

**Highlights from the local media of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka**

**January 15th, 2018 | Volume: 4 - 5/01**

[Pranab Mukherjee in Dhaka](#)

The Daily Star | 15<sup>th</sup> January  
Former Indian president Pranab Mukherjee reached Dhaka yesterday on a five-day private visit. Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali received him at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport. Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Harsh Vardhan Shringla, among others, was also present there to receive Pranab, said foreign ministry officials. Pranab's daughter Sharmista Mukherjee, among others, is accompanying him. It is his first foreign trip after he went into retirement in July last year.

[Bhutan, India celebrate 50 years of diplomatic relations](#)

Kuensel | 14<sup>th</sup> January  
“The friendship between India and Bhutan is solid as a rock and I have no doubt will always remain so. It's not only geographical proximity but mutual love and friendship that has kept us close to each other. Nothing is more valuable than mutual friendship and love.” His Majesty the Third Druk Gyalpo Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, who cemented the relations with India, gave this interview to Air India Radio in February 1968 in Delhi, India a few weeks after the posting of the first special officer of India to Bhutan. Fifty years later, in a grand ceremony yesterday, marked with traditional songs and dances, the two foreign ministers unveiled a special logo to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries through a videoconference.

[India and Myanmar to streamline free movement for border villagers](#)

Mizzima | 15<sup>th</sup> January  
India and Myanmar are set to streamline free movement of people within 16 km along their borders. The Central Government has asked the four States that share an unfenced border with Myanmar to distribute “border passes” to all residents living within 16 km from the boundary line, The Hindu reported on 14 January. The report quoted an official saying both countries had been intending to put a system in place after India raised the issue of free movement of extremists and smugglers across the border. On January 3, the Union Cabinet approved the agreement between India and Myanmar on land border crossing, which the government said would enhance economic interaction between the people of the two countries.

**AFGHANISTAN**

[UNSC Members, Govt Leaders Meet Behind Closed Doors](#)

Daily Outlook Afghanistan | 15th January

A senior delegation of United Nations Secretary Council (UNSC) held talks with Afghan government leadership on Sunday where they reportedly discussed a wide range of issues including security and ongoing developments in the political fronts. Sources say government will announce essentials of the visit by the UN Security Council members to Afghanistan once the delegation completes its visit. The visit is taking place under tight security measures as Afghan security forces cordoned off many roads close to the Presidential Palace and diplomatic facilities in the city. Some residents of Kabul complained about road closures in the city on Sunday. “I left home at six o'clock in the morning and now it is 10am and I finally managed to arrive here (in Wazir Akbar Khan area). All

these are going on because of the visit, a lot of meetings have been held on Afghanistan in the past,” said one resident in Kabul Mohammad Yaqoub.

#### [Afghan Govt Hold Unofficial Peace Talks with Taliban](#)

Daily Outlook Afghanistan | 15<sup>th</sup> January

Afghan government representatives have held unofficial talks with five Taliban members in Turkey on Sunday. Humayun Jarir and Abbas Basir are representing Afghan government in the meeting. Humayun Jarir, a representative of Afghan government in the talks, told TOLONews that the talks are unofficial and that they will discuss mechanisms to pave the ground for official talks between the two sides. He said the Taliban members are representing Quetta Shura, Haqqani network and other factions of the Taliban. Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah's spokesman Mujib Rahman Rahimi said they welcome any move ends to peace in Afghanistan.

#### [Govt has not accepted Jamiat's offer to keep Noor as Balkh governor](#)

Khaama Press | 15<sup>th</sup> January

The Government of National Unity has not accepted the offer by Jamiat-e-Islami to keep Ata Mohammad Noor as the governor of Balkh province, it has been reported. According to the sources privy of the development, keeping Noor as Balkh governor and implementation of the National Unity Government treaty were among the key demands of the Jamiat-e-Islami party in the proposal of the party in a bid to end the ongoing political deadlock. A member of the leadership council of Jamiat-e-Islami Mohammad Ismail Khan has told RFE's Afghanistan service that the demands of Jamiat-e-Islami have not been accepted by the government. He said the proposal included seven demands in total but the government has not accepted the offers and therefore talks have halted between the two sides.

### **BANGLADESH**

#### [337.2m euro deals with Germany for energy, climate](#)

The Financial Express | 14<sup>th</sup> January

Bangladesh and Germany have signed three bilateral agreements for implementing projects in different sectors, including energy and climate. The agreements, worth 337.20 million euro, were signed today (Sunday) on Technical Cooperation-2016, Financial Cooperation-2016 and Financial Cooperation 2016 (Saidabad-III) at the Economic Relations Division (ERD) in the city's Sher-e-Bangla Nagar area. ERD Secretary Kazi Shofiqul Azam and German Ambassador to Dhaka Dr Thomas Prinz signed the agreements on behalf of the two governments, reports BSS.

