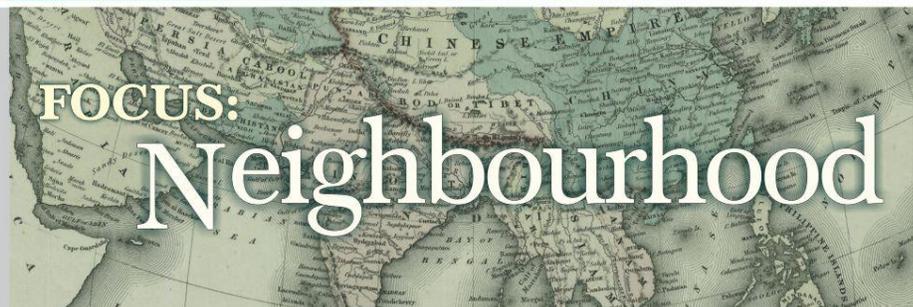


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[Highlights from the local media of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka](#)

[February 23, 2018 | Volume - 4 - 10/02](#)

[China rejects reports of talks with Baloch rebels to protect CPEC investment](#)

The Express Tribune | 22nd February

China has rejected a report claiming that it had been engaged in low-key dialogue with Baloch separatists for over five years in a bid to secure the multibillion-dollar China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project in Pakistan. According to the Financial Times report, published earlier this week, three people had shared details of Beijing being in direct contact with militants in Balochistan. "I have never heard of such things as you mentioned," China's Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Geng Shuang said on Thursday when asked if Beijing was involved in a dialogue with

[Shainee: Govt. does not object to UN mediating talks](#)

Sun Online | 22nd February

The Maldivian government does not object United Nations mediating talks between the government and political parties, says Dr. Mohamed Shainee, Minister of Fisheries and Agriculture and chief envoy for all-party talks on behalf of the government. Opposition political parties have refused to sit down for talks with the government unless the UN acts as mediator. Some Indian newspapers carried reports this Thursday that the Maldivian government has refused to let the UN mediate talks, citing a UN spokesperson as a source. In an interview to "Sun", Shainee refuted the reports and said the Maldivian government does not

[Pakistan values TAPI gas pipeline project: PM Abbasi](#)

Dawn | 23rd February

Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi on Thursday said Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline was an important project for the country due to its growing energy needs. About prospective purchase of electricity from Turkmenistan, he said it would add a new dimension to ties between the two countries. The PM expressed these views during his meeting with Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov at Ruhiyet Palace in Mary, Turkmenistan. Mr Abbasi termed the materialisation of TAPI as success of the vision and commitment of President Berdimuhamedov.

Baloch militants to safeguard its investment in Pakistan. “The Chinese and the Pakistani governments have been working in coordination on security matters regarding the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor,” he added.

object to UN acting as mediator, and said the Maldivian government was working together with the UN even now.

AFGHANISTAN

[HRW Urges Afghan Gov't, US to Probe Alleged Executions of Civilians](#)

Daily Outlook Afghanistan | 22nd February

The government of Afghanistan and US military deployed in the country must investigate reports of alleged executions of civilians by Afghan forces in Kandahar province during military operations held late on January 31, a prominent non-governmental human rights organization said on Wednesday. "The alleged deaths of at least twenty civilians in Band-e Timor demands a prompt and impartial investigation. Summarily executing people in custody, whether they are fighters or civilians, is a war crime. Only a full investigation can uncover all who may be responsible," Patricia Gossman, senior Afghanistan researcher in Human Rights Watch, said.

[HPC Responds to Taliban's Letter to the US](#)

Daily Outlook Afghanistan | 21st February

The High Peace Council on Tuesday called on the Taliban to end the war instead of sending letters to the US. Mohammad AkramKhpalwak, an advisor to the president and head secretary of High Peace Council, on Tuesday said in Kabul at a National Consultative Peace Conference with tribal and Jihadi elders and provincial council representatives, that the Taliban should approach Afghans to end the war instead of sending letters to the United States. "The Taliban should have approached Afghans to end current violence in Afghanistan instead of sending letters to the US," said Khpalwak. Last week the Taliban called on the American people to put pressure on US President Donald Trump to change his war policy in Afghanistan and pursue peace.

