

[View this email in your browser](#)**April 2021****SOUTH ASIA  
SDG  
UPDATE**

## Announcement

### **Dr. Nagesh Kumar, Director of UNESCAP SSWA Office moves on to a new position**



After 12 years of dedicated service at the UNESCAP, Dr. Nagesh Kumar, Director and Head of UNESCAP South and South-West Asia Office, based in New Delhi has decided to take an early retirement from United Nations to head the Institute for Studies in Industrial Development (ISID), a New Delhi based public-funded think-tank. Since 2009, Dr. Kumar has served UNESCAP in different senior management roles including as Chief Economist; Director, Macroeconomic Policy and Financing for Development, and Social Development Divisions, based at the UNESCAP headquarters in Bangkok. Before joining UNESCAP in 2009, Dr. Kumar was the Director-General of the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), a New Delhi based policy think-tank of the Government of India. He has also served on the faculty of UNU-MERIT in Maastricht, the Netherlands (1993-1998). A PhD from the Delhi School of Economics, Dr. Kumar is recipient of the Exim Bank's first International Trade Research Award and GDN's Research Medal. He has researched extensively on different aspects of economic development, resulting in the publication of 18 books, over 30 flagship reports of United Nations and RIS, and over 120 peer-reviewed papers, attracting nearly 7000 academic citations.

With his solid understanding of the development challenges and his vast network in South Asia and beyond, he has helped to establish the UNESCAP Office as a leading regional development partner in the subregion, enhancing visibility and outreach of UNESCAP's work. The UNESCAP-SSWA team wishes Dr. Kumar all the best in his future endeavors!



With the retirement of Mr. Nagesh Kumar on 30 April 2021, Mr. Adnan Aliani, Director, Strategy and Programme Management Division, UNESCAP, Bangkok has been designated with additional responsibility as the Officer-in-Charge of UNESCAP Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia Office, New Delhi with effect from 1 May 2021.



## I. Key Activities during January-March 2021



### 1. Policy Dialogue on Galvanizing South and South-East Asia Transport Connectivity highlights important opportunities



New Delhi, India, 22 January 2021. UNESCAP South and South West South Asia office (UNESCAP SSWA) jointly organized a Policy Dialogue with the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER) on “Galvanizing South and South-East Asia Transport Connectivity post-COVID19,” which attracted more than 100 participants and highlighted the urgency to enhance inter-subregional trade and investment flows between

South and South-east Asia and to accelerate reform measures for seamless transport and digital connectivity between the two subregions. The session was moderated by Dr. Nagesh Kumar, Director of UNESCAP SSWA Office and Dr. Nisha Taneja, Professor, ICRIER delivered the opening remarks. It was followed by a presentation by Mr. Anil Kumar Gupta, Senior consultant UNESCAP and former CMD, Container Corporation of India. The distinguished speakers in the high-level panel included Mr Pawan Aggarwal, Special Secretary (Logistics), Ministry of Commerce and Industries, Government of India, Prof. Mustafizur Rahman, Distinguished Fellow CPD Bangladesh; Amb. Rajiv Bhatia, Distinguished Fellow, Gateway House, Mumbai; Dr Fukunari Kimura, Chief Economist, Economic Research Institute of ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA), Jakarta; Mr Md. Mosharaf Hossain, Director, Connectivity and Security Division, BIMSTEC Secretariat, Dhaka; Mr. Rabi Shanker Sainju, former Joint Secretary, Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies, Nepal; Mr Constantino Xavier, Fellow, Foreign Policy Studies, CSEP (Brookings India); Mr Duncan Overfield, Deputy Development Director, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, British High Commission, New Delhi and Mr Sandeep Jain, Economic Affairs Officer, Transport Division, UNESCAP. The experts engaged on a wide array of issues relevant for strengthening and enhancing connectivity to enhance trade, economic growth, and shared regional prosperity. They deliberated on avenues for trade opportunities between the two subregions in closing the infrastructure gaps, resolving procedural challenges, removing regulatory barriers, and creating an enabling policy environment. The dialogue also found the need for turning transport corridors into economic zones and for enhancing coordination of transport logistics within and between governments and their agencies.

Read more [here](#)



### 2. UNESCAP- EIF project on ‘E-Commerce Capacity Building for Women-led MSMEs’ launched in Afghanistan

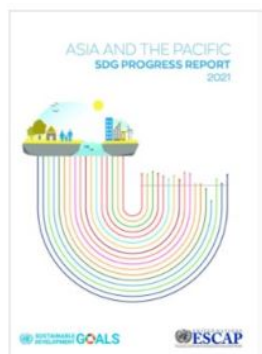


New Delhi, India, 28 January 2021. UNESCAP-South and South-West Asia Office (UNESCAP SSWA) in partnership with Biruni Institute, Afghanistan and Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF) Geneva, held a 'National Inception Workshop on E-Commerce for women led MSME's in Afghanistan' in hybrid mode which was attended by policy makers, women entrepreneurs and other stake holders of Afghanistan. The objective of the meeting was to understand the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in performing business via ecommerce in Afghanistan. Dr. Nagesh Kumar, Director of UNESCAP SSWA Office gave the opening remarks along with Mr. Nazir Kabiri, Executive Director, Biruni Institute, Afghanistan and special remarks were given by H.E. Mr Nisar Ahmad Ghoryani, Minister of Industry & Commerce, Afghanistan and H.E. Ms Karima Hamid Faryabi, Minister of Economy, Afghanistan. The event featured a panel discussion on the theme - 'Ecommerce in Afghanistan' moderated by Ms Manizha Wafeq, Afghanistan Women Chamber of Commerce & Industry. The panelists included Mr Sulaiman Bin Shah, Advisor to the Minister, Ministry of Industry & Commerce (MoIC) Afghanistan; Ms Masi Stanikzai, Founder and CEO at Click.af; Mr Mostafa Kakar, CEO, Parsa Technologies & Former Managing Director Afghanistan; Payments System (APS), Da Afghanistan Bank (DAB); Mr Ahmad Waheed Wais, President at Afghan Post, GoIRA; Ms Mohsena Saeqeb, President of Jama Design, Entrepreneur. The speakers discussed the usage of e-commerce to promote businesses and challenges thereof. The event was attended by more than 80 participants.

Read more [here](#)



### 3. Sustainable Development Goals can guide South Asia to build back better, says UN report



Bangkok, Thailand, 16 March 2021. The 2021 edition of the Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report was launched by Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Under-Secretary General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCAP. "Recovery measures are an excellent opportunity for us to rethink our options for development pathways that are inclusive, more resilient, and respect planetary boundaries," said Ms. Alisjahbana. "As we enter the Decade of Action to deliver the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, we need to reinforce our collective commitment to the SDGs and let it provide our compass for building back together, better and greener." Following the plenary event for presentation of the report to the stakeholders, subregional breakout session was held for South Asia led by Dr. Nagesh Kumar, Director of

UNESCAP-SSWA Office. Sharing the key highlights from the SDG progress in the subregion, he said that 'South Asia needs to accelerate progress on SDG achievement. An important opportunity was to exploit the potential of the stimulus programmes being rolled out in the sub-region to revive the economies in the aftermath of the COVID pandemic, to close the SDG gaps.'

Read more [here](#)



### 4. Building Analytical Capacity in Afghanistan and Bhutan for accelerating SDG achievement

New Delhi, India, 24 March 2021. UNESCAP-South and South-West Asia Office (UNESCAP SSWA) in collaboration with South Asian Network on SDGs (SANS) organized a tailor-made capacity building event on enhancing analytical capacity of think-tanks of Afghanistan and Bhutan for accelerating SDG achievement. The all-day event was held in hybrid mode and aimed at enhancing technical skills of researchers so that their research outputs can be used in evidence-based policy making. Dr Nagesh Kumar, Director of UNESCAP SSWA office UNESCAP South and South-West Asia Office, New Delhi in his opening remarks highlighted the critical importance of evidence-based research inputs in guiding policy makers to pursue





Omar Joya, Executive Director, Biruni Institute, Afghanistan also gave the welcoming remarks. Dr. Selim Raihan, Executive Director, SANEM, Dhaka; Dr. Posh Raj Pandey, Chairman, South Asia Watch on Trade Economics and Environment (SAWTEE), Nepal, Dr. Priyadarshi Dash, Associate Professor, RIS, India; and Prof. Ram Upendra Das, Head, Centre for Regional Trade, India led the various sessions held during the event. Attended by more than 25 participants from research community and policy makers, the sessions

focused at augmenting the knowledge and capacity of researchers through sharing experiences from across the region on making evidence-based policies to accelerate progress for achieving SDGs.

Read more [here](#)



## 5. South Asian countries participate in 8th Asia Pacific Forum for Sustainable Development



**Bangkok, Thailand, 23-26 March 2021.** The 8th Asia-Pacific Forum for Sustainable Development (APFSD) was held in a hybrid mode from 23-26 March 2021 on the theme "Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic in Asia and the Pacific". A regional preparatory of the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), the Forum reviewed SDG1 (No poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 3 (Good health and wellbeing), SDG 8 (Decent work and economic

growth), SDG 10 (Reduced inequalities), SDG 12 (Responsible consumption and Production), SDG 13 (Climate action), SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) and SDG17 (Partnership for the Goals). The Forum was opened by H.E. Ms. Rosemarie Edillon, Under Secretary for Policy and Planning National Economic and Development Authority, The Philippines in her capacity as the Chair of the 7th Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development. The opening session was also addressed by Ms. Amina Mohammed, Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations and Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ESCAP, among other dignitaries. "The 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs] show the way to inclusive, resilient and sustainable economies and societies that respect people and planet," said United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Ms. Amina J. Mohammed in her opening remarks. "The road ahead will not be easy, but we have the tools, energy and capacity to recover from the pandemic and make strides towards achieving the SDGs," she added. "This will be a decade of action and transformation, with ambition, urgency and scale." United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ESCAP Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana urged countries to "formulate a set of policy packages that could create harmony between health and economy, and between economy and the environment." "As we prepare for sustainable and resilient recovery, let us remember that the SDGs are our compass and can continue to play a force for good in transforming our societies in the post-COVID-19 era," said Ms. Alisjahbana. "ESCAP is committed to strengthening, in close collaboration with the UN development system, multi-stakeholder partnerships at the regional, subregional and national levels to recover better together."

Senior dignitaries from the South Asian countries H.E. Mr. Don Pramudwinai, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Thailand; H.E. Munir Akram, President of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC); Ms. Wanun Permpibul, Climate Watch, Thailand CSO Representative provided interventions in the opening forum. The highlights of the country statements made at the APFSD by South Asian countries are reported later.

