

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

February 26, 2018 | Volume - 4 - 11/02

[NATO Renews Commitment to Peace in Afghanistan](#)

Daily Outlook Afghanistan | 25th February

A high-level NATO delegation visited Afghanistan from February 23 to 24 and reaffirmed their commitment to lasting peace in the war-torn country, the Resolute Support (RS) mission said on Saturday. Headed by Gen. General Curtis Scaparrotti, the supreme allied commander for Europe, the delegation included permanent representatives to NATO from Germany, Italy, Turkey and the United States. Gen. Scaparrotti met General John Nicholson, RS commander, NATO's Senior Civilian Representative Ambassador Cornelius Zimmermann, as well as Afghan government officials and military and police leaders.

[Pakistan measles crisis among worst in world](#)

The Express Tribune | 26th February

On the verge of a measles catastrophe, the country is facing an increasing number of reported cases compared to 2016. For the previous and current year, a report by the World Health Organisation presents a dire picture of Pakistan's weak surveillance. The numbers reveal that Pakistan not only experienced a significantly higher number of cases than the entire region, but that cases rose by more than 100 per cent in 2017, compared to previous year. According to the Measles-Rubella Bulletin, the data analysis on the region reports 6,494 cases in 2017, while in 2016 the reported cases were 2,845.

[Myanmar and India to increase drug control cooperation](#)

Mizzima | 26th February

Myanmar and India have vowed to cooperate in drug control, Xinhua reported quoting state media. The two countries made their pledge at the third bilateral meeting of director-general level on drug control in Yangon. The talks reviewed the drug control work to be carried out as decided at the second director-general meeting.

AFGHANISTAN

[US Military Rejects Russian Claims about Number of IS Fighters in Afghanistan](#)

Daily Outlook Afghanistan | 26th February

The United States military has rejected Moscow's claim the number of Islamic State militants in

Afghanistan runs into the thousands, while at the same time urging Russia and Iran to support the Kabul government, not the Taliban, to help defeat IS in the country. Commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan General John Nicholson made the remark Saturday while responding to recent Russian accusations Washington is intentionally downplaying the spread of IS militants in the country. "The numbers that are spread about the number of Daesh fighters by Russia is grossly exaggerated. It is around 1,500," Nicholson told a news conference in the Afghan capital. He used the Arabic acronym for IS.

[Afghanistan Unveils Plans for Controversial Militia Force](#)

Daily Outlook Afghanistan | 24th February

Afghanistan's ministry of defense has announced the creation of a new militia force comprising about 36,000 men to defend areas that military-led operations have cleared of Taliban insurgents. The move comes despite long-running accusations of rights abuses against the existing Afghan Local Police, which consists of local militias trained and paid by the U.S. military. Defense Ministry spokesman, Dawlat Waziri, said in a brief statement the new force will consist of 7,500 officers of the Afghan National Army, or ANA, and 28,500 other personnel.

[Turkey Condemns Terrorist Attacks in Afghanistan](#)

Daily Outlook Afghanistan | 26th February

Turkey on Saturday condemned the latest terrorist attacks in Afghanistan which killed at least 22 people including 18 soldiers. "We learned with sorrow that various terrorist attacks perpetrated in Kabul and provinces of Farah and Helmand today, killed and wounded many Afghan brothers and sisters, including soldiers. "We strongly condemn these terrorist attacks and wish God's mercy upon those who lost their lives," Turkey's Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

At least 18 Afghan soldiers were killed in an overnight attack by the Taliban in the restive western Farah province bordering Iran.

BANGLADESH

[Removing inequalities vital for BD: Norway](#)

The Financial Express | 24th February

Norway has said Bangladesh needs to make sure that the benefits of economic growth continue to reach the poor to remove inequalities in the country. "It's important to keep up the focus on poor people, not just in rural areas but also in cities, including in Dhaka," Norwegian Ambassador in Dhaka Sidsel Bleken told UNB in an interview at her office at the Nordic Embassy. She said statistics are showing that social inequalities are increasing in the country and the poor people are getting poorer. Emphasising stability and security, Ambassador Bleken said they hope that there will be no political violence as the next national election is approaching.