BANGLADESH

[Amnesty slams 'politics of hate'](#)

Prothom Alo | 23rd February

The "politics of demonization" provided fertile ground for human rights abuses in 2017, exemplified by the response of Europe and Donald Trump's US to the refugee crisis, rights group Amnesty International said Thursday. The British-based group in its annual report took particular aim at the US president's "transparently hateful" executive order banning entry to citizens of several Muslim-majority countries. "Throughout 2017, millions across the world experienced the bitter fruits of a rising politics of demonization," said the report, which was launched this year for the first time in the United States. It accused leaders of wealthy countries of approaching the refugee crisis "with a blend of evasion and outright callousness". Amnesty also said Myanmar's military crackdown on Rohingya insurgents, which prompted an exodus of nearly 700,000 Rohingya people into neighbouring Bangladesh, was the "ultimate consequence of a society encouraged to hate, scapegoat and fear minorities".

[Bangladesh ranks 143rd in corruption index](#)

Dhaka Tribune | 22nd February

Bangladesh has progressed by two positions in the Transparency International's corruption perceptions index and ranked 143rd out of 180 in the ascending order on the list of the most corrupt countries in the world in 2017. The country placed 17th on the descending list. The Berlin-based organization also revealed that Bangladesh scored 28 on scale of 0 to 100, with 0 being highly corrupt and 100 being no corruption. Moreover, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka all scored more and ranked higher than Bangladesh, with the only South Asian country to receive a place below Bangladesh being Afghanistan.

[Five million ultra poor to get rice at Tk10](#)

The Financial Express | 22nd February

The government will bring down the price of rice at Tk 10 per kilogram for ultra-poor people from next month. Five million ultra-poor families across the country will get rice at Tk 10 per kilogram this year under 'Food-Friendly Programme', according to UNB. Food Minister Quamrul Islam, talking to reporters at Directorate of Food, said in one month each family will be able to buy a total of 30 kg rice at Tk10 per kg. The project will be conducted in two phases - in the months of March, April and September, October, November, he said. "The government had decided to buy 600,000 metric tonnes of rice in the Aman season, out of which it has already collected 540,000 MT and the remaining amount will be collected in time as well," he added.

BHUTAN

[Their Majesties offer prayers at Taktsang](#)

Kuensel | 22nd February

To mark the 38th Birth Anniversary of His Majesty The King, Their Majesties and His Royal Highness The Gyalsey visited Paro Taktsang yesterday morning to offer prayers. This is His Royal Highness The Gyalsey's first visit to Taktsang. Considered one of the most sacred Buddhist sites in the country, the temple complex surrounding the scared cave where Guru Rinpoche meditated in the 8th century, has been built by various Buddhist masters over the centuries. Later in the evening, His Majesty celebrated the special day at the Royal Bhutan Army's Commando Wing in Paro Shabha with the soldiers and officers, who are the part of Bhutan's first ever contingent for the United Nations peace keeping operations.

MALDIVES

[Government calls for dialogue; public statements unhelpful](#)

Sun Online | 22nd February

The Government of Maldives has to foreign entities to start a dialogue with country instead of unhelpful statements regarding the situation in the Maldives. A statement issued by the Foreign Ministry said that they have taken note of the public statements issued by the Government of India that ignore the facts and ground realities with regard to the ongoing political developments in the Maldives. The Maldivian government said that the assertion by the Government of India that the extension of the State of Emergency by the People's Majlis was unconstitutional is a clear distortion of facts which ignore the Constitution and Laws of the Maldives.

