

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

**February 20th, 2017 | Volume: 3 - 9/2**

**[PM's upcoming visit to further cement Dhaka-Delhi ties](#)**

The Daily Star | 20<sup>th</sup> February  
Bilateral relations between Bangladesh and India are graduating to a new level, as the two countries have come closer through enhanced mutual cooperation in a wide range of areas. Harsh Vardhan Shringla, Indian high commissioner in Dhaka, said this yesterday in an interaction with journalists of The Daily Star during a courtesy visit to the newspaper office in the capital.

**[Kabul will use 'All Means' to End Pakistani Missile Attacks](#)**

Outlook Afghanistan/  
Tolonews | 20<sup>th</sup> February  
Kabul will use all its power in response to Pakistan if it did not stop rocket attacks on Afghanistan soil, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) warned on Sunday. "We hope that Pakistan stops the attacks and that the relationship between the two countries will return to normal. If not, Afghanistan will not sit silent, but will use its internal, regional and international power in response to Pakistan's actions," Faramarz Tamana, Director of Strategic Studies at Ministry of Foreign Affairs said.

**[India proposes Kathmandu to Delhi, Kolkata rail links](#)**

The Kathmandu Post | 20<sup>th</sup> February  
India has expressed interest to link Kathmandu with two Indian cities, New Delhi and Kolkata, using direct railway lines in a bid to strengthen cross-border connectivity and facilitate movement of people between the two countries. "These two railway tracks must be built soon to increase Nepal's connectivity with India," Indian Railways Minister Suresh Prabhakar Prabhu said while delivering a keynote speech at the Nepal Infrastructure Summit 2017, which kicked off on Sunday. "I will give priority to build such networks soon."

**AFGHANISTAN**

**[Afghanistan and EU sign Partnership and Development Agreement](#)**

Khaama Press | 20<sup>th</sup> February

A new agreement was signed between the Afghan government and the European Union to further strengthen partnership between the two sides. The agreement also paves the way for the bilateral cooperation on development, the Office of the President, ARG Palace said. Afghanistan's Minister of Finance Eklil Hakimi and Federica Mogherini, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy signed the agreement. According to ARG Palace, the agreement was signed in the presence of President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani and on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference in Germany. The agreement formally describes EU's cooperation with Afghanistan covering law enforcement, health, development, agriculture, education, science and technology.

**[Qatar Office to be Shut if Taliban Stay Away from Talks: Ghani](#)**

Outlook Afghanistan/ Pajhwok | 13<sup>th</sup> February

President Ashraf Ghani asked Qatar to close the Taliban's political office if the rebel group does not evince any interest in joining the peace process. The Presidential Palace said Ghani made the remarks at a meeting with the Qatari foreign minister on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference on Saturday. In a statement from his office, the president said he discussed with Mohammad Bin Abdul Rahman Al Thani the Afghan peace process

and Taliban's political office in Qatar. It was important for Taliban to shun the insurgency, join the peace process and avoid wasting the available opportunity, the statement quoted him as saying. "If the Taliban don't bring positive changes to their policy and continue violence until the next solar year, they would be sanctioned and their Qatar office shut," the president warned.

## BANGLADESH

### [China wants 'solid effort' to address difficulties in doing business in Bangladesh](#)

bdnews24 | 19<sup>th</sup> February

China wants "solid efforts" from the government to address "practical difficulties" their companies are facing in doing business in Bangladesh. Chairman of China's Council for Promoting South-South Cooperation Lyu Xinhua, a former vice foreign minister, however, did not specify what kind of difficulties Chinese companies face in Bangladesh while speaking at a meeting in Dhaka. He said Chinese companies were moving their production base to all developing countries and "if the investment environment is not good, they will go to other places where the climate is good".

### [Poor connectivity hits India-Bangladesh border trade](#)

The Financial Express | 19<sup>th</sup> February

India-Bangladesh trade ties are troubled by "poor" rail- and river-connectivity in the region bordering Assam as well as a delay in putting four "new" 'border haats' (or border markets) into operation in the area bordering Meghalaya. This is the situation even 20 months after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bangladesh visit that paved way for the "historic" ceremony of exchange of instruments of ratification of the India-Bangladesh Land Boundary Agreement, 1974 and its 2011 Protocol.

### [Hundreds of Rohingyas return 'home'](#)

AFP/ Dhaka Tribune | 20<sup>th</sup> February

Hundreds of Rohingyas who fled to Bangladesh to escape persecution in Myanmar have returned home, community leaders told the AFP on Sunday, adding that most had gone back temporarily to fetch relatives. Dudu Mia, a refugee camp leader in the coastal town of Teknaf, said nearly 1,000 Rohingya – mostly young men – had returned to their home villages to collect elderly family members left behind earlier.

## BHUTAN

### [Telcos under pressure with increasing demand for data](#)

Kuensel Online | 18<sup>th</sup> February

Data is now more popular than voice minutes, changing the way Bhutanese communicate today. The shift in the demand for more data than the voice network has created an additional challenge for the two cellular operators in the country. In a recent survey report from the Bhutan InfoComm and Media Authority (BICMA), the data network performance of the two telcos were found to be under satisfactory. The overall performance of the voice network of both the telcos according to the report was found to be better than that of their data network.

### [Chudzom farmers shocked after cardamom taxed](#)

Kuensel Online | 18<sup>th</sup> February

Cardamom farmers in the south were taken by surprise this year when revenue and customs officials began visiting them to levy taxes on their produce harvested last year and the year before. Farmers had not expected that they would be liable for tax payments for their only source of income. Moreover it was done without prior information. Although the farmers were asked to fill up forms with details of their production and income towards the end of last year, farmers were not told it was for tax purposes.