[US hopeful of fair polls](#)

Prothom Alo | 25th February

US ambassador in Dhaka Marcia Bernicat hopes the next national elections will be free, fair and participatory. She laid emphasis on creating conditions to make that happen, reports UNB. "This democracy, this Bangladesh, has held free and fair elections in the past. People know what to do," the US diplomat told a small group of reporters after her meeting at the foreign ministry. Ambassador Bernicat said Bangladeshi people do not need foreigners to mediate and it is up to the Bangladeshi people to participate and have a free and fair election. "So, can that (fair polls) happen? Yes. Should it happen? Absolutely," she said.

[HC: No bail to Khaleda yet](#)

Dhaka Tribune | 25th February

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia has failed to secure bail in the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case as the High Court says it will pass an order on her bail petition upon receiving all the documents relating to the judgment from the lower court. The High Court bench of Justice M Enayetur Rahim and Justice Shahidul Karim concluded the hearing on Khaleda Zia's bail petition on the

Zia Orphanage Trust graft case on Sunday. The court kept the order pending as the High Court is yet to receive the verdict documents. On February 22, the High Court asked the lower court to submit all the relevant documents within 15 days.

BHUTAN

[His Majesty's birth anniversary celebrated in New Delhi](#)

Kuensel | 22nd February

The 38th Birth Anniversary of His Majesty The King was celebrated as a special event to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of the diplomatic relations between India and Bhutan, yesterday at the Royal Bhutanese Embassy in New Delhi, India. A press release from Bhutan Embassy states that the minister for external affairs of India, Sushma Swaraj and foreign minister, Damcho Dorji jointly launched the commemorative Bhutanese stamps published by Bhutan Post for the Golden Jubilee celebrations and a special issue of 'Bhutan Panorama' magazine published by India-Bhutan Friendship Association in coordination with the Royal Bhutanese Embassy. Prizes for the top three winners of an essay competition organised by the embassy among Bhutanese students studying in India on the theme 'India-Bhutan relations' was also awarded.

MALDIVES

[Ali Arif: Some of the coup work took place in Malay](#)

Sun Online | 24th February

Malaysian government reports a group of Maldivians worked on the recent coup attempt from Malaysia, says Spokesperson at ruling Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM), Ali Arif. Speaking at a press conference held by PPM last Friday night, Feb 24th, Ali Arif said the Maldivian Ambassador to Malaysia Mohamed Fahmy Hassan informed the government some of the work on the coup attempt took place in Malaysia. He said Ambassador Fahmy got the information from Malaysia's foreign ministry. Fahmy was also told by officials at the Malaysian foreign ministry that the country's government will not release a travel advisory warning its citizens against travel to Maldives, said Arif. Arif said the Malaysian government expressed confidence in the capability of Maldives to resolve the current political crisis.

[Police: No rallies allowed after 10:30 p.m.](#)

Sun Online | 25th February

Maldives Police Service has said that protest rallies would not be allowed to continue after 10:30 p.m. effective from tonight. Speaking at a police press conference at Iskandharu Koshi today, Spokesperson of the police, Superintendent Ahmed Shifan said that after 10:30 p.m., no political party would be given the opportunity to hold rallies. Superintendent Shifan said that they have been receiving non-stop complaints regarding the unrest being created at every night as of late. He said that a number of dangerous things are happening at the rallies recently including the use of masks to hide faces when engaging illegal activity. Police said that massive damages are being caused to property and requested support in the police efforts to stop such actions.

MYANMAR

[HIV/AIDS Flagship project launched](#)

Mizzima | 26th February

The launch ceremony of the HIV/AIDS Flagship (UHF) project, with a fund of US\$10 million and backed by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), was held at Sedona Hotel, Yangon, yesterday, state media reported. The two-year project (2018-2019) is being executed in places with the highest rates of HIV infection: Kachin and Shan states, and the Sagaing, Yangon and Mandalay regions. The project aims to scale up HIV prevention, testing and treatment services by utilising non-governmental organisations and private sector health providers for people living with HIV and key populations, people who inject drugs (PWID),

women sex workers, men, women & LGBTQs who are afflicted and transgender people, the report said.