Read more [here](#)

## II. Select Outreach Activities

### 1. Dialogue highlights the need for regional economic integration to address post COVID-19 challenges in the Bay of Bengal subregion

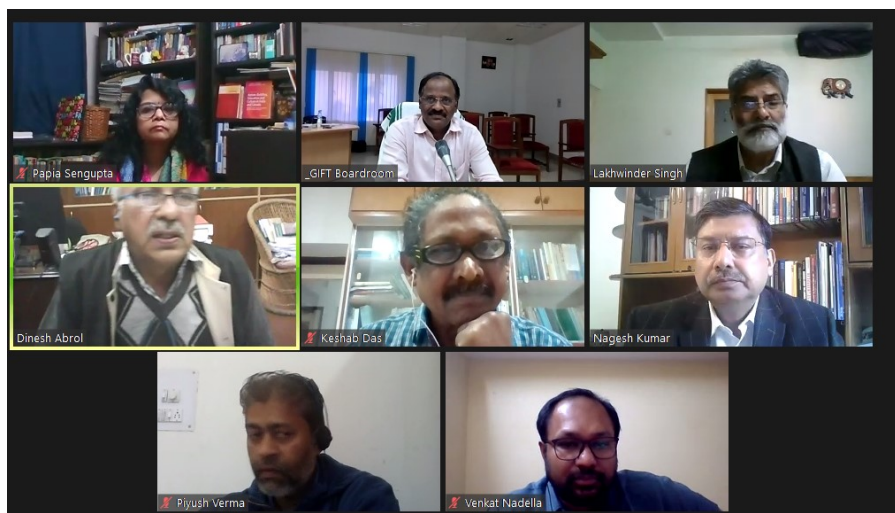


**New Delhi, India, 8-11 February 2021** To discuss the need for regional economic integration in wake of COVID-19 challenges, a Bay of Bengal Economic dialogue was organized from 8-11 February 2021 by SANEM, in collaboration with some leading organizations from the region. Dr. Nagesh Kumar, Director of UNESCAP SSWA Office, chaired the session on 11th February on the theme 'Tackling post COVID-19 challenges in the Bay of Bengal region'. In his remarks, Dr. Nagesh Kumar, stated that "the disruptive effects of the crisis have contracted economies and led to rising inequalities. Government have created fiscal space, expanded public health expenditure, and channeled funds to SMEs, yet recovery has been fragile and uneven". Dr. Rajan Sudesh Ratna, Economic Affairs Officer, UNESCAP SSWA Office was a panelist on day 2 of the session (9th February) on the theme 'Trade and regional value chain'. The dialogue highlighted the necessity for greater regional cooperation in the backdrop of COVID-19 challenges being faced in the Bay of Bengal region and it was felt that such engagements would help to define the scopes for collaboration as well assess and address the COVID-19 challenges in the region.

Read more [here](#)

### 2. UNESCAP contributes to the discussion of India's Draft Science and Technology Policy 2020

**New Delhi, India, 18 February 2021.** Dr. Nagesh Kumar, Director of UNESCAP SSWA Office, chaired the India's Public Lecture on assessment of India's the Draft Science and Technology Policy 2020. Prof. Dinesh Abrol, Centre for Studies in Science Policy, JNU, New Delhi was the speaker and Dr. Papia Sen Gupta, Centre for Political Studies, JNU, New Delhi was the discussant at the session. The speakers made a critical assessment of the newly released draft of the of the National Science, Technology, and Innovation Policy by the Government of India and provided their



inputs. The new policy aims to bring about changes in the ecosystem that would promote research and innovation for both individuals and organizations. The objective of the policy is to identify and address strengths and weaknesses of the Indian Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI) ecosystem to catalyze socio-economic development of the country and make the





### 3. Webinar highlights the Asian perspective at the International Economic Forum on Asia - Digitalization and Development

The poster features logos for RIS (Research and Information System for Developing Countries), OECD Development Centre, and ERIA (Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia). The title is 'International Economic Forum on Asia: Digitalisation and Development: Reflections from Asia'. The date is Friday, 5 March 2021, at 2:30 pm (IST) / 10:00 am (CET). The session is a 'WEBINAR' titled 'Technical Session-I: Digitalization and Sectoral Focus'. The chair is Prof. Nagesh Kumar, Director of UNESCAP SSWA Office, New Delhi, India. The panelists are Prof. Rajat Kathuria (Director and Chief Executive, ICRIER, New Delhi, India), Dr. Miguel Exposito Verdejo (Deputy Head of Unit, Science, Technology, Innovation and Digitalisation), Prof. Keshab Das (Professor, Gujarat Institute of Development Research, Ahmedabad, India), Ms. Anita Gurumurthy (Executive Director, IT for Change, Bengaluru, India), and Prof. Saikat Sinha Roy (Professor of Economics, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, India).

**New Delhi, India, 5 March 2021.** Research and Information System for Developing Countries, New Delhi (RIS) along with Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) organized an International Economic Forum on Asia – Digitalization and Development- Reflections from Asia. Dr. Nagesh Kumar, Director of UNESCAP SSWA Office, chaired the first technical session, titled Digitalization and Sectoral Focus. The session covered the wide scope of digital transformation and the sectors that need specific attention. The session aimed to identify the trends in digital applications and the possible ways different sectors can benefit from the emerging technological possibilities. Eminent speakers brainstormed on sectoral opportunities and challenges of digital economy. The panelists in the session included Prof. Rajat Kathuria, Director and Chief Executive, Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER), New Delhi; Dr. Miguel Exposito Verdejo, European Commission and Prof. Keshab Das, Professor, Gujarat Institute of Development Research, Ahmedabad, India; Ms. Anita Gurumurthy, Executive Director, IT for Change, Bengaluru, India; and Prof. Saikat Sinha Roy, Professor of Economics, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, India.



### 4. Regional Conference on Bay of Bengal as Connectivity Hub in Indo-Pacific Region

New Delhi, India, 14-15 March 2021. Dr. Nagesh Kumar, Director of UNESCAP-SSWA Office participated as a speaker in the Regional Conference on Bay of Bengal as Connectivity Hub in Indo-Pacific Region organized by Centre of Bay of Bengal Studies, Dhaka on 14-15 March 2021. Dr. Kumar addressed the closing session focused on The Bay of Bengal as Gateway to the East – Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Thailand as bridge between South Asia and Southeast & East Asia. Chief Guest for the session was H.E. Prof. Gowher Rizvi, International Affairs Advisor to the Hon'ble Prime Minister and the Moderator was Ambassador (Retd) Tariq A Karim, Director, Centre for Bay of Bengal Studies. The other panelists included Ambassador Mashfee Shams, Secretary (East), Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Dr. C. Raja Mohan, Director, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore; Mr. Nishida Ipeita, Sasakawa Peace Foundation, Tokyo; Dr. Selim Raihan, Executive Director, South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (SANEM). Dr. Kumar's remarks stressed on the importance of connectivity between South, Southeast and East Asia for exploiting potential of trade between the subregions for job creation and resultant development benefits. Greater connectivity between the subregions can guide internal regional transport connectivity reforms within South Asia enhance the commercial viability of the subregional corridors due to expected increase in traffic volumes. It will open will new vistas of overland cargo flow between Asia and Europe, helping the subregional countries to utilize their manufacturing capacities to the full extent. To realize the vision of inter-regional transport connectivity,



international transport projects and programs, (b) formulation of conducive legal and regulatory regimes through comprehensive transport agreements, (c) technical support from multilateral/intergovernmental organizations, and (d) resource mobilization strategies involving public/private, national/international investment partners.



## 5. Knowledge-sharing on COVID-19 pandemic

**New Delhi, India, 28 January 2021.** Dr. Nagesh Kumar, Director of UNESCAP SSWA Office addressed the joint meeting organized by Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) and Philippines Social Science Council (PSSC) as the keynote speaker. The meeting discussed the approaches to managing the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic by India and the Philippines.



## III. Knowledge products issued by UNESCAP-SSWA in the year 2021 and 2020

- [Report – Fourth South Asia Forum on the Sustainable Development Goals](#) (January 2021)
- [UNESCAP SSWA Policy Briefs 7 – Marine Plastic Pollution in South Asia](#) (November 2020)
- [Report on Virtual High-Level Forum on Empowering Women to Join Global Value Chains Through E-Commerce: Experiences in South Asia in COVID-19 Context](#) (October 2020)
- [Policy Brief – Towards Sustainable Graduation of South Asian LDC in the Aftermath of COVID-19: Challenges, Prospects and Policy Lessons](#) (October 2020)
- [Policy Brief – Scenario-Based Risk Analytics for Managing Cascading Disasters](#) (November 2020)
- [SSWA Development Paper 2003 – Asia's Paths to Industrialization and Prosperity](#) (October 2020)
- [Policy Study Series – Pathways to Manage Cascading Risks and Protect People in South Asia: Key Takeaways for Stakeholders](#) (September 2020)
- [Report of the Virtual Policy Dialogue on South Asian Cooperation for Accelerating Recovery from COVID-19 and Building Back Better](#) (September 2020)
- [Policy Study Series – Investing in Innovative Solutions to manage Cascading Disaster Risks in South Asia: Key Takeaways for Stakeholders](#) (August 2020)
- [Report of High-Level Policy Dialogue on COVID-19 and South Asia: Socio-Economic Impacts, National Strategies and Subregional Cooperation for Building Back Better](#) (August 2020)
- [South Asia Development Update – April and July 2020](#) (July 2020)
- [Policy Study Series – Asia-Pacific Disaster Resilience Network: Protecting the Most Vulnerable to Cascading Risks from Climate Extremes and the COVID-19 in South Asia](#) (June 2020)
- [Policy Brief: COVID-19 and South Asia: National Strategies and Subregional Cooperation for Accelerating Inclusive, Sustainable and Resilient Recovery](#) (June 2020)
- [SSWA Development Paper 2002 – Marine Plastic Pollution in South Asia](#) (May 2020)
- [UNESCAP SSWA Policy Briefs 6- Strengthening Freight Transport Corridors of South Asia in the Aftermath of COVID-19](#) (May 2020)
- [Report on the Third South Asia Forum on the Sustainable Development Goals](#) (April 2020)
- [Regional Cooperation for Sustainable Food Security in South Asia](#), London, New York and New Delhi: Routledge for the United Nations (March 2020)
- [South Asia Development Update – January 2020](#) (January 2020)
- [SSWA Development Paper 2001 – Interpreting SDGs For South Asia: In Search of A Regional Framework – The Experience Of Bhutan](#) (January 2020)

## IV. Highlights of South Asian Countries on SDGs Related Issues at the 8th Asia Pacific Forum for Sustainable Development



### Bangladesh

The pandemic poses enormous challenges but has shown the importance of collective efforts and cooperation to recover as well as achieve the Sustainable Development Goals of 2030. The government of Bangladesh has recently approved the 8th Five Year Plan which is in line with the SDG target. The government has given the responsibility to seventeen ministries for the achievement of the seventeen SDGs. It has also designed an SDG Tracker which will monitor the progress of SDG implementation. Bangladesh has taken initiative to localize the SDG with forty priority indicators according to the circumstances of the local areas. Bangladesh, even in times of pandemic, participated in various global and regional forums of SDGs and exchanged experiences regarding their implementation. The Bangladesh's government has adopted a series of stimulus packages estimated at USD 14.6 billion, which accounts to 4.4% of their GDP, for recovering the economy and for the successful implementation of SDGs.

Regional cooperation and integration amongst the South Asian countries could supplement Bangladesh's national strategies for several SDGs namely climate change mitigation, promoting trade and economic activities, disaster management, human development, reducing inequalities, and building peace and justice. Bangladesh believes that in addition to regional cooperation, international development cooperation also has a role to play in helping the countries meet their development financing needs. The nation believes in pooling resources to develop sustainable solutions like collaborative regional approach to agricultural and food-related R&D. In Bangladesh's view, a regional approach may be initiated for the development of common standards and perspectives for methodological processing of data and the reporting of progress at the broader regional and global levels. The nation believes that together nations would be able to overcome the challenges and will be able to build a sustainable world.



### India

In the wake of the global pandemic affecting the global economy along with the domains of health, education, labour and employment and climate initiatives for the Asia and Pacific regions, a four-pillar strategy of "containment, fiscal, financial and long-term structural reform" was adopted by India. While the early intense lockdown provided a strategy to save lives, it also constrained economical activities of the nation. Sectors such as hospitality, travel and tourism were brought to a standstill and this caused unemployment and severe loss of livelihood. To tackle this situation, a systematic pandemic management plan was initiated which included system-wide measures and initiatives focused on specific groups. The nation's core system wide initiative was to constitute a six High Level Empowered Groups (EG) headed by top policy makers and experts to deal with critical aspects. The citizens of the country were provided with emergency financial and food security and special initiatives were implemented for migrant and frontline health workers. The Government of India also initiated measures under Atmanirbhar Abhyaan to empower the working class and migrant workers and to also strengthen India's competitiveness at the global scale. Probably the only nation to use structural reforms to



### Republic of Maldives

With the global poverty and unemployment already on the rise, the inequality gaps and existing vulnerabilities of marginalized groups are being accentuated. Maldives believes that this is an opportunity to re-evaluate past actions and to work together



to achieve agenda 2030. A country heavily dependent on tourism, with 27% GDP from this industry, Maldives was heavily affected when it had to close borders for the first time in its history leading travel, tourism and hospitality industry being brought to a standstill and adversely affecting the economy. Income support, financial assistance, extension of loan payments and various such support measures were provided to those who lost their source of income. The COVID-19 crisis highlighted the importance of collaboration between government and the private sector. Maldives believes that regional cooperation is the key to post COVID-19 sustainable, inclusive and resilient recovery.

