

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

February 8th, 2017 | Volume: 3 - 4/2

[Myanmar rejects UN criticism of Rohingya abuse investigation](#)

Mizzima | 8th February

A Myanmar state commission probing allegations the military has killed, tortured and raped Rohingya Muslims rejected accusations it is not credible, saying Tuesday it was focused on the "truth" and not pleasing the UN. Last week the United Nations' human rights office said Myanmar's military had likely killed hundreds of Rohingya during a continuing crackdown in a "calculated policy of terror" against the Muslim minority.

[Public massacre: 20 killed, dozens wounded in Kabul Supreme Court suicide attack](#)

Afghanistan Times | 7th February

At least 20 people were killed and 41 wounded after a suicide bomber blew himself up inside the Supreme Court's car park on Tuesday, officials said. The target was employees of the Supreme Court, and the number of casualties is feared to rise. "20 people including three women and one child were killed in the today's suicide attack," Wahidullah Mayar, senior public relations advisor to the ministry of public health said. "41 people were also wounded."

[LHC dismisses plea for Hafiz Saeed's release](#)

Dawn | 8th February

The Lahore High Court on Tuesday dismissed a habeas corpus petition filed by a lawyer challenging detention of Jamatud Dawa chief Hafiz Saeed. Justice Erum Sajjad Gull heard the petition of Advocate Sarfraz Hussain as objection case and upheld an objection put by the registrar office on its maintainability. The office had stated that the petitioner had not furnished the impugned notification of Saeed's detention.

AFGHANISTAN

[Trump way only to combat terrorism: Afghan Ambassador to India](#)

Khaama Press | 7th February

The Afghan Ambassador to India Dr. Shaida Mohammad Abdali has endorsed the US President Donald Trump's statement to eradicate radical forces, saying "this is the only way to combat terrorism." Ambassador Abdali made the remarks during an event on 'Afghanistan at the Crossroads: Implications for Regional Security' at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) in New Delhi. He welcomed President Trump's recent statement on his country's resolve to eradicate radical forces and said this is the only way to combat terrorism. Ambassador Abdali further added that he is hopeful that the US government adopts this policy while engaging with the countries in the region.

[Death Toll from Nuristan Avalanches, Cold Snap Soars to 73](#)

Outlook Afghanistan/ Pajhwok | 7th February

As many as 73 people have been killed and 27 others wounded by avalanches and freezing weather in eastern Nuristan province, the governor said on Tuesday. Hafiz Abdul Qayum told Pajhwok Afghan News a relief team had reached Barg-i-Matal district on Monday -- a day after an avalanche buried an entire village in the town. As of Monday afternoon, 63 bodies and 27 injured people were retrieved from the snow. There were 70 homes in the village, where 500 people lived. He said 400 people were still buried under the snow.

[Start talks with Taliban, be tough on Pakistan, Trump urged](#)

Afghanistan Times/PAN | 7th February

Urging the Trump Administration to remain open to restart talks with the Taliban, a group of eminent South Asian experts from top US think tanks Monday urged the White House to take tough measures against Pakistan and send a strong signal to Islamabad that it will not be business as usual. "Washington should remain open to attempts to restart Taliban talks with the Afghan government, but should not plan its strategy around this long-shot scenario. It is likely the Taliban will try to convince the international community that they are willing to negotiate, in order to influence decision-making on troop levels in Afghanistan by the new Trump administration," said the report prepared by experts from top American think tanks.

[Fragile economic situation; ACCI asks govt to support domestic products](#)

Afghanistan Times | 7th February

The Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industries (ACCI) on Tuesday expressed its deep concern over challenges in private sectors and cold shoulder toward domestic products. The ACCI asked government to adopt incentive policy in order to boost up domestic products and pave ground for the growth of private sectors across the country. "Despite positive steps, still domestic products and private sectors facing different challenges, thus it is the need of the hour that the government to take encouragement policies to support home products," said Deputy of ACCI, Khanjan Alkozai.

BANGLADESH

[Banking sector registers highest gain](#)

The Financial Express | 7th February

The Dhaka bourse rallied for the two consecutive sessions on Tuesday with increased turnover value as some enthusiastic investors remained active on bank issues. The day's session began with a bearish tone and the key index of the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) fell 30 points within the first 30 minutes. DSEX quickly recovered the initial loss and reached the day's high 5,398.5 points in next thirty minutes, advancing 35 points.