[MP Musthafa charged with terrorism](#)

Sun Online | 23rd February

Maldives Police Service has charged MP for Thimarafushi constituency, Mohamed Musthafa, with terrorism and taken a statement from him following his remarks on Raajje TV. Talking to the press outside the Police HQ after the statement, lawyer Mahfooz Saeed, representing MP Musthafa, said that his client was previously suspected of instigating support to overthrow the government and was summoned to the police on two occasions for questioning. Mahfooz said that the charge was changed with support from the Prosecutor General and the MP cooperated fully with the police investigation.

MYANMAR

[Germany to provide technical aid for heritage conservation](#)

Mizzima | 22nd February

Myanmar and Germany have agreed to jointly conserve the cultural heritage of Bagan in northern Mandalay region, Xinhua reported quoting state media.

According to a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed on Tuesday, Germany will provide technical aid to conduct a project of conserving the Nanpaya Temple, one of the 389 pagodas destroyed following a 6.8-magnitude earthquake on Aug. 24 in 2016.

A training program for maintaining and preserving murals in the Narathihapate Pagoda will also be carried out, the MoU said.

[Myanmar to hold pearl auction in Hong Kong to penetrate int'l market](#)

Mizzima | 23th February

Myanmar will hold its sixth International Pearl Auction in China's Hong Kong Special Administrative Region starting Friday, the official Global New Light of Myanmar reported Thursday.

In the three-day pearl auction with the aim of penetrating the international pearl market, Myanmar pearls of high value, produced from Myeik, the country's southern coastal Tanintharyi region, will be displayed.

Myanmar holds three pearl auctions annually, once in local currency, one in foreign currency at home, and the third abroad. Myanmar sold more than 200,000 pearls annually in the last five years.

NEPAL

[Election for new Prez on March 13](#)

MyRepublica | 23rd February

The Election Commission has announced March 13 as the date for electing the third president of the Republic. Though the term of the president is five years, the election for the post is being held after two and half years as the country is implementing full federalism and ending the transitional period. A meeting of officials of the EC held on Thursday fixed the election date following consultations with the government and the political parties.

[Govt to have 17 ministries, UML to finalize ministers](#)

MyRepublica | 23rd February

The government has decided to reduce the number of ministries from 18 to 17. The meeting of cabinet of ministers has decided to do so. Likewise, Bishnu Rimal has been appointed as chief advisor to Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli, Chetan Adhikari, press coordinator of PM Oli said. Following the cabinet of ministers meeting, CPN UML is holding a central committee meeting to finalize candidates for the ministries.

[Amnesty faults Nepal over migrant workers' rights](#)

MyRepublica | 23rd February

The government has largely failed to protect migrant workers from unlawful and criminal conducts by dishonest recruitment agencies and agents despite the sizeable contribution of remittances in the economy, according to a recently published report of a human rights watchdog. In Nepal, the culture of impunity for unlawful and criminal recruitment practices has become rampant due to the government's inaction and inability to implement migrant workers-friendly policies, such as 'Free visa-free ticket' policy that was introduced to curtail recruitment charges by agencies, states an annual report of Amnesty International published on Thursday.

PAKISTAN

[Iran envoy to Pakistan regrets delay in opening of bilateral banking ties](#)

Dawn | 23rd February

Iran's envoy to Pakistan Mehdi Honardoost on Thursday regretted that establishment of bilateral banking ties was being delayed because of Islamabad's 'conservativeness', while Iran-Pakistan (IP) gas pipeline project remained frozen. He was speaking at a seminar at the Strategic Vision Institute (SVI) on "Contemporary Relations between Pakistan, Iran and Saudi Arabia: Present Challenges". There were "unjust US sanctions" on Iran, but then "conservativeness of our brothers" was delaying opening of banking channels, even though many countries maintained banking relations with Iran, he said.