Due to the global pandemic, some SDGs have become stagnant, and some have shown a reverse trend. Maldives beliefs that it is of utmost importance to tackle the issue of high NEET (Not in education, employment or training) rate in the region, which is impacting the potential productivity of the region. Further, trade facilitation is in dire need of attention since the domestic and regional economies are at a standstill. The nation is looking to kick start the local and national projects which had been stopped in the wake of Covid pandemic. Initiatives such as "Accelerating Private Investments in Renewable Energy (ASPIRE) are under-way and Maldives has also successfully implemented a phased elimination plan for single use plastic with a target of the year 2023. According to the government, it is crucial for Maldives to align the recovery initiatives with the nation's climate actions and sustainable development agenda in post pandemic recovery efforts. The government is focused on emphasizing greener and resilient developmental initiatives as the country builds back better.

The Maldives government has also been working on a comprehensive "climate emergency" bill to address climate change challenges in designing and implementing developmental programs of the nation, and another bill- the statistical bill, has been submitted to the parliament with the aim that the bill shall strengthen collection, provision and reporting of data, allowing better data availability and hence, better planning and decision making. The nation firmly believes that implementation of climate action can only be achieved by the provision of adequate, predictable, and sustainable financing from developed countries to developing countries, especially for SIDS.



### Nepal

Nepal has placed the SDGs at the centre of its development plans and program. The goals are localized at the sub-national level to aid planning, budgeting, implementation, and monitoring process. The voluntary national review observed a decrease in absolute and multidimensional poverty, increase in access to education, energy and health facilities as a key achievement area in Nepal.

The pandemic COVID-19 harmed trade, tourism, and transport sectors in the country. Impacts were seen in education, construction, agriculture, manufacturing, supply chain, and the service delivery sectors as well. In response to the pandemic, the government of Nepal had introduced relief packages targeting the daily wage earners, poor and other vulnerable people; likewise tax rebates and facilities of a delayed payment of taxes were provided to the business and industrial community. Similarly, concessional loan facilities were provided to the severely affected sectors. Nepal urged for ensuring easy access to all COVID-19 vaccines.

The nation has developed a 50-priority plan which is aligned with the SDGs. Institutional structure for effective implementation of the sustainable development goals have been put in place. SDG Steering committee was formed in the chairmanship of honorable prime minister of Nepal. An implementation and working committee was formed and other thematic committees were also formed. Administering SDGs at all levels of governance, uplifting the disadvantage groups, and giving the aspiration of leaving no one behind remains Nepal's at most priority.



### Islamic Republic of Pakistan

Pakistan has adopted the Agenda 2030 in its development paradigm and identified data at the core of the paradigm shift. The SDGs framework has been translated into a practical application framework for national planning. SDGs are ingrained across state plans and programs and are being localized and institutionalized. In response to the pandemic, Pakistan's government rolled out an \$8 million stimulus package, made emergency cash transfers to marginalized household, and developed a multidimensional vulnerability index. Regional collaborations were developed for rapid employment of diagnostics testing kits, treatments, vaccines and their timely delivery.

Pakistan emphasized on exploring and exploiting regional learning on SDGs. Regional platforms must be viewed as fast platforms for informed collaboration and cooperation to complement the effectiveness of the national mechanisms and address trans-boundary challenges. It condemned 'The country first politics' as the world's most vulnerable are falling through the cracks and the achievement of the SDGs are getting as distant as 2073. It offered its support and looks forward to benefiting from the power of synergies as the members strengthen their collaboration and partnerships.



### Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's paramount consideration had been to minimize the economic and social disparities created by the pandemic to ensure that the important gains on SDG issues by Sri Lanka are not reversed. A multi-pronged approach focused particularly on ensuring good health and well-being, food security, and building resilient livelihoods promoted in an inclusive and equitable manner to address the multiple form vulnerabilities created by the pandemic to ensure that no one is left behind in the recovery efforts.

In response to the pandemic, the Sri Lankan government enforced strict quarantine regulations, social distancing measures, and clinical practice guidelines. Furthermore, several concessionary schemes to support the affected businesses particularly on leasing facilities were placed. The government of Sri Lanka recently signed a \$165 million loan agreement with the Asian Development Bank to provide an immediate financing support for SMEs which have been severely affected by the pandemic including businesses led by women and tea stall holders. A range of financial and material benefits were granted for over six million affected families and vulnerable groups, and low-interest working capital loans were given to ensure MSMEs resilience. Immediate steps were taken to make the COVID-19 vaccination available on an equitable basis to the population.

Sri Lanka is enforcing the commitment to SDGs at the highest levels and into a ministerial steering committee headed by the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka to build strong national ownership of SDGs and mobilizing all stakeholders.



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## V. SDGs IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS

### a. SGD: priorities, actions and means of implementation

**Revolving funds under Poverty Alleviation Fund to be transformed into cooperatives** 4 January 2021 The government is preparing to transform revolving funds created by the Poverty Alleviation Fund into cooperatives. Read more [here](#)

**India's Kashmir region seeks \$4 billion in investments, to provide security** 2 January 2020 India's federal territory of Jammu and Kashmir plans to attract investments worth up to \$4 billion in the next two to three years and would provide security to businesses setting up shop in the insurgency-hit region, its chief said. Read more [here](#)

**Economic indicators showing positive trajectory as exports increasing swiftly: Shibli** 4 January 2021 Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Senator Shibli Faraz has said the economic indicators are showing positive trajectory as export of the country are increasing swiftly due to prudent policies of the government. Read more [here](#)

**Food security: "Money won't be enough if Bangladesh's not self-sufficient"** 3 January 2020 Bangladesh needs to be self-reliant in food production as there will not be enough food that money can buy if a crisis or famine breaks out as a fallout of COVID-19, said Agriculture Minister Dr. Abdur Razzaque. Read more [here](#)

**Government plans to build 6,147 km long road**

**Chabahar port development raises capacity to handle 8.5m tons goods a year: Official** 14 February 2021 Hossien Shahdadi, an official with Sistan-Baluchestan Province Department of Ports and Maritime Organization, said that with more than \$1.3 billion of investment, Chabahar Port is one of the most strategically important ports of the country. Read more [here](#)

**India's economy could recover and grow 10% in fiscal 2022, ratings agency S&P predicts** 16 February 2021 Ratings agency S&P Global Ratings said that India is on track to recover from a pandemic-led economic contraction by next year. South Asia's largest economy could grow 10% in fiscal year of 2022. Read more [here](#)

**Pakistan, IMF reach agreement on reforms to release around \$500 million** 16 February 2021 The package strikes an appropriate balance between supporting the economy, ensuring debt sustainability and advancing structural reform, the fund said in a statement. Read more [here](#)

**Afghanistan: New grant to improve food security, lessen drought and COVID-19 impacts for rural residents** 17 February 2021 The World Bank Board of Executive Directors on February 16 approved a grant from the International Development Association (IDA) of \$97.50 million to provide regular and predictable cash support to Afghans affected by

network. Murad 4 January 2020 Communication Minister Murad Qureshi said the PTI government has planned to build a 6,400-kilometer long network of railways and highways across Pakistan. Read more [here](#)

**Bangladesh a lucrative investment destination in between India, China: FM** 6 January 2021 Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul Momen on Tuesday said Bangladesh, with its 165 million hard-working people in between two large economies like China and India, is a lucrative destination for investment. Read more [here](#)

**World Bank expects Pakistan economic growth to average 1.3pc over next to fiscals** 7 January 2021 WB stated that Pakistan's growth is projected to be held back by continued fiscal consolidation pressures and services sector weakness. Read more [here](#)

**Current downtrend in export likely to continue till April: Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Export Association (United News of Bangladesh)** 7 January 2020 President of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) Dr Rubana Huq has said the current downtrend in RMG export will probably continue till April of this year. Read more [here](#)

**Covid slump may cause 7.7% GDP contraction in FY21: First Advance Estimate** 7 January 2020 India's economy is set for its biggest annual contraction in records going back to 1952 as the rapid spread of coronavirus cases and measures to contain them hurt businesses and households. Read more [here](#)

**Prime Minister Khan lauds Pakistani exporters, as India, Bangladesh struggle continue** 7 January 2020 Prime Minister Imran Khan lauded Pakistan exporters after the country managed to record significant growth as compared to neighboring India and Bangladesh, which posted a decline during Nov-Dec 2020.. Read more [here](#)

**Tax collection surpasses Rs 2,205 billion in first half of current fiscal year, says Prime Minister** 10 January 2021 Imran Khan lauded the authorities for bringing about much-needed reforms in the taxation system. He called for measures to enhance the number of taxpayers in the country. Read more [here](#)

**Government taking steps to provide traders business-friendly environment: President** 11 January 2021 President Dr Arif Alvi has urged the business community to take steps for the financial inclusion of differently abled people by providing them jobs according to their skills and talents. Read more [here](#)

**Prime Minister launches Pakistan's first instant Digital Payment System 'Raast'** 11 January 2021 In a major stride towards achieving greater efficiency in sending and receiving payments and digitization of the economy, Prime Minister Imran Khan launched the country's first instant Digital Payment System called 'Raast'. Read more [here](#)

**Bangladesh gets closer to Least Development Countries (LDC) graduation** 12 January 2021 Bangladesh is set to meet the LDC graduation criteria for the second consecutive time to be recommended for graduation during the upcoming triennial review of the Committee for Development Policy (CDP) of the United Nations (UN) next month. Read more [here](#)

**Social safety net allowances being sent to beneficiaries' mobile wallets: Prime Minister** 14 January 2021 Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said the government is sending allowances under social safety net (SSN) programme directly to the beneficiaries' mobile wallets to get rid of middlemen. Read more [here](#)

**Pakistan leads in adopting Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) agenda: UN report** 14 January 2021 Pakistan has taken lead in adopting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 ambitious Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), becoming one of the first countries in the world to take up their pledge to transform lives and protect the

droughts and COVID-19 and improve food and nutrition security. Read more [here](#)

**Sri Lanka to launch global campaign to attract tourists** 17 February 2021 Sri Lanka is to launch a global campaign to draw tourists to the country after the coronavirus took a serious hit on the industry. The 'High-Powered Steering Committee for Strategic Management of Global Promotional Campaign' includes stakeholders from the tourism industry. Read more [here](#)

**Curb food adulteration with an iron hand: Prime Minister** 18 February 2021 The Prime Minister said this in an address on the National Food Safety Day-2021, with the theme of "Teksoi Unnyan-Somriddho Desh, Nirapod Khadyer Bangladesh" (Bangladesh: A country of sustainable prosperity and safe food). Read more [here](#)

**Vaccination programme: Government to give priority to tourism sector employees** 18 February 2021 The Government has paid attention to give priority to the personnel engaged in the tourism sector such as hotel employees, tour guides and drivers under the ongoing COVID vaccination programme. Read more [here](#)

**Rise in Remittance in 2020: Bangladesh one of three large recipients** 20 February 2021 Bangladesh became one of the three large remittance-recipient countries that registered a rise in inward remittance last year, according to a new report of the Economist Intelligence Unit. Read more [here](#)

