

BANGLADESH ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE

A Brief Highlights on Contemporary Issues of South Asia
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NEPAL-BANGLADESH: PTA SIGNING WITH NEPAL FACING COMPLEXITIES

The signing of a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) with Nepal has hit snags as the priorities of various government organizations in Bangladesh and the demands of Nepal for the elimination of other duties and charges (ODCs) along with customs duty are not being matched for striking a deal. Bangladesh trade officials stated that Nepal has repeatedly sought exemption from ODCs, including Supplementary Duty (SD), Regulatory Duty (RD), and other taxes, on the export of its products to Bangladesh under the proposed PTA. Although the Commerce Ministry has responded positively, customs authorities are opposed, thus delaying the progress in signing the trade deal. The National Board of Revenue (NBR) is in favor of the elimination of only customs duties under the proposed PTA as the other duties, such as SD and RD, are imposed to protect the local industry, they added.

Source: *The Financial Express*, 26 April 2021
[\[https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/trade/dhaka-s-negotiations-with-kathmandu-over-pta\]](https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/trade/dhaka-s-negotiations-with-kathmandu-over-pta)

MYANMAR: ASEAN SUMMIT IN JAKARTA AND ROHINGYA REPATRIATION

The ASEAN Summit, held in Jakarta, Indonesia on 24 April 2021, released a five-point consensus aimed to bring about stability in the context of the ongoing political upheaval in Myanmar. The response to the consensus from Myanmar has been mixed. Pro-democracy citizens in Myanmar were upset at the absence of a point regarding the release of political prisoners. Myanmar's Parallel National Unity Government (NUG), formed after the recent military coup, composed of pro-democracy forces and other ethnic groups, expressed deep concern about the junta's response to the ASEAN document and also about the organization's ability to influence Myanmar positively. ASEAN also stressed the peaceful and voluntary repatriation of the Rohingya in line with the bilateral agreement signed between Bangladesh and Myanmar in 2017. The recommendations on the bilateral agreement had been discussed to facilitate the repatriation of displaced nationals back to the Rakhine state. Moreover, ASEAN called for an examination into the root cause of the conflict which caused the forceful displacements of the Rohingya community and urged Myanmar to take appropriate action.

Source: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/opinion/editorial/myanmar-peoples-disdain-asean-borne-pathetic-consensus.html>.
<https://asean.org/chairmans-statement-asean-leaders-meeting-24-april-2021-five-point-consensus/>.
<https://www.thedailystar.net/world/news/protesters-reject-consensus-2083937>

AFGHANISTAN: US TO WITHDRAW ALL TROOPS FROM AFGHANISTAN BY SEPTEMBER 11, 2021

Two decades have passed since the United States invaded Afghanistan and toppled the Taliban regime. The Biden administration is now set to withdraw American troops from the soil of Afghanistan by September 11 this year. This historic withdrawal will not depend on ground realities despite fears that the Taliban could make major gains and further hamper the fragile political stability of the country. Former US President Donald Trump's administration had set the pullout date of May 1, but Biden's decision will delay the end of withdrawal by another five months. This withdrawal of US troops might have geopolitical repercussions across the region.

Source: *The Washington Post*, 14 April 2021
[\[https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/biden-us-troop-withdrawal-afghanistan/\]](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/biden-us-troop-withdrawal-afghanistan/)



|| WEEKLY NEWS HIGHLIGHTS ||

AFGHANISTAN: CHINA TO SUPPORT AFGHANISTAN IN PEACE AND RECONCILIATION PROCESS

Afghanistan is critically important to the strategic interest of Beijing. Many experts believe, as U.S. troops leave China's influence will grow at various levels. China has already expressed its keen interest to provide immediate support for peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan. As per a news conference in Kabul, Mr. Wang Yu, the Chinese Ambassador to Afghanistan, said that Beijing would work together with the international community in a bid to ensure sustainable peace in the country meaning that China would firmly support the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process. China wants the Afghan people to take control of their own destiny and firmly supports an inclusive platform for all stakeholders to achieve peace by political means. It is actively participating bilateral and multilateral foraa and pushing the international community to foster a common understanding across conflicting parties for the promotion of a peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan.

Source: *Afghanistan Times*, 26 April 2021
[<http://www.afghanistantimes.af/china-support-a-stable-afghanistan>]

COVID CRISIS IN SOUTH ASIA

India's Coronavirus infections have significantly worsened since last month. As of March 29, the infection rate has crossed 18 million. The world's second-most populous nation is in deep crisis, with hospitals, oxygen, medicines, and morgues being completely overwhelmed. India's military has begun moving key supplies, such as oxygen, across the nation and will open its healthcare facilities to civilians. Hotels and railway coaches have been converted into critical care facilities to make up for the shortage of hospital beds.

Pakistan is also experiencing a surge of Covid infections with over 5,000 people testing positive for the virus on a single day. Bangladesh reported a lower amount of Covid positive patients compared to last week. Nepal has reported a significant surge of Covid affected patients this week, reporting 4,831 cases.

