterres has called on the international community to find “comprehensive, durable and inclusive solutions” to help end the plight over 700,000 Rohingya who fled from Myanmar to Bangladesh to escape a brutal military crackdown. The secretary general issued the statement marking five years since the start of the forced mass displacement of Rohingya and other communities from Myanmar’s Rakhine state. The Secretary-General noted the unflagging aspirations for an inclusive future among the country’s many ethnic, and religious groups and underlines that the full and effective participation of the Rohingya people is an inherent part of a Myanmar-led solution to the crisis. He also said that greater humanitarian and development access for the United Nations and its partners to affected areas is crucial.

In the meantime, US secretary of state Antony Blinken has said that they are working to increase resettlement of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh in a bid to rebuild their lives in the United States. He came up with this disclosure in a press release titled ‘Marking Five Years Since the Genocide in Burma’. The statement said that as an essential component of an international, comprehensive humanitarian response, the U.S. is working to significantly increase resettlement of Rohingya refugees from the region, including from Bangladesh, so that they can rebuild their lives in the United States. Blinken also said that the United States stands in solidarity with the government of Bangladesh and other Rohingya-hosting governments in the region.

Blinken added that they will continue to support Rohingya and the people of Burma in their pursuit of freedom and inclusive democracy by advancing justice and accountability, increasing economic and diplomatic pressure, and safeguarding the human rights and human dignity of all individuals in Burma.

On the other hand, Prime minister Sheikh Hasina has said while United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Myanmar Noeleen Heyzer called on her at the latter’s official residence Ganabhaban that Myanmar should allow international organizations to work in the Rakhine state to create an appropriate environment for the dignified return of the forcibly displaced Rohingya people. Prime minister's press secretary Ihsanul Karim briefed reporters after the meeting. Recalling the CHT Peace treaty, Sheikh Hasina said some 62,000 refugees were returned home from India after signing the treaty in 1997. The UN special envoy said that she visited Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar and had talks with them and it is essential to create a suitable atmosphere to ensure their dignified return to Myanmar, she said.

<https://en.prothomalo.com/international/ss0tzh232v>  
<https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/je25yogahx>  
<https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/qt60hh5r28>

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## BUSINESS : PM SEEKS HELP FROM QATAR IN LNG IMPORTS; BANGLADESH MULLS ALTERNATIVE TRANSACTIONS TO IMPORT COMMODITIES FROM RUSSIA; EXPORTS TO SAARC COUNTRIES REACH NEW HEIGHTS

While Qatar’s labor minister Ali bin Saed bin Smaikh Al Marri paid a courtesy call on her at her Ganabhaban residence, Prime minister Sheikh Hasina has offered land to Qatar in the special economic zones being set up across Bangladesh alongside seeking more help from the gulf country in the energy sector, particularly in LNG import. PM said that Bangladesh is setting up 100 special economic zones and Qatar can take land in the zones for its investors and entrepreneurs to make investments on a larger scale. The premier told the minister of Qatar that China, Japan, India and Korea have already taken land in the economic zones and they are working to set up industries there.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh has been weighing options to make payments for commodities it seeks to import from Russia after Moscow was banned from using the SWIFT payment system, the most popular international payment gateway, following its invasion of neighboring Ukraine. To that effect, Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi confirmed that Dhaka has already been in touch with 24 international banks, which still maintain a financial connection with Moscow, to discuss how to proceed. An inter-ministerial meeting, with both Munshi and Food Minister Sadhan Chandra Majumder, took place in this regard at the Cabinet Division in Dhaka. Stakeholders from their respective industries attended the meeting as well. Participants discussed at length how to make payments of imported commodities from Russia while bypassing the SWIFT system. According to a white paper published by Thomson Reuters Regulatory Intelligence, or TRRI, in July, global banks and businesses have been struggling to do business with Russia following unprecedented levels of sanctions, export controls, and prohibitions against providing certain corporate services to Russia that have

been imposed by Western governments since Russia invaded Ukraine. Moscow, however, quickly opted for different alternative payment methods for their top export items, mostly gas, oil and grains, to keep the cash flow running and the economy afloat.

In the meantime, Bangladesh’s exports to South Asian nations reached a new high in the last fiscal year of 2021-22 for having grown steadily over the past three years, according to Export Promotion Bureau (EPB). India’s zero-duty benefit for most Bangladeshi items aided the growth, particularly in the last fiscal year, when overall exports to eight countries in the region grew 53 per cent year-on-year to \$2.28 billion. The demand for garments made in Bangladesh has been growing in Indian and Nepalese markets on the back of their expanding middle-income population. Moreover, sourcing is on the rise by foreign retailers and brands like Walmart for Indian markets and by the neighboring country’s domestic retailers and brands such as Reliance and Aditya Birla. Data from the EPB showed that India alone accounted for \$1.99 billion or 87 per cent of the total exports receipts from the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in fiscal year 2021-22.