#### [Awami League's twin strategies to pressurize the BNP](#)

Dhaka Tribune | 15<sup>th</sup> January

The ruling Awami League is adopting a two-pronged strategy to put pressure on the BNP until the 11th parliamentary elections: keeping BNP leaders under pressure of cases and arrest, and confront the BNP activists in the field. Some Awami league leaders at the policy-making level said until the election, the government will follow the principle of “zero tolerance” on BNP. According to these sources, the ruling party wants to create fear among BNP leaders by adopting these strategies. The more BNP's politics becomes like a movement, more of its leaders will be arrested and charges pressed against them. Also, many of the old cases against BNP leaders will be reopened, new cases will increase and crackdown against BNP leaders will continue.

### **BHUTAN**

#### [Health ministry assures female health worker in BHU II by this month](#)

Kuensel | 14<sup>th</sup> January

The placement of one female health worker in each grade II Basic Health Unit (BHU) by the end of this month is a challenge for the health ministry. Health Secretary Dr Ugen Dophu, said the ministry is facing problems mobilising excess female health workers. The ministry has identified some dzongkhags with excess female health workers and written to the respective dzongkhag's Human Resource Committee (HRC) asking for a list of excess female health workers who would to be transferred to other BHUs where there are none.

### **MALDIVES**

#### [Delegation from EU calls on FM Asim](#)

Sun Online | 14<sup>th</sup> January

The high-level delegation from European Union visiting Maldives has called on Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr.

Mohamed Asim. The delegation, led by Paola Pampaloni, Deputy Managing Director for Asia Department of the European External Action Service (EEAS) held talks with Asim in a meeting this Sunday morning, reports Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The delegation also includes Head of the EU Delegation to Maldives, Tung-Lai Margue, and the EEAS Head of Division for South Asia, Caroline Vinot.

#### [Noorul Islam to Health Ministry: Disruptions resolved](#)

Sun Online | 14<sup>th</sup> January

Disruptions in operations of the Kulhudhuffushi Regional Hospital have now been resolved, reports Noorul Islam International, the company in charge of running the hospital. Disruptions in operations of the Kulhudhuffushi Regional Hospital had led to Ministry of Health taking over running of some of its operations. 80 percent of Kulhudhuffushi Regional Hospital is owned by Noorul Islam Educational Trust of India, while the remaining 20 percent is owned by Maldivian citizen Ali Usaid. Conflicts between the two shareholders led to disruptions in the hospital's operations Ministry of Health recently gave Noorul Islam 10 days to guarantee the conflict will not disrupt the hospital's operations.

### MYANMAR

#### [India and Myanmar to streamline free movement for border villagers](#)

Mizzima | 15<sup>th</sup> January

India and Myanmar are set to streamline free movement of people within 16 km along their borders. The Central Government has asked the four States that share an unfenced border with Myanmar to distribute "border passes" to all residents living within 16 km from the boundary line, The Hindu reported on 14 January. The report quoted an official saying both countries had been intending to put a system in place after India raised the issue of free movement of extremists and smugglers across the border. On January 3, the Union Cabinet approved the agreement between India and Myanmar on land border crossing, which the government said would enhance economic interaction between the people of the two countries.

#### [China, Myanmar to further military cooperation for border stability](#)

Global Times / mizzima | 13<sup>th</sup> January

Chinese Defense Minister Chang Wanquan said Friday China is willing to strengthen military cooperation with Myanmar to maintain the stability in border areas. Chang made the remarks while meeting the visiting Admiral Tin Aung San, commander-in-chief of the Myanmar navy. He said that China respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Myanmar, and supports the country in its development path in accordance with its own conditions. Since the relations between the two countries' militaries are at their best status currently, China is willing to advance cooperation with the Myanmar side, jointly safeguard stability in border areas and promote exchanges and cooperation between the two militaries, according to Chang. Tin Aung San expressed willingness to further pragmatic cooperation between the two militaries and promote relations between the two countries to a higher level.

