



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

July 7th, 2017 | Volume: 3 - 3/7

[Delhi steps up efforts to improve road links to Dhaka, Kathmandu](#)

Prothom Alo | 7th July
With an eye on China, India is working on a slew of road and bridge projects to improve connectivity with Bangladesh, Nepal and Myanmar, reports livemint.com. The strategic projects being constructed by the state-run National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corp. Ltd (NHIDCL) include a bridge on the Feni river in Tripura, which will connect Agaratala with Bangladesh's Chittagong port and a bridge over river Mechi which will link Bhadrapur in Nepal with Galgalia in Bihar, adds the Indian daily.

[Sri Lanka sees opportunities in China's Belt, Road initiative](#)

Colombo Gazette | 6th July
Sri Lanka sees opportunities in China's Belt and Road initiative, China.org reported quoting a Sri Lankan official as saying. Sirimali Fernando, chairman of the National Science Foundation of Sri Lanka regarded the framework as an excellent opportunity for Sri Lanka, a country with relatively weak foundation of scientific research and limited international partners in this field to escalate its capacity of scientific research overall. An International Symposium on Funding Science and People Cooperation for a Prosperous Belt and Road was held in China.

[Russia's Gazprom and OGDC of Pakistan sign joint venture deal](#)

Express Tribune | 7th July
In a major development, Russia and Pakistan's energy giants entered into a joint venture deal that is expected to attract \$3-4 billion in the South Asian country. Russia's Gazprom International and Pakistan's Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL) signed the Memorandum of Understanding in Moscow aimed at mutual cooperation, joint ventures and use of state-of-the-art technology that would aid exploration and development. Russia has already expressed its interest to invest \$8 billion in Pakistan and a major part of it will go in the country's ailing energy sector.

AFGHANISTAN

[Khalilzad doubts Pakistan will act against Haqqani network and Taliban](#)

Khaama Press | 6th July
The former US ambassador to Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad doubts the Pakistani military will act against the Haqqani terrorist network and Taliban leadership. Khalilzad made the remarks in reaction to the agreement on

joint efforts to fight against the terrorist groups along and on both sides of the Durand Line. “AF/Pak coordinated counter/terror operations? Will see if Paks move against Haqqanis and Talibs,” Khalilzad said in a Twitter post.

[59 Taliban killed in Kunduz](#)

Afghanistan Times | 5th July

At least 58 Taliban insurgents have been killed, and 33 others wounding during air and ground operations in Northern Kunduz province in the past 24 hours, security official said. In a press statement, the Ministry of Defense said “Afghan commandos have conducted air and ground operations against insurgents in Talawka and Angorbagh areas of Kunduz province, in which 58 armed insurgents were killed and 33 others received injuries.” Taliban commanders for Kunduz, Dasht-e-Archi district, Qari Obaid and Qari Hasan, the Taliban shadow district chief for Ashkamish district of Takhar were among militants killed in the operation, the statement added.

[Clear sign of interference: Parliamentarians slam Iranian President over dam remarks](#)

Afghanistan Times | 5th July

Member of the Wolesi Jirga or Lower House of the Parliament on Wednesday strongly condemned Iranian President’s remarks regarding Afghanistan’s water and construction of dams, terming it a clear sign of interference in internal affairs of Afghanistan. They called on the government to summon Iranian ambassador in Kabul for clarification. Recently, Iran’s president, Hassan Rouhani expressed his concern regarding Afghanistan’s dam projects. Addressing an international conference on combating sand and dust storms in Tehran, the capital city of Iran, Rouhani said that dam construction in Afghanistan play a role in the desiccation of rivers and that people will be forced to leave their homes.

[Afghanistan Accepts Pakistan’s Offer of ‘Coordinated’ Anti-Terror Operations](#)

Outlook Afghanistan / Agencies | 6th July

Pakistan and Afghanistan have agreed to conduct “coordinated, complementary” security operations against terrorist groups on their respective sides of the shared border, officials confirmed Wednesday. A high-powered U.S. bipartisan congressional delegation led by Senator John McCain mediated the deal during its visit this week to Islamabad and Kabul. “The [U.S.] Senators said that the head of Pakistan’s armed forces, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, agreed to joint operations against terrorist groups in the Durand Line region,” said an Afghan statement after Tuesday’s talks between President Ashraf Ghani and the U.S. delegation.

BANGLADESH

[Home minister rejects HRW report on disappearances](#)

Prothom Alo | 6th July

Home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal on Thursday rejected the Human Rights Watch’s report on secret detentions and enforced disappearances in Bangladesh calling it a “smear campaign” against the country. “This organisation had launched a smear campaign against us even during the trial of crimes against humanity. The latest report is a part of their campaign, as well,” said the minister while talking to Prothom Alo. In a latest report published on Wednesday, HRW said, “Bangladesh law enforcement authorities have illegally detained hundreds of people since 2013, including scores of opposition activists, and held them in secret detention.”