NEPAL

[Much ado about ministers for Oli govt](#)

MyRepublica | 26th February

Sharma Oli led government is planning to expand its cabinet of ministers today. Oli was appointed as the 38th Prime Minister of Nepal on February 15. However, with almost two weeks gone, the government hasn't been able to expand its ministries after Maoist Center became reluctant to join the government unless an agreement for party unification was reached. Last week, the UML and the MC signed a seven point guideline that has opened doors for the latter to join the government.

[Acceptable final report to boost Nepal-India ties](#)

The Kathmandu Post | 26th February

Members of Eminent Persons Group on Nepal-India Relations have agreed to come up with a report acceptable to both the countries. The group is in the final stage for preparing a single report from their respective draft reports. Ahead of wrapping up the seventh meeting on Sunday in Kathmandu, Nepal co-ordinator Bhekh Bahadur Thapa and India co-ordinator Bhagat Singh Koshiyari expressed the view, at a press conference, that the group was working to table a report that would take bilateral ties between the two countries to a new high.

PAKISTAN

[Pakistan may find itself on FATF blacklist after June](#)

Dawn | 26th February

Pakistan may find itself on the blacklist of a global financial watchdog if it does not prepare a comprehensive action plan to eradicate terrorist financing by June, official sources told Dawn. The 37-nation Financial Action Task Force (FATF) held its plenary meeting in Paris last week where it placed Pakistan on a watchlist of the countries where terrorist outfits are still allowed to raise funds. On Friday, the group issued an updated grey list, along with a statement announcing the decisions taken at the plenary session, and Pakistan was not on the list. Officials in Islamabad interpreted this as a "breather", although it's more of a technical detail.

[Pak-Afghan track II dialogue begins today](#)

Daily Times | 26th February

Pakistan and Afghanistan will begin a track-II dialogue in Islamabad on Monday to explore ways for improvement in relations between the two neighboring countries. A 12-member Afghan delegation arrived in Islamabad on Sunday to take part in the dialogue, 'Pakistan-Afghanistan Track 1.5/ II initiative, titled 'Beyond Boundaries,' Islamabad-based the Center for Research and Security Studies (CRSS) said in a statement. The CRSS and Safeworld, a UK-based independent international organisation, have jointly arranged the three-day dialogue, which will take place amid signs of improvement in relations as both governments have now launched bilateral dialogue on key areas.

[World Bank 'moderately' satisfied with progress on \\$73m water project](#)

The Express Tribune | 25th February

A \$73-million foreign-funded project that Pakistan had undertaken to ensure food security through better planning of water resources is facing execution problems due to lax management by the government. In its latest report on Water Sector Capacity Building and Advisory Services Project, known as WCAP, the World Bank has again termed the progress towards achievement of the project goals as "moderately satisfactory". It is not for the first time that the World Bank has given a poor rating to the project. Since 2008, when Pakistan had signed the first loan of \$38 million, the World Bank has conducted 17 reviews of the project. The scheme earned seven poor ratings on account of achievement of goals.

SRI LANKA

[Sri Lanka President reshuffles cabinet, PM sworn in as Law and Order Minister](#)

Colombo Page| 25th February

Sri Lanka's Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has been sworn in as the new Cabinet Minister of Law and Order, after the second cabinet reshuffle of the unity government of United National Party (UNP) and United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA). Sri Lanka President Maithripala Sirisena carried out a Cabinet reshuffle at the Presidential Secretariat on Sunday (25) changing ministerial portfolios of number of United National Party (UNP) ministers.

[Myanmar donates 300 tons of rice to Sri Lanka flood victims](#)

Colombo Page| 26th February

The government of Myanmar and the Myanmar Rice Federation (MRF) have donated 300 tonnes of rice to Sri Lanka's flood victims. A ceremony to donate the rice stock was held on Saturday, 24 February at Pinlekoethwe rice mill in Dagon Seikkan Industrial Zone with the participation of the Union Minister for the Commerce Ministry Dr Than Myint and other officials, along with Sri Lanka's Ambassador to Myanmar K.W.N.D Karunaratne, and officials from the MRF, the official Global New Light of Myanmar reported.

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.

To know more, Please log on to www.anantaaspencentre.in