[Pakistan, Russia agree to further coop in diverse fields, says Asif](#)

The Financial Daily | 22nd February

Foreign Minister Khawaja Asif has said there is consensus between Pakistan and Russia on regional and international issues particularly Afghanistan. In a tweet, he said that he had a very fruitful meeting with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov. He said matters pertaining to need for close cooperation on countering terrorism and drug trafficking and promoting trade and defence relations were discussed at the meeting. Earlier, at their meeting in Moscow, two foreign ministers agreed to strengthen bilateral engagement and diversify cooperation in various fields. The two countries reiterated that there is no military solution to the Afghan conflict and a negotiated settlement through an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process is the only viable option for lasting peace in Afghanistan.

[Pakistan's ranking in corruption index shows little change: report](#)

Pakistan Daily | 23rd February

Pakistan ranks 117 out of the 180 countries, according to the Corruption Perceptions Index 2017, released by the Transparency International. Pakistan's position has not changed much from 2016 when the country was ranked 116 out of 176 countries, reports a local English daily. Pakistan's score is 32 in 2017, which shows that not a lot has changed from the previous year when the score was 32. The index uses a scale of zero to 100, where zero is highly corrupt and 100 is very clear and ranks countries and territories by their perceived levels of public sector corruption. According to the index, not many countries have been successful in their efforts of curbing terrorism despite numerous efforts in the last six years or so. Further analysis of the index results indicates that countries with the lowest protections for the press and NGOs also tend to have the worst rates of corruption.

SRI LANKA

[Sri Lanka needs more private sector involvement in development to become an upper middle-income country -](#)

[WB Director](#)

Colombo Page | 23rd February

While Sri Lanka in many ways has been a development success story since its independence 70 years ago, the island nation still faces some critical challenges as it strives to transition to another stage of its development and become a competitive upper middle-income country, according to the World Bank Country Director for Sri Lanka and Maldives Dr. Idah Z. Psarayi-Riddihough. In a blog post titled "Sri Lanka at 70: Looking back and forward", the World Bank Country Director observes that the country's current overreliance on the public-sector as the main engine for growth and investment, from infrastructure to healthcare, is reaching its limits. "With one of the world's lowest tax to gross domestic product (GDP) ratios - 12% in 2016, down from 24% in 1978 - Sri Lanka's public sector is now facing serious budget constraints and the country needs to look for additional sources of finance to boost and sustain its growth," she points out. The World Bank official says the country needs to move urgently to more private investment, tradable sector-led growth model to sustain growth if it were to become an upper middle-income country.

[Sri Lanka continues to fare poorly in global corruption rankings](#)

Colombo Gazette | 22nd February

Sri Lanka has failed to show significant improvement in the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2017, released by Transparency International, the global movement against corruption. The index ranks 180 countries and territories by their perceived levels of public sector corruption. Sri Lanka has moved up 4 places from 95th to 91st, far more importantly its CPI score has only risen by two points from 36 to 38, representing the slow rate of progress. Transparency International Sri Lanka (TISL), the local chapter of the global movement, is concerned by the fact that Sri Lanka's current CPI score of 38 is the same score that prevailed in 2014. Speaking on the country's performance in CPI 2017. TISL Executive Director Asoka Obeyesekere said, "A close analysis of Sri Lanka's positioning in the CPI from 2012 to 2017 shows that despite the institutional strengthening of anti-corruption agencies following the 19th amendment, consistent failure in implementation has led to very limited progress".

[US Pacific Partnership mission to return to Sri Lanka for a second time](#)

Colombo Page | 22nd February

The Asia-Pacific's largest humanitarian assistance and disaster-relief preparedness mission will return to Sri Lanka for a second time as the United States continues to cultivate partnerships in the region, according to the U.S. military's news source Stars and Stripes. This marks the second year Pacific Partnership will visit Sri Lanka, whose location next to a critical sea lane attracts both the U.S. and China. During this year's Pacific Partnership exercise, which begins Friday and runs through June, the Navy hospital ship USNS Mercy will travel to Indonesia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Vietnam while the USNS Fall River heads to, Malaysia, Palau, Thailand and Yap in Micronesia. Events will include civic-action projects, community health exchanges, medical symposiums and disaster-response training.

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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