[Implement budget, development projects speedily, PM urges govt officials](#)

The Financial Express | 6th July

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has urged the civil servants to go for implementing the budget and development projects without any delay to yield better outcomes and move the country forward speedily. She also directed them to take steps to fulfill the basic needs of the citizens, ensure social security and construction of necessary infrastructures, and generate employments.

[Ola eyes Bangladesh Market](#)

The Financial Express | 6th July

Indian ride-hailing company Ola, a rival of Uber, has taken a plan to enter into Bangladesh market. Ola, operates in over 100 cities in the country, is eyeing international expansion, multiple sources familiar with the matter have told Gadgets 360. The company, which leads rival Uber in India's ride-hailing market, has been looking at international markets for a while.

[Rampal Project: Unesco 'lifts objection'](#)

The Daily Star | 7th July

The World Heritage Committee of Unesco has withdrawn its objection to the setting up of Rampal power plant at its current site near the Sundarbans, claims the Bangladesh foreign ministry. The committee, however, requested Bangladesh to carry out Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of its south-west region, including the Sundarbans, before starting the project. Dhaka has agreed to it. The decisions were made yesterday at the 41st session of the committee in Krakow of Poland. The 10-day session ends on July 12.

BHUTAN

[Import prices to drop post-GST provided traders pass the benefit to consumers](#)

Kuensel Online | 6th July

As the goods and services tax (GST) subsumes the excise duty and exempts exports going out of India, price of consumables and raw materials imported from India would fall by at least 10 percent. This means Indian goods would be cheaper in Bhutan than in India. For instance, the price of vehicles not exceeding 1,500 cc engine capacity is expected to fall by 14 percent and engine capacity of 1,500 cc and above by 25 percent.

[Report finds investment in ECCD cost effective](#)

Kuensel Online | 6th July

A study report on Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) has pointed out the need to provide safe and appropriate infrastructure and environment for ECCD centres, explore innovative models to reach out to scattered rural communities and to provide stable and secure position for facilitators. ECCD's programme officer, Karma Gayleg, said there was also a need to provide opportunities for professional development for facilitators like ECCD Diploma and to make ECCD programmes more inclusive to enable access to children with disabilities.

MALDIVES

[Abdulla Nazim: Opposition cannot digest development brought by President Yameen](#)

Sun Online | 5th July

Health Minister, Abdulla Nazim Ibrahim has said that it is the development brought to the country since President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom took office that the opposition is having trouble digesting the. In a tweet sent out today, Minister Nazim said that the opposition is trying to obstruct the development that is being brought to the country. Minister Nazim has made the remark at a time where the opposition has filed a no-confidence motion against the Speaker of the Parliament, Abdulla Maseeh Mohamed with the signatures of 45 MPs.

[MATATO calls to reduce bank fees for mid-level businesses](#)

Sun Online | 6th July

Maldives Association for Travel Agents and Tour Operators (MATATO) has called to the banks to reduce the fee charged for small and mid-level businesses. The association made the statement today at the Maldives Financial Expo 2017. MATATO said that the small and mid-level businesses in the Maldives are charged an interest of 9-11 percent from the banks and it is an obstruction to maintain and develop such businesses.

MYANMAR

[Norway returns Buddha statue to protect Myanmar's national cultural heritage](#)

Mizzima | 6th July

Under the auspices of UNESCO, representatives of The Republic of the Union of Myanmar and The Kingdom of Norway finalized the repatriation of an illegally-purchased Buddha Statue to its place of origin, according to a statement. The return of the statue took place during an official handover ceremony in the presence of H.E. Mr Børge Brende, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Norway, and H.E. Thura U Ko Aung, Minister of Religious Affairs and Culture, at the National Museum in Nay Pyi Taw on 6 July 2017 at 16.45.

[Bangladesh for resolving Rohingya issue bilaterally](#)

Mizzima | 6th July

Dhaka has urged the authorities in Yangon to take back Rohingyas from Bangladesh, with a hope that the two countries would be able to resolve the problem through bilateral talks. Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina made the call when National Security Advisor of Myanmar U Thaung Tun called on her in the capital Dhaka on Tuesday.

[India will fully cooperate with Myanmar for security and combating terrorism](#)

Mizzima | 6th July

Country Consultancy Office Minister U Kyaw Tint Swe said that Myanmar will fully cooperate with India for security and combating terrorism on July 4 at the Delhi Dialogue held in Delhi, India. Myanmar will work closely with India for anti-terrorist cooperation and peace in the region, the minister said. In addition, he also there will be an increase in bilateral trade between Myanmar and India.