**Nutrition deficiency still prevalent despite country spending billions to address the issue** 21 February 2021 The [Nepal Demographic Health Survey-2016](#) found that 41 percent of women between the age of 15 and 49 and 53 percent of children between 6 and 59 months were anemic. Read more [here](#)

**India's recession exit gains momentum on services, manufacturing** 25 February 2021 India's economy looked ready to leave a sharp downturn behind in the new year, as business and consumer activity showed more signs of gathering momentum in January. Read more [here](#)

**Reserve Bank of India Governor Shaktikanta Das says need coordinated action between centre, states on tax reduction in fuel prices** 25 February 2021 "There is a need for coordinated action between the centre and states because there are inherent taxes levied by both" the Governor said adding that calibrated reduction of taxes was important. Read more [here](#)

**Moody's term Pakistani banks strong growth despite pandemic 'a credit positive'** 25 February 2021 Moody Investor Services in its latest credit outlook, has called the strong profit growth posted by leading Pakistani banks as a credit positive and reflect containment of the pandemic's adverse effects. Read more [here](#)

**Value-addition of horticulture produce crucial to boost exports: President** 28 February 2021 Addressing at a seminar on 'Trade Potential of Pakistan Citrus – From Roots to Trade Routes', the President said it was important for the country to improve quality standards of local fresh fruit with improved packaging and preservation to attract high-end markets. Read more [here](#)

**Prime Minister launches Al-Beruni heritage trail at Nandana Fort in Jehlum** 28 February 2021 Prime Minister Imran Khan has launched Al-Beruni heritage trail at Nandana Fort in Jehlum. The project was undertaken as part of the Prime Minister's vision to promote tourism in line with the National Tourism Strategy 2020-30. Read more [here](#)

**Government targets \$150 billion remittance in 8th Five-Year Plan** 1 March 2021 The government has set an ambitious target of earning \$150 billion through remittance between July 2020 and June 2025, according to a document on the 8th Five-Year Plan. Read more [here](#)



**How a multilingual education model can help Pakistan increase literacy** 14 January 2021 A new report by The Citizens Foundation (TCF) and the Thar Foundation has pointed out how countries like Pakistan - where people speak a host of regional and local languages - can adopt a 'mother tongue-based multilingual education' model to help increase their literacy rates. Read more [here](#)

**Government approves 2 new stimulus packages of Tk 2,700 crore** 17 January 2021 To reduce the impact of coronavirus fallout, the government today approved two new stimulus packages of Tk 2,700 crore to boost the cottage, small and medium enterprises, and to develop the living standards of people at the grassroots level. Read more [here](#)

**Understanding food poverty and food vulnerability situation** 17 January 2021 There is no denying the fact that over time, Bangladesh has performed quite impressively in terms of alleviating poverty. Based on the upper poverty line, from as high as 56.7 per cent during the early 90s, headcount poverty gradually declined to 48.9 per cent in 2010 and then 24.3 per cent in 2016. Read more [here](#)

**Modi government creates record! Completes construction of 534 kilometers National Highway in one week** 18 January 2021 In the current financial year 2020-21, the Road Transport and Highways Ministry has constructed 8,169 kilometers of National Highways from April 2020 to 15 January 2021, i.e. with a speed of around 28.16 kilometers per day. Read more [here](#)

**Work underway on over 1,000 km metro network in 27 cities: Prime Minister** 18 January 2021 Work is in progress on over 1,000 km long metro rail network in 27 cities in India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Monday. Read more [here](#)

**Tourism recovering** 19 January 2021 Hotels and resorts have seen a surge in tourist numbers in the last couple of months as young people are leading the recovery of an industry that had hit rock bottom at the height of the coronavirus pandemic. Read more [here](#)

**Prime Minister terms establishment of border markets, vital for prosperity** 19 January 2021 Prime Minister Imran Khan has said establishment of border markets is vital for the prosperity of the population living in border areas of Balochistan and merged districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Read more [here](#)

**Labour Market: Government now looking for alternatives** 21 January 2021 Mentioning that the employment situation in different countries, especially in the oil-dependent Middle Eastern states, might not remain the same as before due to the pandemic, Read more [here](#)

**Economic indicators showing significant improvement: Asad Umar** 21 January 2021 Planning Minister Asad Umar says economic indicators are showing significant improvement, especially the large-scale manufacturing witnessed an overall surge of 15 percent in November 2020. Read more [here](#)

**Sri Lanka reopens to tourists after 10 months** 21 January 2021 Sri Lanka reopened to foreign tourists after a nearly 10-month pandemic closure that cut deeply into the Indian Ocean island nation's lucrative travel industry. Read more [here](#)

**Gifting homes to homeless is the biggest festival: Prime Minister** 23 January 2021 Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said the distribution of 66,189 houses among landless and homeless families across the country under Ashrayan-2 Project as part of the government's pledge to provide houses to all the landless and homeless families. Read more [here](#)

**Agricultural products lead export growth in first half** 26 January 2021 Export revenues from listed

Iran's trade improves by \$65 billion: Official 1 March 2021 Zardboom said that Iran's foreign trade reached \$65 billion during March 2020-February 2021. He added from this amount of foreign trade, about \$34 billion is in imports and about \$31 billion is in exports. Read more [here](#)

**Prime Minister says \$82 billion being invested in ports** 2 March 2021 India will invest USD 82 billion in port projects by 2035, raise share of clean renewable energy source in maritime sector, develop waterways and boost tourism around lighthouses as part of port-led development. Read more [here](#)

**Pakistan improves position on World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Index: Report** 2 March 2021 As per World Bank's latest rankings on ease of doing business for 2020, Pakistan has improved its position by 28 points from 136 to 108 which is an unprecedented improvement, report said. Read more [here](#)

**India's services sector expands at fastest rate in a year in February; employment falls further: Survey** 3 March 2021 The seasonally adjusted India Services Business Activity Index rose from 52.8 in January to 55.3 in February, pointing to the sharpest rate of expansion in output in a year amid improved demand and more favorable market conditions. Read more [here](#)

**Conduct research to diversify exports: Prime Minister** 4 March 2021 Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina today urged researchers to conduct studies to diversify Bangladesh's export basket alongside modernizing and mechanizing the agriculture sector. Read more [here](#)

**India's unemployment rate recovers to pre-Covid level of 6.9% in February: Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE)** 4 March 2021 India's unemployment rate in February stood at 6.9 per cent, much lower than 7.8 per cent clocked in February 2020, suggesting the unemployment rate has recovered to pre-Covid levels. Read more [here](#)

**Pakistan desires to strengthen trade ties with European Union: Foreign Minister** 4 March 2021 The Foreign Minister said there are great opportunities of investment in Pakistan. He said despite Covid-19, there has been a significant increase in investment portfolio from European companies to Pakistan. He expressed satisfaction that bilateral trade has also improved. Read more [here](#)

**Budget 2021 'booster rocket' for economy, will make this decade 'Roaring 20s' for India: Jayant Sinha** 5 March 2021 This Budget has focused on supply-side investment and this is going to ensure that the country has a non-inflationary growth for very long period of time. Read more [here](#)

**4 female judges of Bangladesh to join UN peacekeeping mission** 7 March 2021 Four female judges of Bangladesh are going to join UN peacekeeping mission with special assignment to contribute to reconstruction of judicial system and rule of law in the troubled countries. Read more [here](#)

**World Bank approves \$120 million to help Bangladesh improve irrigation-based agricultural productivity** 10 March 2021 In a press release the World Bank said, "The Climate-Smart Agriculture and Water Management Project will rehabilitate and modernize public Flood Control, Drainage, and Irrigation (FCDI) infrastructures". Read more [here](#)

**First metro rail to open in December** 10 March 2021 The long wait of Dhaka city dwellers for a smooth public transport system is set to end in a few months as the first Dhaka metro rail is expected to hit the track by December 2021. Read more [here](#)

**Each upazila to get community vision centre: Prime Minister Hasina** 11 March Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said that the government will set up community eye centres in all upazilas across the

**Indian economy estimated to contract by 9.6% in 2020, grow at 7.3% in 2021: United Nations** 26 January 2021 The Indian economy, which grew at 4.7 per cent in 2019, will contract by 9.6 per cent in calendar year 2020, as lockdowns and other containment efforts slashed domestic consumption without halting the spread of the disease. Read more [here](#)

**Trade deficit narrows on falling imports** 28 January The trade deficit shrank heavily in the first half of the ongoing fiscal year because of dwindling imports amid the economic slowdown, in a sign of depressed demand and consumption. Read more [here](#)

**Uplift work: Prime Minister approves PKR500 million grant for each lawmaker** 28 January Prime Minister Imran Khan has approved a Rs500 million development grant for each member of National and provincial assemblies under sustainable development goals so they can carry out development schemes in their constituencies. Read more [here](#)

**India's 'get well soon' budget boosts healthcare spending 135%, opens up insurance** 1 February 2021 India boosted healthcare spending by 135% and lifted caps on foreign investment in its vast insurance market on Monday to help revive an economy that suffered its deepest recorded slump as a result of the pandemic. Read more [here](#)

**Fitch revises Pakistan's real growth at 1.1pc amid strong external demand** 1 February 2021 The Fitch Solutions is its latest Pakistan Country Risk Report-Q2 2021 states that a very likely rebound in the global economy along with a global vaccine rollout will also bode well for exports. Read more [here](#)

**National Food Safety Day** 1 February 2021 National Food Safety Day-2021 with the theme "Sustainable development-rich country, safe food for Bangladesh", will be observed on 2<sup>nd</sup> February across the country with a vow to ensure safe food for all in a befitting manner. Read more [here](#)

**Exports, cheap foreign loans to take a hit for LDC graduation** 2 February 2021 The projected loss of exports and grants and higher debt service costs would lead to higher current account deficit, said the study styled "Impact assessment and coping up strategies of graduation from LDC status for Bangladesh" prepared by the General Economics Division (GED). Read more [here](#)

**Prime Minister instructs officials to prepare proposals for bringing down prices of commodities** 4 February 2021 Taking note of increase in prices of essential commodities, Prime Minister Imran Khan has directed the officials concerned to take effective measures to provide relief to the people. Read more [here](#)

**World Bank approved \$40m to help Bangladesh increase coverage of electronic government procurement (e-GP)** 7 February 2021 To respond to the challenges of COVID 19 pandemic and any other future emergencies, the financing will help add important features to the e-GP system, Read more [here](#)

**World Bank, Bangladesh sign \$200m deal for improved sanitation, water access** 9 February 2021 The World Bank and Bangladesh signed a \$200 million financing agreement to help 3.6 million people access hygienic sanitation facilities and about 600,000 people access clean water in rural areas. Read more [here](#)

**United Nations mulling establishment of regional innovation hub in Dhaka** 9 February 2021 Encouraged by a vibrant startup ecosystem in Bangladesh, the United Nations Technology Bank for Least Developed Countries along with the UNDP and

country in phases to provide better eyecare services to local people. Read more [here](#)

**Budget being released to distribute social security allowance to left out groups** 11 March 2021 The Department of National ID and Civil Registration, released an additional fund of NPR 3.97 billion to 152 local governments to distribute the allowances to previously left out groups, including single women below 60, partially disabled people, and senior citizens receiving pension from foreign governments. Read more [here](#)

**Poor internet services may hinder 'Digital Bangladesh' vision** 14 March 2021 Raising eyebrows over the sudden slow pace of internet, experts opined that it may be sabotage by a vested quarter to hinder the country's ongoing development pace and create obstacles for building a digital Bangladesh by 2021. Read more [here](#)

**Women financial inclusion vital for economic growth, stresses Governor State Bank of Pakistan (SBP)** 15 March 2021 "50 percent of the country's asset base as far as human resources are concerned are women, so we would not be doing justice as a country for our economic aspirations" said Governor SBP. Read more [here](#)