<https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/government/qgbk1jh6ro>

<https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/economy/bangladesh-mulls-alternative-transactions-to-import-commodities-from-russia-1661436712>

<https://www.thedailystar.net/business/export/news/exports-saarc-countries-reach-new-heights-3099516>

## BHUTAN : NO FURTHER IMPORT SUSPENSIONS FOR NOW: FM

Finance Minister Namgay Tshering has told that Bhutan government will review the moratorium on the import of vehicles, which came into effect on August 18, after six month. The moratorium was imposed in view of a drastic depletion of currency reserves and the worsening Balance of Payments, which is the difference between the inflow and outflow of money. The reserve position and Balance of Payments, the finance minister said, would be reviewed on a monthly basis to keep track of the situation. He said the moratorium would be eased gradually depending

on how the situation would improve. Asked if the government had plans to restrict other non-essential imports, he said that a detailed plan of action and a list of goods whose imports would be restricted if the situation worsens have been prepared.

<https://kuenselonline.com/no-further-import-suspensions-for-now-fm/>

## INDIA: DELHI, DHAKA DISCUSS SHARING RIVER WATER; BANGLADESH PM SHEIKH HASINA SET TO ARRIVE IN DELHI ON SEPTEMBER 5; TRADE AND DEFENCE TIES ON TALKS TABLE

Union Ministry of Jal Shakti has said that India and Bangladesh have finalized the text of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on interim water sharing of Kushiyara River. The text was finalized during the 38th meeting of the ministerial-level Joint Rivers Commission (JRC) of India and Bangladesh. The two sides were led by Jal Shakti Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat and his Bangladesh counterpart, Zaheed Farooque. According to the Jal Shakti Ministry, the JRC meeting assumes significance since it was held after a “long gap” of 12 years, although technical interactions under the framework of JRC have continued in the interim. The ministry said India and Bangladesh share 54 rivers, of which seven have been identified earlier for developing the framework of water-sharing agreements on priority. During the meeting, the neighbors agreed to include eight more rivers for data exchange.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is set to arrive in India on September 5 for a four-day visit— her first since the start of the pandemic. Sources said an advance team from Dhaka, including foreign ministry and security officials, is in India to discuss the logistics and

protocol for the visit. PM Hasina will be in India between September 5 and 8. She is likely to arrive on September 5 and hold talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other Indian leaders, before heading to Jaipur and Ajmer Sharif. She will return to Dhaka on September 8. During her visit, Hasina and Modi are expected to jointly inaugurate a “Swadhinata Sarak” from Bangladesh to India through virtual mode. Trade, connectivity and defence ties are expected to dominate the conversation between the two sides when the leaders meet for bilateral talks on September 6. Besides, border management, river-sharing, and development cooperation will also be part of the discussions.

<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/delhi-dhaka-discuss-sharing-river-water-8112141/>

<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/hasina-set-to-arrive-in-delhi-on-september-5-8100591/>

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## MYANMAR : UK IMPOSES MORE SANCTIONS ON MYANMAR MILITARY-LINKED COMPANIES; UN SPECIAL ENVOY'S MEETING WITH MYANMAR JUNTA CHIEF DEEPLY DISAPPOINTING: NUG; INDIAN FOREIGN MINISTER DEFENDS TIES WITH MYANMAR JUNTA

The UK has announced a further round of sanctions against Myanmar's junta targeting three military-linked businesses including Sky One Construction Co. Ltd, which the coup leader's son is a director of. Also sanctioned are the Star Sapphire Group of Companies and the International Gateways Group of Companies Limited, according to the UK government's press release. Britain stated in the press release that the three companies are being sanctioned in an effort to limit the Myanmar military's access to arms and revenue. Sky One Construction Co. Ltd was established in April 2013 by junta crony U Maung Maung Naing, who fronts a number of businesses connected to regime Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing's family. His son, Aung Pyae Sone, is a director of Sky One, according to the Directorate of Investment and Company Administration.

On the other hand, Myanmar's civilian National Unity Government (NUG) has expressed extreme disappointment at the United Nation's (UN) special envoy on Myanmar's meeting with coup leader Senior General Min Aung Hlaing. UN special envoy Noeleen Heyzer met with the junta chief in Naypyitaw on 17 August, despite numerous warnings that it would give an appearance of legitimacy to the military regime. She was also reminded of the failure of the visits of her counterpart from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. The NUG responded to the meeting with a statement saying that the meeting's overriding outcome has been to diminish the credibility of both the special envoy and the UN. The civilian government said that it acknowledged that the special envoy clarified in a statement issued later that the meeting did not "in any way confer legitimacy" on the junta. The NUG also said that it appreciated the

Special Envoy's call for a cessation of violence, respect for human rights, allowing humanitarian access to all those in need, and an end to airstrikes and the burning of civilian houses.