[Bangladesh gets first female election commissioner](#)

Dhaka Tribune | 8th February

Bangladesh got its first female election commissioner with Kabita Khanom, a historical moment in the Election Commission's (EC) 45 years. All of the 11 chief election commissioners and 23 election commissioners who have served in the EC since 1972 have been male. Kabita, a retired district and session judge, was picked by President Abdul Hamid on Monday for the post. The ruling Awami League had recommended her name. A native of Naogaon, she served as a judge for 31 years.

BHUTAN

[Wood-based entrepreneurs in Merak in want of timber](#)

Kuensel Online | 7th February

Almost three months after Nima from Merak in Trashigang opened a furniture house in the locality, it is non-operational. His band saw and panelling machines lie idle in his furniture house. Nima had to run to many offices to get a permit to fell one standing tree in his village. He needed the timber for his newly-opened woodcraft and furniture house. But the tree was barely enough to make a (altar).

MALDIVES

[Amendment pushed to allow embezzlers, bribe-takers to compete for councils](#)

Sun Online | 7th February

Progressive Party of Maldives lawmaker, MP Ali Mohamed has submitted an amendment to Local Council Election Act which will overturn the ban on anyone found guilty of a crime punishable through Islamic Sharia, treason, bribery, distribution or use of illegal substances, child abuse or rape from competing for a council seat. MP Ali Mohamed has proposed to amend the eligibility criteria for local council elections to allow anyone sentenced to less than 12 months for a criminal offense to compete in the election.

[PPM lawmakers express concern over councilor eligibility bill](#)

Sun Online | 7th February

Bill proposed by Progressive Party of Maldives lawmaker, Holhudhoo MP Ali Mohamed to amend eligibility criteria to complete in local council elections has been criticized by lawmakers from both the opposition and the ruling party. It is rare to see PPM lawmakers criticize a bill submitted by one of their own, but the bill submitted by MP Ali Mohamed drew widespread criticism.

MYANMAR

[Myanmar, Thailand push 'one destination'](#)

Mizzima | 7th February

Thailand and Myanmar have vowed to stimulate tourism and raise the number of visitors between the neighbouring nations to 1.5 million by 2020 as part of the "two countries, one destination" cooperative scheme. The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) signed a memorandum of understanding last Friday with the Myanmar Tourism Federation to promote tourism between the countries.

[HR Commission says human rights violations not found in Sittway prison](#)

Mizzima | 8th February

Myanmar Human Rights Commission member Yu Lwin Aung said that they did not find any human rights violations inside Sittway prison. "The situation there is normal. We had found some human rights violations in other prisons in the past. In comparison with past experiences in these prisons, there are no human rights violations here," he said.

[2nd meeting of Myanmar's peace conference scheduled for Feb. 28](#)

Mizzima | 8th February

The second meeting of Myanmar's 21st century Panglong Peace Conference will be held in Nay Pyi Taw on Feb. 28 with participation of about 700 representatives, the official Global New Light of Myanmar reported Tuesday. "We agreed to carry out the process with union spirit and to encourage groups that have not yet signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Accord (NCA) in the conference," U Zaw Htay, acting director-general of the Ministry of the State Counselor's Office, told the Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC) in the capital on Monday.

NEPAL

[PM roots for EVMs, others sceptical](#)

My Republica | 8th February

While some lawmakers are cautious about the use of electronic voting machines (EVM), Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal is strongly advocating their use in upcoming polls. Speaking at a function organized at the Election Commission (EC) to demonstrate the use of EVMs from the UK-based firm Smartmatic, Dahal said technology is a must for the conduct of elections in a free, fair and credible manner and for minimizing election expenditures. "When I reach different parts of the country including the remotest, people take photos with their cell phones. One should not think that Nepalis are unaware of technology," said Dahal, adding, "So, they can easily use electronic voting machines also."

[BIMSTEC Senior Officials Meet concludes](#)

My Republica | 8th February

The 17th Session of BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM) has concluded in Kathmandu on Tuesday, with an understanding to host the summit meeting by the end of 2017. The SOM meeting represented by senior foreign ministry officials from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand gave concurrence to Nepal's proposal to host the fourth BIMSTEC Summit in October/November in Kathmandu. As the current chair of BIMSTEC, Nepal is hosting the fourth BIMSTEC Summit.