**World Bank approves \$200 million to help Bangladesh support urban poor, migrants** 17 March 2021 The World Bank today approved \$200 million to help Bangladesh provide support and services to low-income urban youth impacted by Covid-19 and returnee migrant workers in order to improve their earning opportunities. Read more [here](#)

**President calls for removing disparity among different streams of education** 17 March 2021 President Dr. Arif Alvi has called for removing disparity among different streams of education in the country by ensuring implementation of Single National Curriculum in Pakistan. Read more [here](#)

**Prime Minister says his vision is peace in region for sustained economic prosperity in South Asia** 17 March 2021 Prime Minister Imran Khan says Pakistan is poised to become the trade and transit hub for the extended region. Read more [here](#)

**Working for a better future of children: Prime Minister** 17 March 2021 Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said the government is doing everything for providing the children a better tomorrow as they are the future of the country. Read more [here](#)

**New master plan of major cities to check haphazard expansion: Prime Minister** 18 March 2021 Prime Minister Imran said progress was being made on the early completion of the master plan of ten major cities to contain their spread and to allocate separate areas for farming, accommodation and business activities. Read more [here](#)

**Digital Financial Transactions show double-digit growth in Pakistan: State Bank of Pakistan (SBP)** As per the SBP Quarterly Payment System Review (QPSR) during Q2FY21, 296.7 million e-Banking transactions valuing PKR 21.4 trillion were carried out, registering a growth of 24 percent by volume and 22 percent by value, over the same quarter last year. Read more [here](#)

**India expected to register largest increase in child and maternal deaths in South Asia in 2020 amid Covid-19, says United Nations** 18 March 2021 India is projected to register the greatest increase in the number of deaths among children under 5 in South Asia in 2020 as well as the highest number of maternal deaths as the COVID-19 pandemic disrupts the country's health services. Read more [here](#)

**International Monetary Fund approves \$500 million tranche, as Pakistan makes satisfactory progress** 25 March 2021 The International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved a \$500 million disbursement to Pakistan for budgetary support after its Executive Board completed delayed reviews of Pakistan's \$6 billion loan program. Read more [here](#)

**Promotion of trade, tourism imperative for sustainable economic development: President** 9 February 2021 President Dr. Arif Alvi on Tuesday said promotion of trade, business and tourism was imperative for sustainable economic development besides bolstering of industrialization and generation of employment opportunities for people. Read more [here](#)

**At United Nations, Pakistan calls for debt relief to help poor countries rebuild Covid-19 hit economies** 9 February 2021 Pakistan has called for finding a "long-term and comprehensive" solution of the debt problem for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) as part of the efforts to build back better from the wreckage left behind by of the devastating coronavirus pandemic. Read more [here](#)

**Socio-welfare uplift of poor, government's key responsibility: Prime Minister** 10 February 2021 Prime Minister Imran Khan terming uplift of poor and underprivileged a 'key responsibility of the government' said the network of socio-welfare projects would be expanded to benefit the deserving populace amass. Read more [here](#)

**Tk 1,000 crore released to construct 50,000 more homes for the homeless: Prime Minister** 11 February 2021 Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina today said she has released Tk 1,000 crore to construct 50,000 more houses for the homeless and landless people. Read more [here](#)

**Pakistan's blue economy strategy to ensure responsible use of ocean resources: President** 13 February 2021 Addressing the inaugural session of 9th International Maritime Conference, the President said Pakistan was transforming into a geo-economic hub and taking effective steps on blue economy for improved livelihoods while preserving the health of the ocean ecosystem. Read more [here](#)

the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs have launched global call to find innovative solutions for financial inclusion in Bangladesh. Read more [here](#)

**President inaugurates national projects in trade, economic zones** 25 March 2021 Iranian President Hassan Rouhani inaugurated 30 national projects worth 5,800 billion tomans investment in trade and economic zones of three provinces. Read more [here](#)

**50 years of independence: Int'l community lauds Bangladesh's remarkable progress** 27 March 2021 Representatives of the UN and its member states have lauded the remarkable progress of Bangladesh saying it has made tremendous strides over the past five decades and become a development miracle. Read more [here](#)

**Southern metro rail to carry nearly 1 million passengers each day** 29 March 2021 The government plans to build Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) line 5, commonly known as southern metro rail, in Dhaka targeting to carry 924,000 passengers each day. Read more [here](#)

**Turkey prepares bill for those with special needs** 28 March 2021 Kemal Çelik, a ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) Antalya deputy and the head of Turkey's Parliamentary Down Syndrome, Autism and Other Developmental Disorders Research Commission, said in a statement that commission deputies are preparing a bill designed to help those with special needs. Read more [here](#)

**Asian Development Bank (ADB) approves \$300 million for hydropower plant to boost clean energy in Pakistan** 30 March 2021 The plant will add 1,143 gigawatt-hours of clean energy annually to the country's energy mix, enhancing the energy sector's reliability and sustainability. Read more [here](#)

## b. Regional cooperation and other means of implementation

**Iran and Russia preparing meeting on coronavirus vaccines, envoy says** 4 January 2021 Iran and Russia are preparing a personal meeting on cooperation in producing the vaccine against the novel coronavirus, Iranian Ambassador to Russia Kazem Jalali said in an interview with Izvestia newspaper published on Sunday. Read more [here](#)

**China's foreign aid agency is all set to make foray into Nepal's northern region** 6 January 2021 For the first time, China's external aid and development agency, China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA) is making a foray into Nepal, pledging to finance 15 pilot development projects in 13 northern districts of the country. Read more [here](#)

**DTI aims for 2021 RCEP ratification** 4 January 2021 The Association of Southeast Asian Nations and its five trade partners- Australia, China, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand- signed the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement in November. Read more [here](#)

**Sri Lanka to ink another deal with the Chinese** (Source: Colombo Gazette) 12 January 2021 Sri Lanka is to sign another agreement with China, this time to market tea online. Cabinet has granted approval to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Fujian Star China International Trade Company Ltd to market Pure Ceylon Tea across online and offline platforms within China. Read more [here](#)

**EU offers Sri Lanka Rs. 8.26 billion grant** 13 January 2021 The European Union (EU) has offered

**China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) bringing regional stability, connectivity, development & prosperity** 7 February 2021 CPEC will not only push Pakistan's economy onto the track of fast development, but also lead the whole region to stability, connectivity, development and prosperity with the active participation of Afghanistan, Central Asian countries and other regional countries. Read more [here](#)

**India facilitates transit traffic from Bangladesh to Nepal** 8 February 2021 In a big boost to sub-regional connectivity and sub-regional cooperation, India facilitated the transit of fertilizer export to Nepal from Bangladesh via Rohanpur-Singhabad rail route. Read more [here](#)

**Bangladesh to help Maldives combat climate change: Prime Minister** 10 February 2021 Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina assured visiting Foreign Minister of the Maldives Abdulla Shahid that Bangladesh would extend its all-out support to his country in fighting climate change. Read more [here](#)

**Collaboration shown in fighting COVID-19 valuable takeaway: Prime Minister Modi at workshop with 10 nations** 18 February 2021 Citing the region's collaborative effort to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, Prime Minister Narendra Modi called for greater integration among South Asia and the Indian Ocean island countries to deal with their challenges. Read more [here](#)

**Asian Development Bank praises Hasina's leadership in Covid fight** 23 February 2021 The



three grants amounting to Rs. 8.26 billion to Sri Lanka. The grants will support Sri Lanka's justice sector, help improve road safety, and encourage efforts to mitigate climate change. Read more [here](#)

**India gives Nepal 'iron clad' commitment on Covid-19 vaccine, supply schedule coming week** 17 January 2021 The Narendra Modi government has given iron clad assurances to Nepal that it will be among the first countries to receive India developed twin Covid-19 vaccines, supply schedule of which will be announced in the coming week. Read more [here](#)

**Bangladesh to get some Covid-19 vaccines from India as gift: Health minister** 18 January 2021 Health Minister Zahid Maleque on Monday said that Bangladesh is going to get some Covid-19 vaccines from India as gift. Read more [here](#)

**Pakistan wants to enhance bilateral ties with friendly countries: President** 19 January 2021 President Dr Arif Alvi says Pakistan wants to further enhance bilateral trade, investment, defense and cultural ties with all friendly countries. Read more [here](#)

**Sign language to be made a recognized language in Sri Lanka** 19 January 2021 Sign language will be identified as a recognized language in Sri Lanka for the benefit of the large community in the country suffering from a loss of hearing. Read more [here](#)

**Bangladesh eyes big opportunities abroad through 'contract farming': Foreign Minister** 20 January 2021 Bangladesh wants to move fast in a coordinated way to explore opportunities in "contract farming", especially taking advantage of farming in the Middle East and greater African landscape, Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul Momen said. Read more [here](#)

**India, 'pharmacy of the world', starts COVID vaccine shipments to neighbors** 20 January 2021 India started delivering coronavirus vaccines to its neighbors on 20th January 2021, the foreign ministry said, flagging off a drive to garner goodwill in an often-fractious region with the first shipment sent to the tiny Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan. Read more [here](#)

**One million doses of Covid-19 vaccine to arrive in Nepal from India** 20 January 2021 India is providing one million doses of Covid-19 vaccine to Nepal under grant assistance, said Minister for Health Hridayesh Tripathi. The ministry said that India will supply Covid-19 vaccines to Bhutan, the Maldives, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Seychelles from January 20 2021. Read more [here](#)

**Turkey receives 6.5 million doses of Sinovac vaccine from China** 25 January 2021 Turkey received an additional 6.5 million doses of a vaccine developed by China's Sinovac. Ankara began its nationwide inoculation campaign using Sinovac on January 14, with health-care workers among the first to receive the shots. Read more [here](#)

**India to increase cooperation with Sri Lanka in infrastructure projects** 26 January 2021 India says it remains committed to assisting Sri Lanka with increased foreign investment and cooperation in infrastructure projects like ports, airports, energy including renewable such as solar and wind. Read more [here](#)

**Pakistan pledges \$25k contribution for United Nations Secretary General's Peacebuilding Fund** 27 January 2021 Pakistan has announced a contribution of \$25,000 to the United Nations Secretary General's Peacebuilding Fund, expressing commitment to multilateral cooperation for peace and conflict prevention. Read more [here](#)

**Pakistan to get help from China in improving agriculture sector: Imran Khan** 30 January 2021 The Pakistani government is collaborating with China in learning agricultural techniques under CPEC to enhance yield of crops, modernization of irrigation system and value addition. Read more [here](#)

Asian Development Bank (ADB) Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's dynamic and successful leadership in fighting the Covid-19 pandemic and rolling out a nationwide vaccination programme. Read more [here](#)

**Dhaka for taking US-Bangla relations to strategic level** 24 February 2021 US Secretary of State J. Antony Blinken and Bangladesh Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen on Tuesday discussed ways to further deepen Dhaka-Washington relations by advancing common goals and mutual interests. Read more [here](#)

**Prime Minister emphasizes on improving trade links in sub-continent** 24 February 2021 Prime Minister Imran Khan emphasized the need to improve trade links among the countries of the sub-continent to bring people out of poverty. Read more [here](#)

**Prime Minister Imran Khan, Sri Lanka President affirm cooperation at multilateral fora** 24 February 2021 Prime Minister Imran Khan and President of Sri Lanka Gotabaya Rajapaksa held a one-on-one meeting at Presidential Secretariat in Colombo. Read more [here](#)

**India to fund for reconstruction of 25 health posts in Dhading and Sindhupalchowk districts** 26 February 2021 A Memorandum of Understanding was penned between India and Nepal. Four MoUs have been penned between the neighboring nations for the reconstruction of as many as 25 health posts in Nepal- 12 in Dhading and 13 in Sindhupalchowk district. Read more [here](#)

**China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) set to become High-Quality Demonstration Project of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): Foreign Minister** 2 March 2021 Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi and his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi, formally commenced activities to celebrate 70 years of establishment of diplomatic relations between Pakistan and China. Read more [here](#)