Meanwhile, India's foreign minister has defended his country's ties with the Myanmar junta, despite growing international concerns about recent executions and the legitimacy of elections planned for next year. Myanmar's decade-long experiment with democracy was halted last year and the country has since spiraled into bloody conflict after the military ousted Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian government in a coup. It has become a global pariah, with some Western countries downgrading relations and leveling economic sanctions against the junta. But India, China and Russia have continued to engage with the regime, including conducting ministerial visits. Indian Minister of External Affairs Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said New Delhi's position on Myanmar has been consistent over decades and goes back to the country's struggle for freedom against colonialism. He also said that as a direct neighbor, India could not avoid dealing with the military junta regime because of border issues such as organized crime, coronavirus and Indian insurgents in Myanmar.

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/uk-imposes-more-sanctions-on-myanmar-military-linked-companies.html>

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/un-special-envoys-meeting-with-myanmar-junta-chief-deeply-disappointing-nug.html>

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/indian-foreign-minister-defends-ties-with-myanmar-junta.html>

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## NEPAL : DISPUTE IN CONGRESS OVER ELECTION SEATS AS LEADERS WANT A BIGGER BITE FOR THE PARTY; UML CALLS FOR POLL ALLIANCE OF LEFTIST FORCES

The Nepali Congress is caught in a conundrum over how many seats to claim as the ongoing seat-sharing talks in the ruling coalition have got knottier with all the political parties seeking bigger bites of the 165 lower house seats. According to party insiders, Deuba has appeared flexible over the party's demands for seats, he is reportedly ready to compromise a few seats if necessary so as to keep the coalition intact. On the other hand, many other leaders of the party have remained adamant on their demand for not less than 100 seats. The Central Committee meeting of the CPN-UML has decided to go to the November 20 polls projecting its chairman KP Sharma Oli as the next prime minister. The two-day-long

meeting also decided to partner with like-minded parties in the upcoming federal and provincial polls. This is probably the first time since the dissolution of the Nepal Communist Party the UML chair has made a call for forming a left alliance. Insiders, however, said there have been attempts to hold discussions with the leaders of the CPN (Maoist Centre), and the CPN (Unified Socialist). During the meeting chairman Oli had told leaders that merely sloganeering for a left alliance will not work and a focused campaign is needed.

<https://tkpo.st/3TjWH6L>

<https://tkpo.st/3AnpDC6>

## PAKISTAN : PAKISTAN PM SHEHBAZ SHARIF VISITS QATAR SEEKING TRADE, INVESTMENT; MINISTRY TO SEND PAKISTANI MANPOWER ABROAD FOR FREE

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has travelled to Qatar in the hope of generating trade and investment for his cash-strapped country. The South Asian country of 220 million people is in economic turmoil with a balance of payment crisis. The foreign reserves have fallen to as low as \$7.8bn, hardly enough for more than a month of imports, a widening current account deficit, a historic depreciation of the rupee against the United States dollar and 24.9 percent inflation posted in July. The visit is coming ahead of an International Monetary Fund (IMF) meeting that is expected to approve a \$1.2bn tranche of lending, which has been stalled since the beginning of the year.

Federal Minister for Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development Sajid Hussain Turi has said that steps were afoot to send Pakistani workers and professionals abroad free of charge and minimize the hurdles for thousands of citizens seeking better professional

opportunities in foreign countries. Currently, Pakistanis trying to bid adieu to the country for greener pastures are required to pay fees ranging from Rs 50,000 to 100,000. However, a summary seeking abolition of the charges as well as smoothing out of the bureaucratic maze will be soon presented to the cabinet for approval. The move will essentially enable the government to export manpower to mitigate unemployment and earn precious foreign exchange.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/8/23/pakistan-pm-visits-qatar-seeking-trade-and-investment>  
<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2373339/ministry-to-send-pakistani-manpower-abroad-for-free>

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## SRI LANKA : IMF HOLDS TALKS WITH SRI LANKA ON DEBT RESTRUCTURING

A team from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) will meet Sri Lanka's president for talks to finalise a bailout package, including restructuring debt of about \$29 billion, amid the nation's worst financial crisis in more than seven decades. The second such IMF visit in three months comes as the Indian Ocean island scrambles to lock down a staff-level pact with the global lender for a possible \$3 billion programme to pave its way out of the crisis. The team will also hold talks with the central bank governor and other officials, including

representatives of Sri Lanka's financial and legal advisers Lazard's and Clifford Chance.

<https://www.thedailystar.net/business/global-economy/news/imf-holds-talks-sri-lanka-debt-restructuring-3102511>

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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.

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