[Uncertainty clouds Nepal-India meet on air routes](#)

The Kathmandu Post | 8th February

Great deal of uncertainty remains over the proposed Nepal-India joint technical committee meeting on air routes which was scheduled for the first week of February, amid controversy over India's proposal to allow overnight stay for in-flight security officer, popularly known as "air marshal".

PAKISTAN

[Six-nation talks: Pakistan, India to come face to face in Moscow](#)

Express Tribune | 8th February

Russia, joined by China, is set to host six-nation talks this month on Afghanistan in an unprecedented development where arch-rival Pakistan and India are also invited to discuss options for seeking a peaceful end to the lingering unrest in the war-torn country. The talks involving host Russia, China, Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan and India are scheduled to be held in Moscow in mid-February, according to the Russian media following talks between Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and his Afghan counterpart Salahuddin Rabbani on Tuesday. The United States, a major stakeholder, however, has not been invited to the meeting in what appears to be significant move suggesting that both Russia and China are now seeking a regional solution to the Afghan problem.

[Powerful earthquake jolts Balochistan coast](#)

Express Tribune | 8th February

A powerful 6.3-magnitude earthquake hit off the coast of Balochistan. According to US Geological Survey, the 6.3-magnitude earthquake hit 23 kilometers southwest of the city of Pasni at a depth of 10 kilometers. The cities of Turbat and Gwadar are also within 90 kilometers from the epicenter of the quake. No casualties or damage to property was reported.

[China opposes US move to blacklist JEM chief](#)

Express Tribune | 8th February

China opposed a proposal by the US in the United Nations to ban Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM) chief Masood Azhar, Times of India reported on Tuesday. The US, supported by the UK and France, moved a proposal to designate Masood Azhar as a global terrorist at the Sanctions Committee of the UN Security Council. The proposal, which was finalised after consultations between Washington and New Delhi was opposed by Beijing.

[No plan for travel ban on Pakistanis: US](#)

Dawn | 8th February

The Trump administration has no plan to ban Pakistani citizens from travelling to the United States because Pakistan is providing the data they need to vet a visitor, US officials say. In recent briefings to various media outlets, White House officials also said the administration had no plan to add other countries to the list of seven Muslim countries whose citizens were barred from travelling or migrating to the US. White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer explained that Afghanistan, Pakistan and Lebanon were among the countries which were providing the information needed to scrutinise travellers. But he warned that if this cooperation changed, these or other countries could also be added to the list. The US Department of Homeland Security (DHS), however, was more categorical in assuring the 40 non-designated Muslim countries that Mr Spicer mentioned in his statement.

[Four IS militants handed over to Afghan govt](#)

Dawn | 8th February

Pakistan handed over four suspected members of the militant Islamic State (IS) group's Afghanistan chapter to Kabul as 'a gesture of goodwill' on Tuesday. The four were paraded before journalists at the Michni checkpoint before being handed over to Afghan officials at the Torkham border crossing.

SRI LANKA

[U.S. lauds unprecedented level of cooperation with Sri Lanka](#)

Colombo Page | 7th February

The United States praised the unprecedented level of cooperation with Sri Lanka today due to the democratic progress Sri Lanka has made and its renewed commitment to reconciliation, accountable government, and freedom of expression. Acting Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Ambassador Bruce Wharton said while the level of cooperation today is unprecedented, there is always more progress to be made and the United States will continue to stand with Sri Lanka as a friend and partner.

[China to work with Sri Lanka to consolidate political trust, expand cooperation](#)

Colombo Page | 7th February

Chinese President Xi Jinping on Tuesday told his Sri Lankan counterpart Maithripala Sirisena that he was "willing

to work to consolidate political trust, expand mutually beneficial cooperation and deepen people-to-people friendship". The two leaders on Tuesday exchanged congratulatory messages to mark the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between the two nations, Xinhua news agency reported.

[Sri Lanka Foreign Minister to visit Saudi Arabia](#)

Colombo Page| 8th February

Sri Lankan Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Azmi Thassim on Saturday said he was making extensive arrangements for the forthcoming visit of Foreign Affairs Minister Mangala Samaraweera to the Kingdom. "It's going to be a remarkable visit, since the foreign minister's talks will focus on how best the two countries can cooperate with each other in working toward achieving the goals of Saudi Vision 2030 and the National Transformation Program (NTP) 2020," Arab News quoted the ambassador as saying.

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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