**Cabinet approves proposal to develop West Terminal of Colombo Port with India** 2 March 2021 The West Container Terminal (WCT) at the Colombo South Port will be developed by India's Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Limited (APSEZ Consortium). Read more [here](#)

**Smooth transport connectivity with India may raise Bangladesh's income by 17%: World Bank** 9 March 2021 The report titled "Connecting to Thrive: Challenges and Opportunities of Transport Integration in Eastern South Asia" analyses the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) Motor Vehicles Agreement (MVA), compares it with international best practices, and identifies its strengths as well as gaps for seamless regional connectivity. Read more [here](#)

**Country received foreign aid worth NPR 5.30 billion in eight months** 14 March 2021 According to the Financial Comptroller General Office (FCGO), the collected amount is only 8.77 per cent of the total original target of the government, and 15.14 per cent of the revised target. Read more [here](#)

**Bangladesh biggest receiver of India-made Covid-19 vaccines** 16 March 2021 Bangladesh is the highest recipient of India-made Covid-19 vaccines among a group of 70 countries. Read more [here](#)

**India to give Bangladesh 109 ambulances** 17 March 2021 On the occasion of 50th anniversary of Bangladesh's independence and Mujib Borsho, India will give 109 ambulances to Bangladesh during Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit on March 26-27. Read more [here](#)

**Prime Minister Hasina: Bangladesh-Pakistan ties have immense potential** 19 March 2021 In a letter of felicitation to her Pakistani counterpart Imran Khan on the occasion of Pakistan Day, she stated the commitment of Dhaka towards peaceful and cooperative relations with Islamabad and other neighbors. Read more [here](#)

**Proposed Kathmandu-Raxaul rail project moves a step ahead** 24 March 2021 Nepal and India have

Iran, Russia ink contract for purchase and production of COVID-19 vaccine 30 January 2021 Moscow and Tehran have signed an agreement for the purchase and joint production of Russia's Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine. The first batch of the vaccine will arrive in Iran by February 7. Read more [here](#)

**Uzbekistan, Pakistan discusses railway link project through Afghanistan** 3 February 2021 Uzbekistan and Pakistan held the first meeting of the joint working group on trade and economic issues, as well as on a railway project to link the two countries. Read more [here](#)

**Vaccine diplomacy: India seeks to rival China with broad shipments** 7 February 2021 India has approved the shipment of COVID-19 vaccine to Cambodia and plans to supply Mongolia and Pacific Island states, officials said, as supplies arrived in Afghanistan - all part of the country's widening vaccine diplomacy. Read more [here](#)

### c. Gender equality and empowerment

**Pakistan court outlaws 'virginity tests'** 6 January 2021 Human rights campaigners have welcomed a decision by a Pakistani court outlawing so-called "virginity tests" in rape examinations. Read more [here](#)

**Global meet on gender equality gets underway in Kerala** 11 February 2021 The International Conference on Gender Equality (ICGE) got underway with Kerala Social Justice and Women and Child Development Minister K K Shailaja emphasizing the need to promote social entrepreneurship in a big way for the uplift of marginalized sections. Read more [here](#)

**Pakistan stresses gender equality to accomplish global development goals** 10 March 2021 Pakistan has called for achieving gender equality, parity, non-discrimination between men and women for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that are aimed at fighting poverty, reducing inequality, and addressing climate change. Read more [here](#)

### d. Environmental sustainability and disaster resilience

**Government mute as Kathmandu air deteriorates to 'hazardous' levels** 5 January 2020 Air quality in Kathmandu Valley deteriorated to 'hazardous levels', crossing the 600 mark, fuelling concerns about respiratory complications especially among the elderly, children and Covid-19 patients. Read more [here](#)

**Sri Lanka among most vulnerable countries to climate change** 7 January 2021 Sri Lanka is one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change ranking 6th on the Climate Risk Index, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Sri Lanka said today. Read more [here](#)

**Dhaka's air quality 'hazardous'** 10 January 2021 Dhaka, one of the most polluted cities in the world, ranked worst in the Air Quality Index (AQI) on 10<sup>th</sup> morning. It had a score of 439 at 10:20 am. The air was classified as 'hazardous.'. Read more [here](#)

**India generated around 33,000 tonnes COVID-19 waste in 7 months; Maharashtra biggest contributor** 10 January 2021 India generated around 33,000 tonnes of COVID-19 biomedical waste in the last seven months, with Maharashtra contributing the maximum (3,587 tonnes) to it, according to Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) data. Read more [here](#)

**Fire destroys homes of thousands in Rohingya**

moved ahead to prepare a detailed project report for a broad-gauge rail line between Kathmandu and Raxaul that will link the capital with the Indian railway network and provide access to all Indian states. Read more [here](#)

**Rohingya Camp Fire: Australia announces additional \$10 million for affected people** 25 March 2021 Australia is providing emergency humanitarian aid as a response of the fire incident at Cox's Bazar Rohingya camp. Read more [here](#)

**At United Nations, Pakistan proposes Global Compact for Women's Empowerment** 16 March 2021 At the United Nations, Pakistan has proposed a Global Compact for Women's Empowerment, based on an action plan for mainstreaming their participation in decision-making in public life. Read more [here](#)

**Pakistan firmly believes in women empowerment, gender equality: Dr. Shireen Mazari** 24 March 2021 Minister for Human Rights Dr. Shireen Mazari has said Pakistan firmly believes that economic growth, sustainable development, peace and prosperity can only be achieved through women empowerment and gender equality. Read more [here](#)

**Himalayan glacier breaks in India, around 125 missing in floods** 7 February 2021 Around 125 people were missing in northern India after a Himalayan glacier broke and swept away a small hydroelectric dam on Sunday, with floods forcing the evacuation of villages downstream. Read more [here](#)

**Dozens trapped in tunnel after Himalayan glacier's collapse, scores still missing** 9 February 2021 Rescuers raced to free around 35 Indian construction workers trapped in a tunnel, two days after the hydroelectric dam they were helping to build was swept away by a wall of water from a collapsed glacier that barreled down a Himalayan river. Read more [here](#)

**Bangladesh among top 5 disaster-prone countries in Asia-Pacific** 8 March 2021 Latest United Nations report identifies hazard-prone countries with high vulnerability and low response capacity and has found Bangladesh to be among the five most hazard-prone countries in Asia and the Pacific. Read more [here](#)

**Hatton National Bank's (HNB) quest for the future of renewable green energy in Sri Lanka** 9 March 2021 Sri Lanka is among the top three Asian countries with the highest share of renewable energy sources according to a study carried out by REN21 (international policy network which supports sustainable energy future with renewables) in cooperation with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in 2019. Read more [here](#)

refugee camps - UNHCR 14 January 2021 A huge  
lowest in Bangladesh in the early hours of Thursday  
the United Nations camp, affecting some 100,000  
to thousands of people. Read more [here](#)

**Sri Lanka to demand further compensation from MT New Diamond** 16 January 2021 The Marine Environment Protection Authority (MEPA) has decided to seek further compensation from the crude oil tanker MT New Diamond, which caught fire in the seas off Sri Lanka in September 2020. Read more [here](#)

**Pakistan 5th most vulnerable country to climate change: Report** 25 January 2021 Pakistan has been ranked as the fifth-most vulnerable country to climate change, according to the Global Climate Risk Index published by Germanwatch. Read more [here](#)

## e) Health & Covid-19 Related

**Coronavirus: India approves vaccines from Bharat Biotech and Oxford/AstraZeneca** 4 January 2021 India has formally approved the emergency use of two coronavirus vaccines as it prepares for one of the world's biggest inoculation drives. Read more [here](#)

**Sri Lanka intensifies lab testing to detect new variant** 4 January 2021 Sri Lanka has intensified lab testing of the coronavirus in order to detect the new variant or any other variant that may enter the country. Read more [here](#)

**Bangladesh to get Oxford Covid vaccine on time as per deal: Beximco** 4 January 2020 Beximco Pharmaceuticals, the local partner of Serum Institute of India (SII), assured that Bangladesh will get agreed amount of vaccine doses on time as per agreement. Bangladesh is on a priority list as a result of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's diplomatic efforts, the official said. Read more [here](#)

**Bangladesh to be first to get Covid-19 vaccine: Dr Momen says quoting Indian Foreign Minister** 4 January 2020 Bangladesh will be the first country to get Covid-19 vaccine from India, said Foreign Minister Dr A K Abdul Momen quoting India's ministry of external affairs. Read more [here](#)

**Fear of sub-clusters prevents lifting isolation in some areas** 5 January 2021 Police Spokesman, Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Ajith Rohana said that the isolation status will remain in a number of areas, including in parts of Colombo. Read more [here](#)

**Random Rapid Antigen Tests to be conducted in vulnerable areas in the country** 5 January 2021 Random Rapid Antigen Tests (RAT) will be conducted on persons who live in vulnerable areas in the country to identify COVID-19 patients and treat them, Police Spokesman DIG Ajith Rohana said. Read more [here](#)

**Bangladesh approves Oxford- AstraZeneca Vaccine for emergency use** 6 January 2021 The government has approved the Oxford University-AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine for emergency use to be imported from Serum Institute of India. Read more [here](#)

**Government allows import/export of COVID-19 vaccine without any value limitation** 6 January 2021 The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) has amended the regulations to facilitate the import/export of COVID-19 vaccines through courier, at locations where the Express Cargo Clearance System (ECCS) is operational. Read more [here](#)

**Sri Lanka to sign deal to secure vaccine through COVAX** 6 January 2021 Sri Lanka is to sign an agreement to secure the coronavirus vaccine through the COVAX facility. Read more [here](#)

Renovation may curb Istanbul's risk of quake damage in 5 years 17 March 2021 It is not if but when as Istanbul prepares for the big one, an earthquake that is expected to hit much of the city's coastal areas. Read more [here](#)

**2020: Bangladesh air world's worst, again** 18 March 2021 South Asia remained the most polluted region of the world with Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan sharing 42 of the 50 most polluted cities worldwide. Read more [here](#)

**Nepal Government decides to shut schools for four days as air pollution reaches hazardous levels** 29 March 2021 According to Sanjay Sharma, a secretary at the Ministry of Education, the government decided to close schools in view of the adverse effect the rising air pollution can have on students' health. Read more [here](#)

**Iran begins Covid-19 vaccinations with Russia's Sputnik V jab** 9 February 2021 Iran began its coronavirus vaccination programme, with doctors and nurses the first groups to get jabs of Russia's Sputnik V vaccine. Read more [here](#)

**Pakistan to allow private firms to import COVID-19 vaccine, exempt from price caps** 11 February 2021 The National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination division had sought out the approval from the special cabinet, to allow exemption from such imports. Read more [here](#)

**Several countries offering Bangladesh Covid-19 vaccines: Prime Minister** 14 February 2021 Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said several countries have expressed interest to provide Covid-19 vaccines to Bangladesh, and the country will receive those to ensure vaccination up to rural level. Read more [here](#)

**World Health Organisation (WHO) in talks with Sri Lanka to provide vaccines for 27% of population** 15 February 2021 Sri Lanka was earlier set to receive vaccines from the WHO to cover 20 % of the total population. However, the WHO is now considering increasing it to cover 27% of the population in Sri Lanka. Read more [here](#)

**India to multiply vaccinations amid coverage concerns** 16 February 2021 India will increase the number of its COVID-19 vaccination sites by up to five times after administering nearly 9 million shots in a month, amid concerns about the speed of coverage in the country. Read more [here](#)

**Government of Nepal approves China's Vero Cell vaccine for emergency use against Covid-19** 18 February 2021 The government has approved the 'Vero Cell' vaccine manufactured by Beijing Institute of Biological Products Co Ltd (BIBP), China, under Sinopharm, for emergency use against Covid-19 in Nepal. Read more [here](#)