[EU provides € 1.5 million in assistance to victims of Tropical Cyclone Mora](#)

Mizzima | 7th July

The European Union is providing € 1.5 million (more than 2.3 billion MMK) in humanitarian aid funding for emergency relief assistance to populations affected by Tropical Cyclone Mora, which ripped through parts of Bangladesh and Myanmar in late May. The aid will be targeted at the most vulnerable people in storm-struck localities of the two neighbouring countries.

NEPAL

[Press freedom necessary for Democracy to survive: PM](#)

Rastriya Samachar Samiti / The Himalayan Times | 6th July

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba has said that democracy without press freedom cannot be imagined. Releasing a book entitled 'Press Freedom in Nepal' by Federation of Nepalese Journalist President Mahendra Bista here on Thursday, the Prime Minister said that press freedom would be pushed to a risk if democracy did not prevail.

[Progress on bilateral projects reviewed](#)

Himalayan News Service /The Himalayan Times | 7th July

The fourth meeting of Nepal-India Oversight Mechanism was held in Kathmandu today. During the meeting, a comprehensive review was made of the progress in the implementation of bilateral economic and development cooperation projects since the third meeting of the mechanism held on 12 April 2017, according to a press release issued by Nepal's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

[Both govt and private sector clueless on impact of India's GST](#)

My Republica | 7th July

Both the private sector and the government of Nepal are clueless about the impact the Goods and Services Tax (GST) that India introduced Saturday will have on Nepal. There is speculation that the price of goods and services may go up in Nepal too due to GST, which came as India's biggest tax reform initiative. GST may be compared to the Value Added Tax (VAT) system in Nepal and is passed on to the consumer.

[Nepal in a fix as Gulf rivals seek support](#)

The Kathmandu Post | 7th July

The diplomatic pressure from the divided Persian Gulf has put Nepal in a fix as large numbers of Nepali migrants are working in Saudi and the United Arab Emirates, which have formed an alliance with Bahrain and Egypt against Qatar. Nepal has been urging both the sides to find a peaceful way of ending the crisis in order to avert any kind of difficulty for millions of Nepalis employed in the Arab world.

PAKISTAN

[US prefers stable civilian government in Pakistan: McCain](#)

Express Tribune | 7th July

US Senator John McCain informed Pakistan's key stakeholders that the Trump administration preferred a stable civilian dispensation in the country. The development came during a recent visit of a group of American senators led by Senate Armed Services Committee chairman McCain. Sources close to the ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government said the US delegation that engaged with the top civil and military leadership of the country made their assessment of the current political situation in the country besides communication on the critical question of terrorism and Pakistan's Afghan policy.

[Coordination needed with India, Afghanistan to mitigate flood threat](#)

Dawn | 6th July

All the relevant authorities looking at ways to mitigate and counter flood threats have stressed the need for

improved coordination with India and Afghanistan regarding details of heavy water flow from these countries. At the Inter-Agencies Meeting for Floods Mitigation on Wednesday, officials were informed that river coordinates were not received well in time from India, resulting in loss of life and property in Pakistan. The meeting was chaired by National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) Chairman Lt Gen Omar Mehmood Hayat who stressed the need for enhanced coordination between relevant agencies in the country.

SRILANKA

[Sri Lanka, Romania to expand bilateral cooperation in a wide range of areas](#)

Colombo Page| 6th July

Sri Lanka and Romania have agreed to expand bilateral cooperation in a wide range of sectors including, power and energy, rural development, agriculture, health, finance and banking, tourism, education and labor. Sri Lanka's State Minister of Foreign Affairs Vasantha Senanayake visited Romania from 29 June - 2 July 2017 for the second session of the bilateral political consultations. He reaffirmed Sri Lanka's commitment to further advance and consolidate its longstanding bilateral ties with Romania, when he met the Romanian Secretary of State for Bilateral Global Affairs Monica Gheorghita on 29 June 2017. This was the first official visit undertaken by the State Minister for Foreign Affairs since assuming the new portfolio.

[Sri Lanka President assures Buddhist leaders to keep them apprised of constitutional reforms](#)

Colombo Page| 7th July

Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena on 6th July assured the Buddhist leaders that he will keep them apprised of the process of drafting a new constitution. President Sirisena met with the Maha Sangha led by the chief prelates (Maha Nayaka Theros) of the three main chapters at the President's House in Kandy. During the meeting the Buddhist leaders have presented their ideas and proposals on the political, social, economic and religious matters, to the President. They presented a list of proposals related to these matters, the President said in a social media post. "I assured the Maha Sangha that they will be informed if an initial draft on new constitution is formulated. It's a transparent process."

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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