Source: *Covid Dashboard by CSSE at John Hopkins University*, 29 April 2021

[<https://www.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/bda7594740fd40299423467b48e9ecf6>]

[<https://www.reuters.com/world/india/indias-coronavirus-infections-cross-18-million-2021-04-29/>]

BANGLADESH STRIDES TO AVAIL COVID VACCINE

As South Asia countries face a scourge of the second wave of the pandemic, diversifying the sources of obtaining vaccine supplies has become the top-most priority for the region's governments. Bangladesh is also making a strong effort to solicit vaccines from various sources. China, as a part of its "China-South Asia Platform for Covid-19 Consultation, Cooperation, and Post-Pandemic Economic Recovery", proposed to establish a Medical Equipment Storage where the medical equipment, vaccines and other supplies would be stored for six countries -Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Afghanistan and Pakistan- in South Asia. All six countries have already agreed to the proposal of China. Foreign minister AK Abdul Momen stated that Bangladesh agreed to the proposal as this would ensure the delivery of much-needed supplies of vaccine. Additionally, the government has also approved the production of Russia's Sputnik V and China's Sinopharm coronavirus vaccines.

Source:

[<https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/news/china-initiates-platform-south-asian-nations-2082881>].

[<https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/news/russian-chinese-vaccines-qovt-now-going-coproduction-2085405>]



|| WEEKLY NEWS HIGHLIGHTS ||

BANGLADESH GDP GROWTH: ADB ADJUSTS ITS FORECAST TO 5.5- 6%

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has readjusted its projection of GDP growth of Bangladesh for the Fiscal Year 2020- 2021 to 5.5 - 6% due to the resurgence of Covid cases and fresh lockdown imposed in the country. The ADB Country Director said that the economy of Bangladesh had been signaling recovery from the damage done by the first wave with higher remittances, export, and other indicators but the recent surge and lockdown forces us to cut the projection of the country's GDP growth. He also added that the impact of more coronavirus cases and lockdown would cut at least one percent of current GDP growth projection. The government also revised its GDP growth forecast to 6.1 percent for FY21 for the second time during this pandemic. Initially, the government projected 8.2 percent GDP growth and later it revised its target to 7.4 percent. On 6 April 2021, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) forecasted that the country would achieve 5 percent GDP growth in FY21.

Source: *The Daily Star*, 29 April 2021
[\[https://www.thedailystar.net/business/news/adb-cuts-growth-projection-second-wave-2085613\]](https://www.thedailystar.net/business/news/adb-cuts-growth-projection-second-wave-2085613)

BANGLADESH: PRIME MINISTER URGES FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION PLAN AT LEADERS' SUMMIT ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND RECOMMENDS FOUR MEASURES TO ESCAP FOR QUICK RECOVERY FROM PANDEMIC

Bangladesh's Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, addressed the 'Leaders' Summit on Climate' on Thursday, 22 April 2021 hosted by US President Joe Biden, where she emphasized the importance of a strong collective response and made 4 concrete recommendations to deal with the challenge of climate change. Her suggestions covered issues relating to the announcement of an immediate and ambitious action plan by developed countries to reduce their carbon emissions and keep the global temperature at 1.5°C, as well as calling on them to focus on mitigation measures.

Prime Minister Hasina also addressed the 77th Annual Session of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for the Asia and the Pacific (UN-ESCAP) where she also made four recommendations for quick recovery from the Covid -19 crisis. The four recommendations at the forum of UN ESCAP call on the developed world, development partners and international development institutions to come forward in helping to achieve a quick recovery from the Covid pandemic. She emphasized that the development approach should be more inclusive, resilient, and environment friendly. Lastly, she highlighted that the Asia- Pacific region should take comprehensive and efficient policies for increasing connectivity in different sectors like trade, transport, energy and ICT, science, and technology.

Source: *Dhaka Tribune*, 22 April 2021
[\[https://www.dhakatribune.com/pm-hasina-places-4-suggestions-to-deal-with-climate-challenge\]](https://www.dhakatribune.com/pm-hasina-places-4-suggestions-to-deal-with-climate-challenge)

Financial Express, 27 April 2021
[https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/national/pm-recommends-measures-for-escap-to-ensure-quick-recovery-from-pandemic-1619427090\]](https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/national/pm-recommends-measures-for-escap-to-ensure-quick-recovery-from-pandemic-1619427090)

WEST BENGAL ELECTION: FINAL ROUND OF VOTING TOOK PLACE DESPITE COVID CRISIS

On 29 April, the West Bengal state in India completed its eighth and final round of the state's Assembly Polls. The first round began in March 2021 during which time there was a resurgence of Covid-19 cases in the state. The result of the election will come out in early next month. The safety and security of polling officials and voters had become a major issue during each round of the poll. Every polling station was equipped with Assured Minimum Facilities (AMP) such as drinking water, waiting shed, toilets, and ramps for persons with disabilities. Sanitization of polling stations, mask distribution to voters, thermal scanning was also provided on polling days. Between March and April 2021, five Provincial Assembly Elections have taken place in India in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Pondicherry, and Assam.

Source: *Indian Express*, 29 April 2021
[\[https://indianexpress.com/elections/west-bengal-final-round-of-voting-today-in-covid-shadow-7293094\]](https://indianexpress.com/elections/west-bengal-final-round-of-voting-today-in-covid-shadow-7293094)

In compiling this weekly news update, BEI has attempted to include the most relevant stories from the past week related to the South Asian Region. Occasionally, news from beyond South Asia will also be included if it is found to be of relevance to 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 all the above text is entirely extracted from various news articles published in the print media of various countries in South Asia and beyond. If you have any comments or feedback for us regarding this digest, please email us at bei@bol-online.com. For more information about BEI and our work, please visit <https://www.bei-bd.org/>