**Prime Minister instructs authorities to vaccinate monks and other religious leaders** 20 March 2021 Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa has given instructions to vaccinate monks and leaders of other religions. Army Commander, General Shavendra Silva said that Covid hotspots will be selected to prioritize vaccination. Read more [here](#)

**India's Serum Institute says prioritizing domestic vaccine needs, asks for patience** 21 February 2021 Serum Institute of India (SII), the world's biggest vaccine maker by volume asked for patience from foreign governments awaiting their supply of COVID-19 shots, saying it had been directed to prioritise India's requirements. Read more [here](#)

**India says virus variants not behind upsurge in cases** 23 February 2021 India said mutated versions of coronavirus were not responsible for an upsurge in cases in two states, a potential relief for a country



**Bird flu: India to cull poultry amid fears of virus 7** January 2021 India has begun culling tens of thousands of poultry birds after wild geese, crows and ducks across the country tested positive for avian flu. Read more [here](#)

**Sri Lanka formally requests Indian assistance to obtain Covid vaccine 7** January 2021 Sri Lanka has formally requested Indian assistance to obtain the Covid vaccine. Visiting Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said that the request was conveyed to him during his meetings in Colombo today. Read more [here](#)

**Bird flu spreads across India, culls under way in several states 10** January 2021 An outbreak of avian influenza or bird flu is rapidly spreading across India, with seven states confirming cases and others awaiting test results as they put containment measures in place, officials said. Read more [here](#)

**Sri Lanka to obtain Oxford-AstraZeneca, Pfizer vaccines next month 11** January 2021 Sri Lanka is to obtain the Oxford-AstraZeneca and Pfizer vaccines in February, the Government said. State Minister of Primary Health Services, Pandemics and COVID Prevention, Dr. Sudarshani Fernandopulle said. Read more [here](#)

**'Centre to bear expenses for phase 1 of Covid vaccination': PM Modi 11** January "Centre, not states, will bear expenses for first-phase vaccination of three crore corona warriors and frontline workers," PM Modi said after a meeting with chief ministers where he discussed the Covid-19 situation in states and preparedness for the vaccination programme. Read more [here](#)

**Registration of Covid-19 vaccination to begin on January 26: Prof Dr Khurshid 11** January Coronavirus or Covid-19 vaccine will be available in the country by January 21 to 25 while the registration of vaccination will begin on January 26. Read more [here](#)

**India delivers COVID-19 shots to prepare for 'world's biggest vaccination drive' (Source: Reuters) 12** January 2021 Indian airlines started delivering batches of COVID-19 vaccines nationwide on Tuesday, preparing for the launch of a campaign to offer shots to 1.3 billion people, in what officials call the world's biggest vaccination drive. Read more [here](#)

**People to face devastating situation in case of apathy towards corona SOPs: Asad Umar (Source: Radio Pakistan) 12** January 2021 Minister of Planning and Development Asad Umar warned that Pakistan could face the devastating situation regarding COVID-19. Read more [here](#)

**Around 95 percent quarantine facilities closed in Karnali (Source: The Kathmandu Post) 13** January 2021. Health authorities and local units in several districts of Karnali Province, Nepal have removed more than 95 percent of quarantine facilities. Read more [here](#)

**Covid Vaccination: Healthcare staffers' training starts 13** January 2021 The government would start providing training to the healthcare staffers from 13 January 2021 in an effort to ensure safe and efficient Covid-19 vaccine administration. Read more [here](#)

**New COVID variant enters Sri Lanka 13** January 2021 The new COVID variant has been detected in Sri Lanka. Chief Epidemiologist of the Health Ministry Dr. Sudath Samaraweera told Colombo Gazette that the new variant is the same one detected in the United Kingdom (UK). Read more [here](#)

**Sri Lanka keeping a close eye on Nipah virus 14** January 2021 While taking measures to contain the spread of the coronavirus and detect mutated versions of the virus in Sri Lanka, the authorities are monitoring other viruses spreading in region, including the Nipah virus. Read more [here](#)

**WHO Congratulates India On "Largest" Coronavirus Vaccination Drive 16** January 2021

where mask-wearing and social distancing have largely disappeared. Read more [here](#)

**Afghanistan seeks to get Russia's Sputnik V vaccine 23** February 2021 Afghanistan's request for Russia's Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine is currently under consideration by the Russian government, and Kabul would like to receive the vaccine as soon as possible. Read more [here](#)

**All above 60 years of age, 45-plus with comorbidities can get COVID-19 vaccine from March 1 24** February 2021 Everyone above 60 years of age and those over 45 years with comorbidities will be able to get COVID-19 vaccine from March 1 for free at government facilities and for a charge at many private hospitals, the Government of India said. Read more [here](#)

**6 states contributed to 86.37% of new Covid-19 cases, says government 28** February 2021 Six states continued to record a surge in new cases of the coronavirus cases (Covid-19) in the last 24 hours and contributed to 86.37 per cent of the fresh infections in the country. Read more [here](#)

**Modi takes home-grown vaccine as India widens immunization drive 1** March 2021 Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was inoculated with the first dose of a home-grown coronavirus vaccine on 1st March, kicking off an expansion of the country's immunization campaign that began in mid-January with healthcare workers. Read more [here](#)

**India's next phase of virus crisis likely to be localised outbreaks 2** March 2021 Experts say that the relatively low hospitalisation and fatality rates in India suggest the coronavirus pandemic is approaching its next phase- largely manageable local outbreaks. Read more [here](#)

**Turkey's reopening relieves restaurants but worries doctors 2** March 2021 Turkish restaurants reopened and many children returned to school on Tuesday after the government announced steps to ease COVID-19 restrictions even as cases edged higher, raising concerns among the top medical association. Read more [here](#)

**Covid brought under control with united efforts: Prime Minister 3** March 2021 Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said the government has been able to successfully face the Covid-19 pandemic with united efforts of all sectors and the situation is now under control. Read more [here](#)

**Pakistan to get 10 million free coronavirus vaccines from COVAX by June 3** March 2021 Pakistan, Nigeria and Indonesia will be among the biggest recipients of free coronavirus vaccines before June. Read more [here](#)

**First consignment of vaccine under COVAX facility to arrive on 7th March 3** March 2021 The first consignment of Covid vaccine under the COVAX programme of the World Health Organization will be delivered to Sri Lanka on March 7, State Minister of Primary Health Care, Epidemics and COVID Disease Control Sudarshini Fernandopulle said. Read more [here](#)

**Prime Minister Oli gets Covid-19 jab as Nepal launches drive for senior citizens 7** March 2021 Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli received the coronavirus vaccine on Sunday, officially beginning the second phase of Covid-19 vaccine drive in the country. Read more [here](#)

**Nepal among the first Asian countries to receive Covid-19 vaccines from COVAX Facility 7** March 2021 Nepal received its first consignment of the Covid-19 vaccine doses under the COVAX facility- a partnership between CEPI, Gavi, UNICEF and WHO- made possible through generous donor support from governments, international organizations, foundations, and the private sector. Read more [here](#)

**Pakistan urges world to stop spread of fake Covid-19 vaccines 8** March 2021 Pakistan has urged

The regional office of the World Health Organization launched the first phase of a nationwide drive to vaccinate around three crore people against the novel coronavirus. Read more [here](#)

**India hails 'life saving' Covid-19 vaccine rollout** 17 January 2021 India's Covid-19 vaccination drive had a successful start with more than 224,000 people receiving their first jabs and just three people hospitalized for experiencing side effects, the health ministry said Sunday, as reports emerged about concerns over a homegrown vaccine. Read more [here](#)

**Provinces, private sector free to import Covid-19 vaccines after Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (Drac) approval: Asad Umar** 17 January 2021 Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Asad Umar said on Saturday that the federal government would not hold a monopoly on the import of coronavirus vaccines, adding that provinces and the private sector were free to import vaccines subject to approval of the Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan. Read more [here](#)

**Pakistan registers 300,000 health workers for COVID-19 vaccination, says Umar** 17 January 2021 Planning Minister Asad Umar has announced that registration of 300,000 frontline health workers for coronavirus vaccination across the country has been completed. Read more [here](#)

**Vaccination programme to be run from 300 centres in Dhaka: Health Minister** 18 January 2021 Health Minister Zahid Maleque has said coronavirus or Covid-19 vaccine will reach the country by January 25 or 26. The vaccination programme will begin within few days after arrival of the vaccine in the country. Some 300 vaccination centres will be set up in the capital, he said. Read more [here](#)

**Indian companies prepare to buy vaccines for employees** 18 January 2021 Several Indian companies are making plans to buy Covid-19 vaccines for their employees, just days after the country's government began one of the world's largest vaccination drives with healthcare and other frontline workers. Read more [here](#)

**UN agencies supporting mammoth India COVID-19 vaccine rollout** 19 January 2021 India has begun what is the world's biggest COVID vaccination campaign so far, deploying hundreds of thousands of health workers, with the training and support of the UN World Health Organization. Read more [here](#)

**Sri Lankan government plans to vaccinate 50% of population free of charge** 19 January 2021 The Government is planning to vaccinate 50 per cent of the population free of charge when the Covid-19 vaccine is available in the country by the end of February or early March. Read more [here](#)

**Fine tuning underway to secure Covid vaccine** 20 January 2021 The Health Ministry says "fine tuning" is underway to secure the Covid vaccine for Sri Lanka. Health Services Deputy Director General Dr. Hemantha Herath said all preliminary measures have been completed regarding the acquisition of the vaccine. Read more [here](#)

**Billions in aid needed to help Afghanistan children this year, charity says** 20 January 2021 As many as 10 million Afghan children are at risk of not having enough food to eat in 2021, a humanitarian organization said, calling for billions of dollars in aid. Read more [here](#)

**Covid-19: Govt to gradually vaccinate all Bangladeshis over 18 for free: Finance Minister** 20 January 2021 Covid-19 vaccine will be provided to all Bangladeshi citizens -aged above 18- for free, Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal said. Read more [here](#)

**Covid vaccination to start February 8: Health Minister** 21 January 2021 The much-sought Covid-19 vaccination in Bangladesh will start from February 8

the international community to work together to prevent criminals from making and distributing false Covid-19 vaccines and other fake medical products. Read more [here](#)

**Afghanistan receives first COVID vaccine shipment under COVAX program** 9 March 2021 Afghanistan has received its first shipment of COVID-19 vaccines under the COVAX international vaccine-sharing program. Read more [here](#)

**India, world's top vaccine maker, denies shortage at home** 9 March 2021 India's government denied any shortage of coronavirus vaccine doses in a big northwestern state and said it was sending supplies around the country based on demand and consumption patterns. Read more [here](#)

**Maintain highest possible caution** 10 March 2021 With the Covid infection rate on the rise, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged the people to follow the health safety protocols to check the spread of the virus in the country. Read more [here](#)

**Surge in COVID cases: Educational institutions in various Punjab cities to remain closed for two weeks** 10 March 2021 The decision has been taken in a meeting of National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) to discuss the fate of educational institutions after surge in coronavirus cases in schools. Read more [here](#)

**Second batch of vaccines from Serum Institute due by end March** 11 March 2021 The second consignment of 500,000 COVISHIELD vaccines from the Serum Institute of India is expected to arrive in Sri Lanka by 25<sup>th</sup> March, Principal Advisor to the President and the Chief of the Presidential Task Force on the Procurement of COVID Vaccine, Lalith Weeratunga said. Read more [here](#)

**Iran starts trial of new homegrown vaccine as campaign lags** 16 March 2021 Iran's campaign to inoculate its population against the coronavirus and promote itself as an emerging vaccine manufacturer inched on as health authorities announced that the country's third homegrown vaccine has reached the phase of clinical trials. Read more [here](#)