#### [Indian coast guard ships visit Yangon](#)

mizzima | 15<sup>th</sup> January

The Indian Coast Guard ships Shaunak and Rajshree are visiting Yangon from 14-18 January, 2018 on a goodwill visit. ICGS Shaunak is an Offshore Patrol Vessel and was commissioned into Indian Coast Guard on 21 February, 2017. ICGS Rajshree is an Inshore Patrol Vessel commissioned on 15 January, 2012. Major activities during their stay at Yangon include courtesy calls, interaction with personnel from the Myanmar Navy, visits to places of interest and friendly sports, according to a press release.

### NEPAL

#### [Congress has not offered PM's post to Dahal: Sharma](#)

The Himalayan Times | 15th January

Newly appointed Spokesperson of the Nepali Congress Bishwa Parkash Sharma said the party has not offered the prime ministerial post to CPN MC Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal. Speaking in an interaction organised by Reporter's Club today, Sharma rejected the allegation that the NC wants to break the left alliance. Sharma further said how fast the left alliance could be united was up to the parties.

### [Chinese rider on Tatopani, Nepal](#)

The Himalayan Times | 14th January

Nepal wants China to modify the proposal as there are sensitive issues involved. CPN-UML Chairman KP Sharma Oli and CPN Maoist Centre Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal are in dilemma over a Joint Command Mechanism proposal floated by the Chinese government. China has proposed to set up offices of joint security forces and jointly patrol the Nepal-China border to check movement of Tibetan refugees and criminal activities.

## PAKISTAN

### [Bill Gates announces aid bump for Pakistan](#)

Dawn | 15<sup>th</sup> January

Days after the Trump administration announced it was suspending security assistance to the country, a billionaire philanthropist has committed that his Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation will increase financial aid for Pakistan. In a letter to Minister for National Health Services (NHS) Saira Afzal Tarar – a copy of which is available with Dawn – Mr Gates praised the government's commitment to the eradication of polio.

### [Pakistan wants strategic concerns addressed](#)

The Express Tribune | 15<sup>th</sup> January

Pakistan wants the United States to pay heed to its 'genuine' strategic grievances instead of restoring security assistance the Trump administration had suspended recently to persuade Islamabad to take action against alleged sanctuaries of the Afghan Taliban and Haqqani network.

### [Oil on the boil is bad news for govt](#)

Dawn | 15<sup>th</sup> January

The recent sharp rebound in global oil prices on the back of supply cuts by the 14-nation Opec oil cartel and other producers led by Russia does not augur well for Pakistan's economy, industry, exports and households. With around two dozen oil exporters agreeing to extend their deal to limit their production through 2018, crude oil prices are set to spike significantly over the next several months.

### [Govt aiming to sell PIA before 2018 elections, says privatisation minister](#)

Reuters / The Express Tribune | 14th January

The government will try to privatise Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) before general elections due this year, privatisation minister Daniyal Aziz said, as the ruling party seeks to restart sales of state-run businesses.

## SRI LANKA

### [Sri Lanka Finance Minister reviews status of economic projects with Indian leaders](#)

Colombo Page | 14th January

Sri Lanka's Minister of Finance and Mass Media Mangala Samaraweera, who is currently visiting New Delhi, has met with Indian leaders to discuss the bilateral relations between the two countries in economic development. Minister Samaraweera met with India's External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj in New Delhi. The two leaders discussed bilateral issues of developmental cooperation, Ministry of External Affairs Spokesperson Raveesh Kumar said.

### [Sri Lankan President reinstates alcohol ban on women, annuls liquor gazette notification](#)

Colombo Page | 14th January

Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena said he has instructed the Prime Minister and the Finance Minister to cancel the Gazette notifications issued last week regarding liquor sales to women and the opening hours of licensed liquor outlets. Accordingly, the gazette notification issued by the Minister of Finance Mangala Samaraweera removing the ban on females from buying alcohol and working at establishments that produce or sell alcohol and the revision of the business hours of all licensed liquor shops in Sri Lanka will be void from 15th January.

### [Pakistani PM invites Sri Lankan businessmen to invest in 'emerging Pakistan'](#)

Colombo Page | 13th January

Pakistan's Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi has invited Sri Lankan businessmen to invest in trade with the "emerging Pakistan" and see for themselves what Pakistan can offer for investors. The Pakistani Premier has said

that "Pakistan is a vibrant democracy with a vibrant press and its foreign investment policies are liberal, apolitical, non-partisan and consistent," Dawn reported.

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### ***About Ananta Aspen Centre***

*Ananta Aspen Centre is an independent and not-for-profit organisation that seeks to foster positive change in society through dissemination of knowledge. The Centre facilitates discussions on issues of international significance, values-based leadership and cross-sector outreach by engaging the civil society, government, private sector, and other key stakeholders.*

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