## MALDIVES

### [Trump's sons interested in investing in Maldives](#)

19th February | Sun Online

News of US President Donald Trump's two eldest sons Donald Trump Jr. and Eric Trump visiting Maldives for vacation was reported by a number of news agencies. It was reported that Trump Jr. and Eric Trump arrived in Maldives on February 14 and stayed at the luxurious PER AQUUM Niyama resort before leaving on February 17.

#### [MPs file motion alleging State employees coerced to join PPM](#)

Sun Online | 19<sup>th</sup> February

Maldivian Democratic Party lawmakers, West Mafannu MP Mohamed Falah and North Machangolhi MP Mariya Ahmed Didi has filed a motion requesting People's Majlis probe allegations employees of State-run companies were being coerced into signing for the ruling Progressive Party of Maldives. The reason for the motion has been written as the government violating rights and liberties of employees by coercing State employees to join PPM, and threatening them with termination of post if they failed to do so.

### MYANMAR

#### [Two Myanmar military injured in clash with militants in Rakhine State](#)

Mizzima | 20th February

Two members of Myanmar's security forces were injured in a clash with militants on the troubled Rakhine State border with Bangladesh, VOA reported on 19 February quoting the Myanmar state counsellor's office. The government last week said the situation in northern Rakhine had stabilized and that it had ended a four-month security crackdown on Rohingya Muslims. The security operation had been under way since nine policemen were killed in attacks on security posts near the Bangladesh border October 9.

### NEPAL

#### [Ruling coalition agrees to announce local level election](#)

My Republica | 19th February

Parties within the ruling coalition have agreed to announce dates for local level election. Meeting between Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, Nepali Congress President Sher Bahadur Deuba and other leaders in the coalition at PM's official residence Baluwatar on Sunday decided to declare election dates and consult the Election Commission on this regard.

#### [Prime Minister vows to mobilize private sector for bridging infrastructure gap\](#)

My Republica | 20th February

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal on Sunday said that lack of basic infrastructure has directly hurt development activities in the country and vowed to mobilize the private sector as an indispensable partner to bridge the infrastructure gap.

### PAKISTAN

#### [IMF postpones Islamabad talks due to security concerns](#)

Express Tribune | 20<sup>th</sup> February

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has postponed next week's scheduled talks in Pakistan in the wake of a recent wave of terrorism that claimed more than 100 lives in four deadly attacks across the country. Both, the Q Block –the seat of the finance ministry – and IMF resident representative in Islamabad Tokhir Mirzoev confirmed to The Express Tribune on Sunday that talks have been postponed for now. Pakistan and the IMF had a plan to meet in Islamabad for the first time in many years due to the improved security situation. These talks were previously held in UAE.

#### [Privatisation Commission failing to plug losses](#)

Express Tribune | 20<sup>th</sup> February

The Privatisation Commission – largely mandated to save public exchequer money from wasteful spending on inefficient and loss-making state-owned entities (SOEs) – has not privatised any such entity in the last three and a

half years, though the priority list has 31 companies. The commission has not plugged even a single rupee loss that has been burdening public finance.

#### [Efforts for military courts' revival gather steam](#)

Dawn|20<sup>th</sup> February

The government has stepped up its hectic lobbying for the revival of military courts following the deaths of over 100 people in six terrorist attacks across the country last week. On Sunday, Finance Minister Ishaq Dar and National Assembly Speaker Ayaz Sadiq contacted parliamentary leaders from opposition parties and informed them about the government's intention to prepone their next meeting on the issue of the military courts from Feb 27 to Feb 23.

### SRI LANKA

#### [Sri Lanka Premier optimistic in reviving economy with international assistance](#)

Colombo Page| 19<sup>th</sup> February

Sri Lanka's Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe expressed hope in paying off the government's huge debt and reviving the economy with international assistance as the government work towards to improve the international standing of the country. Speaking at a ceremony held to open a new housing scheme constructed for the people affected by the landslide in Aranayake on Sunday, the Premier said the finding a solution to the ethnic problem in Sri Lanka is the government's most important task.

#### [Over 5000 Indians register for festival on Sri Lankan island](#)

Colombo Gazette| 19<sup>th</sup> February

A record 5,015 Indian pilgrims, including about 2,000 from Rameswaram island have registered for the two-day annual St Antony's Church festival in Katchatheevu, scheduled for March 11 and 12, Rev Fr. Sagayaraj, Verkodu Parish Priest and chief coordinator of Indian pilgrimage, said. The response was overwhelming as the pilgrims wanted to visit and offer worship at the new church, which was inaugurated on December 23, 2016, The Hindu newspaper reported.

#### [Ministerial delegation visits Thailand for bilateral discussions on developing Sri Lanka's fisheries industry](#)

Colombo Page| 20<sup>th</sup> February

A ministerial delegation comprising Minister of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Development Mahinda Amaraweera, Minister of Agriculture Duminda Dissanayake and Minister of Development Strategies and International Trade Malik Samarawickrama are currently visiting Thailand for bilateral discussions on developing Sri Lanka's fishery industry. The ministerial delegation, visiting Thailand on an invitation extended by the Thailand Deputy Prime Minister Somkid Jatusripitak, have participated in bilateral talks with regard to fisheries, trade, industry, tourism and agriculture and entered in to several bilateral agreements.

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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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