**Iran unveils another COVID-19 vaccine, Fakhra** 16 March 2021 Phase one of a clinical trial for another Iranian COVID-19 vaccine, Fakhra- named after the martyred nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh- kicked off, with his son receiving the first dose. Read more [here](#)

**Turkey ranks 5th in number of delivered vaccines: Erdogan** 16 March 2021 President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Turkey ranks fifth in the world in terms of the number of vaccines delivered. Read more [here](#)

**Need 'quick, decisive' steps to stop second Covid-19 wave: Modi tells Chief Ministers** 18 March 2021 In a first such warning against an emerging second peak of Covid-19, Prime Minister Narendra Modi asked states to take quick and decisive steps to check the spread of the virus. Read more [here](#)

**Revised quarantine procedure for travelers issued** 18 March 2021 The Ministry of Health has issued a revised quarantine procedure for travelers, including vaccinated travelers. The revised procedure is for Sri Lankans, including dual citizens, and foreigners. Read more [here](#)

**Government to inoculate 2.65 million elderly people** 18 March 2021 Sri Lanka is to inoculate 2.65 million elderly people (above 60 years of age) in the country, as per the National Vaccine Deployment Plan of the Ministry of Health (MOH). Read more [here](#)

**All those above 45 years will be eligible for Covid-19 vaccine from April 1** 23 March 2021 In a major move, the Union Cabinet decided to open the vaccination drive for everyone above the age of 45 years starting from April 1. Read more [here](#)

**Coronavirus: India temporarily halts Oxford-**

across the country after a week's trial run, said Health Minister Zahid Maleque. Bangladesh received Indian gift of Covid-19 vaccine at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport on 21 January morning. Read more [here](#)

**Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine granted emergency use approval in Sri Lanka** 22 January 2021 The National Medicines Regulatory Authority (NMRA) has granted approval for the emergency use of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine for Covid-19 in Sri Lanka which it is likely to receive from India. Read more [here](#)

**Covishield and Covaxin: What we know about India's Covid-19 vaccines** 23 January 2021 India's Covaxin, the homegrown government-backed vaccine, has an efficacy rate of 81%, preliminary data from its phase 3 trial shows. Bharat Biotech, the vaccine's manufacturer, Read more [here](#)

**Bangladesh received the first consignment of imported Covid vaccine doses** 25 January 2021 Bangladesh received the first 50 lakh doses of Covidshield, the Covid-19 vaccine developed by Oxford-AstraZeneca and manufactured by the Serum Institute of India (SII). Read more [here](#)

**Nepal launches its Covid-19 vaccination drive starting with frontline and healthcare workers** 27 January 2021 Nepal rolled out its vaccination drive against Covid-19, a little over a year after the country reported its first coronavirus case. The vaccination drive has been launched with the one million doses of Covid-19 vaccine that India provided to Nepal last week under grant assistance. Read more [here](#)

**Prime Minister details vaccine rollout plan** 27 January 2021 Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina unveiled the detailed vaccine roll-out plan in parliament as the consignments of Covid-19 inoculate started reaching Bangladesh. She stated that a total of 1.50 crore people (8.86pc of population) will get two doses of inoculation over a span of two weeks in the first phase of vaccine distribution. Read more [here](#)

**Nepal to allow unrestricted entry to vaccinated tourists** 29 January Nepal is considering allowing unrestricted entry to vaccinated tourists in a bid to boost the morale of the moribund tourism industry ahead of the upcoming spring peak season, said Tourism Minister Bhanu Bhakta Dhakal. Read more [here](#)

**Pakistan all set to vaccinate 300,000 health workers as campaign kicks off** 2 February 2021 Prime Minister's Special Adviser on Health Dr. Faisal Sultan has said that more than 300,000 frontline health care workers will be administered COVID-19 vaccine within the next three weeks. Read more [here](#)

**Bangladesh rolls out nationwide Covid-19 vaccination campaign** 7 February 2021 More than 2,400 health teams are administering the vaccine at 1,015 health facilities across Bangladesh, said Health Minister Zahid Maleque as he kicked off the campaign in the capital, Dhaka. Read more [here](#)

**Iran sets 11<sup>th</sup> February start for first coronavirus vaccinations** 7 February 2021 Iran is set to start administering coronavirus vaccine jabs, reported its Health Ministry. The first jabs will use the Sputnik V vaccine provided by Russia. Read more [here](#)

**COVID vaccine for the 30-60 age group from March- State Minister** 8 February 2021 Steps are being taken to provide COVID-19 vaccine to all citizens from 30 to 60 years from March 1, State Minister of Primary Health Care, Epidemics, and COVID Disease Control Dr. Sudarshani Fernandopulle said. Read more [here](#)

**Covid-19 vaccination drive: Prime Minister instructs to reduce age limit of recipients to 40** 8 February 2021 Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina instructed the authorities concerned for reducing the age limit from 55 to 40 years- to get registered for Covid-19 vaccination- aiming to expand and accelerate the drive. Read more [here](#)

**AstraZeneca vaccine exports 24 March 2021** The move - described as a "temporary squeeze" by officials - is expected to affect supplies until the end of April. Some 100 countries under the Covax scheme are likely to be affected. Read more [here](#)

**India detects 'double mutant' coronavirus variant in western state** 24 March 2021 India has detected a "double mutant variant" of the novel coronavirus in 206 samples in the worst-hit western state of Maharashtra, a senior government official said. Read more [here](#)

**Health Ministry starts large-scale seroprevalence study** 24 March 2021 After more than 14 months after the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in the country, the Ministry of Health and Population has now launched a large-scale seroprevalence study. Read more [here](#)

**Take prompt steps to check fresh surge of coronavirus: Prime Minister** 28 March 2021 Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina reiterated her call to the countrymen to wear facemasks alongside maintaining the health guidelines and she also asked the authorities concerned to take prompt measures to check fresh surge in the Covid-19 infection. Read more [here](#)

**India's Maharashtra considers total lockdown as virus cases jump** 28 March 2021 India's richest state, Maharashtra, is considering imposing a strict lockdown this week after recording the highest one-day jump in coronavirus infections of any Indian state since March 2020, officials said. Read more [here](#)

**Government will further tighten restrictions amid surge in COVID-19 infections, says Umar** 28 March 2021 Planning Minister Asad Umar has said that the government will further tighten restrictions keeping in view the drastic and continued increase in COVID-19 infections across the country. Read more [here](#)

**Restrictions on gatherings, quarantine rule among Prime Minister's Office (PMO)** 29 March 2021 In the wake of the fresh surge in the Covid-19 infections, the PMO issued an 18-point directive for the next two weeks to contain the spread of the coronavirus in Bangladesh. Read more [here](#)

**Punjab government to enforce lockdowns in districts with over 12 percent positivity rate** 29 March 2021 "The lockdown will continue till April 11," said Punjab Chief Minister Usman Buzdar while speaking to media. Read more [here](#)

**India suffers highest daily coronavirus infections in five months** 29 March 2021 India reported the highest daily increase in coronavirus cases in five months. With the second wave of the disease driven by surging infections in the country's richest state Maharashtra. Read more [here](#)

**14-day institutional quarantine mandatory for travellers from European Countries: Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB)** 30 March 2021 The CAAB made 14-day institutional quarantine mandatory for the travelers from the European countries including the United Kingdom. Read more [here](#)

**India tells states to get a grip before COVID-19 overwhelms hospitals** 30 March 2021 India's health secretary bluntly told the 28 federal states to get a grip on lax coronavirus prevention measures "right now" to prevent healthcare systems being overwhelmed by a surge in infections. Read more [here](#)

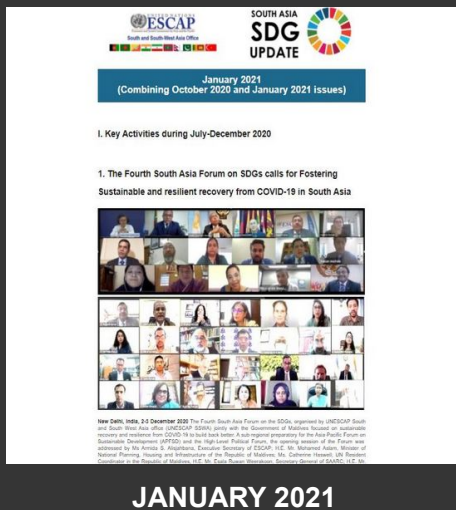
**Biggest share of Indian-made vaccines for poor country programme stays in India** 30 March 2021 India itself has received more than a third of the nearly 28 million Indian-made AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine doses delivered so far by the global programme for poor countries, according to data from UNICEF and vaccine alliance Gavi. Read more [here](#)



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If you have missed them, here are the links to previous newsletters editions!



JULY 2019

## 1. SOUTH ASIAN COUNTRIES PARTICIPATE IN THE 75TH COMMISSION SESSION OF UNESCAP



All the Asian South countries participated in the 79th Commission Session of UNESCAP that was held in Bangkok from 27 to 31 May, under the theme "Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality." This year's Commission Session was opened by Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chulabhorn, and attendees included Prime Minister of Thailand, Deputy Prime Minister, Ministers of Education, Health, Labour, and Social Security, and other senior government officials. The Session resolved to take no final or official record in the form of a declaration, innovation, space applications and air pollution. In his policy statement, UNESCAP Executive Secretary Amrita Arora commented, "We can learn from each other as we work together to address the challenges of the 21st century. We are committed to working together to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and to transform and resilient society for which we strive." UNESCAP also signed Three Memoranda of Understanding and one Statement of Cooperation on the activities of the Commission Session to increase regional cooperation in the areas of disaster preparedness, early warning systems, remote sensing, research and evidence-based policymaking.

[Read the Theme Study](#)[Read Country Statements](#)

**JULY 2019**

APRIL 2019

1. SOUTH ASIAN COUNTRIES PARTICIPATE IN THE 6TH ASIA-PACIFIC FORUM FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



The 6<sup>th</sup> Asia-Pacific Forum Sustainable Development (APFSD) was held in Bangkok, Thailand from 27 to 29 March 2010 on the theme **“Empowering People for a more inclusive and equal Asia-Pacific”**. A regional preparatory of the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), the Forum reviewed **SDG4 (Quality Education)**, **SDG8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth)**, **SDG10 (Reduced Inequalities)**, **SDG11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities)** and **SDG17 (Partnership for the Goals)**. The Forum was opened by H.E. Dr. Nayu Kumar, Vice-Chairman of India's NITI Aayog in his capacity as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for the Asia-Pacific region, and the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. The opening session was also addressed by Mr. Amma Mohammed, Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations and Dr. Armita Alajbegovic, Executive Secretary of ESCAP, among other dignitaries. Senior representatives from the South Asian countries chaired and addressed different high-level panels including H.E. Dr. K. R. Narayanan, Minister of External Affairs, Government of India; Mr. K. R. Narayanan, Minister of External Affairs, Government of Nepal; H.E. Dr. Ahmad Javad Omani, Deputy Minister of Economy of Afghanistan. The highlights of the country statements made at the APFSD by South Asian countries are reported later.

**APRIL 2019**

JANUARY 2019

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4. SDGs IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS

- SDGs: priorities, actions and means of implementation
- Regional cooperation and other means of implementation
- Gender equality and empowerment
- Environmental sustainability and disaster resilience

## Editorial Introduction

We are pleased to share the January 2019 issue of the *South Asia SDG Update*. The issue begins with a briefing on UNESCAP's activities in South Asia subregion September-December 2019. It goes on to provide briefings on Voluntary National Reviews of South Asian countries and their statements at the United Nations General Assembly pertaining to SDGs, to get an idea of priorities of the subregion. Finally it has a news round-up from across the subregion regarding SDGs, regional cooperation and other means of implementation. The update will appear in January, April, July and October of each year reporting on the highlights and initiatives taken during the previous quarter. Comments and feedback welcome.

Nagesh Ku

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UNESCAP South and South-West Asia Office

**JANUARY 2019**

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