

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

January 8th, 2018 | Volume: 4 - 2/01

[73pc Afghans to Have Access to Hygienic Water in 2 Years](#)

Daily Outlook Afghanistan | 8th January

As many as 1.8 million people would find access to clean drinking and sanitation in the countryside under a two-year plan signed here on Sunday. The plan documents were signed between the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Minister of Rural Rehabilitation and Development Mujiburrahman Karimi, speaking at the signing ceremony, said the 2018 and 2019 plan would benefit additional 1.5 million people in emergency situations.

[Bangladesh 3rd tourist sending country to Kashmir](#)

BSS/ The Daily Star | 8th January
Bangladesh became the third tourist sending country to Indian Jammu and Kashmir, popularly known as "Paradise on Earth" last year after Malaysia and Thailand. "We started our promotional campaign in Bangladesh last year and it is amazing that we received third largest number of foreign tourists from here in 2017 after Malaysia and Thailand," visiting Chairman of Association of Tour Operators of Kashmir (AKTO) Nazir Mir told BSS yesterday.

[Iran urges cooperation with Pakistan to counter US](#)

The Express Tribune | 8th January
Iran on Sunday urged Muslim nations to forge closer cooperation to counter the US policy of seeking to create division among them. "The US' dishonest, duplicitous and divisive policy towards Muslim countries, including Iran and Pakistan, requires that they bolster cooperation against the US in addition to maintaining vigilance and taking preventive measures," Ali Shamkhani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, was quoted as saying by Iran's state-owned Press TV.

AFGHANISTAN

[Afghanistan Civil Aviation to get new radar system worth €24 million](#)

Khaama Press | 6th August

The Afghanistan Civil Aviation Authority informed regarding the installation of a new radar system in a bid to increase the air control capacity of the civil aviation. The General Director of the Civil Aviation Authority Mahmood Shah Habibi informed regarding the new plans during a press conference in Kabul today. He said the new system will be installed with a total cost of 24 million Euros, calling it one of the most modern systems being used in the world.

[Senate urges immediate distribution of e-ID cards](#)

Afghanistan Times | 7th January

The Senate called for the immediate launch of the distribution of the electronic-ID cards (e-ID), as tensions over the process is still looming in the parliament. The senators said Sunday that no problem remained to delay the process. "We ask the government to start the distribution of the electronic ID cards as soon as possible," said Fazl Hadi Moslemyar, head of the senate. He added that distributing of the electronic ID cards would help the transparency of the elections. Senators said that the problems over registering nationality and ethnicity had been solved. The process was to begin last week.

BANGLADESH

[Ensuring quality credit gets top priority in next MPS](#)

The Financial Express | 8th January

Ensuring the quality of credit to achieve maximum economic growth by the end of this fiscal gets top priority as the central bank prepared to formulate country's next monetary policy. Officials said the priority was suggested at an internal preparatory meeting on the monetary policy statement (MPS) at the Bangladesh Bank headquarters Sunday with BB Governor Fazle Kabir in the chair. All general managers (GMs) and officials above that station of the BB were eligible to attend the initial MPS-preparatory meeting, according to them, which got on the table the entire gamut of problems and plans on the monetary-financial and economic front.

[Communal violence came down a little in 2017](#)

Dhaka Tribune | 8th January

There were at least 1,004 attacks on the minorities in 2017. Violence targeting the religious and ethnic minorities dropped a little last year compared to the year before. Bangladesh Hindu-Buddha-Christian Oikya Parishad came up with the observation in a report prepared after analyzing news reports. There were at least 1,004 attacks on the minorities in 2017 compared to at least 1,471 the year before, the organization's General Secretary Rana Dasgupta said quoting the report. At Tuesday's press briefing in Dhaka, he said that last year 82 people were killed while bodies of 22 victims, who had died under unclear circumstances, were recovered.

BHUTAN

[GST shatters the Dungsam dream](#)

KUENSEL | 6th January

Dungsam Cement Corporation Limited (DCCL), which was called the country's cash cow when it was first established, is down before it could stand on its own feet. DCCL, A Druk Holding and Investments (DHI) owned company, started with losses in billions. At a time the company was about to come out of the red, the India's goods and services tax (GST) has killed all its dreams. The real impact was brought by the 15.125 percent tax implication, which has actually created a level playing field between local cement industries like DCCL and Indian cement manufacturers. In the earlier regime, Bhutanese manufacturers exporting to India are levied with 14.5 percent value added tax (VAT). However, for Indian manufacturers, an excise duty of 12.5 percent was levied (which was exempted for Bhutanese manufacturers) in addition to the VAT. So, Bhutanese cement enjoyed an advantage of 15 percent, including landing charges and insurance.

[Govt. to introduce non-subsidised LPG](#)

KUENSEL | 6th January

The government will launch non-subsidised liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) to meet the growing demand in the country. Currently, each household can avail just one LPG refill a month. Once non-subsidised LPG is launched, consumers requiring more than one refill a month can avail non-subsidised LPG cylinders in addition to the subsidised one. The cost of a non-subsidised empty cylinder as per the prevailing market price is Nu 1,650, inclusive of 10 percent Bhutan Sales Tax and the cost for refill services Nu 815. The difference between the refill cost for subsidised and non-subsidised is Nu 278 in Thimphu. Rural communities have emerged as a new market for LPG, but there has been no increase in the supply from India. Last year, the government launched a scheme to provide LPG cylinders to rural households. Speaking to media editors yesterday, Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay urged consumers to go for non-subsidised LPG. "Affluent households and individuals would be encouraged to use non-subsidised LPG so that subsidised LPG can be made available in the rural areas," the prime minister said.

MALDIVES

[President: Japan is an important partner](#)

Sun Online | 7th January 2018

President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom has said that Japan is an important partner in socioeconomic development of the Maldives. The President Yameen made the remarks during the Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono's call on the President yesterday evening at the Presidential residence, Mulee'aage. During the call, the President welcomed the Minister to the Maldives and extended warm greetings and good wishes to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. The President emphasized with appreciation that Japan has been a pioneering development partner of the Maldives, and that the Official Development Assistance (ODA) Programme administered by Japan. In particular, the President highlighted the short-term training opportunities and the exchange programmes for

human resource development offered by Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the ISDBT project for disaster prevention and E-learning. In regard to the ISDBT project, the Minister noted that the system will bring new opportunities to the Maldives for progress in today's globalized world.

[Vice President of Mundoo Council arrested](#)

Sun Online | 8th January

The Vice President of the Laamu Mundoo Island Council, Adam Nasif, along with another person, has been arrested for assaulting a woman. The two people were arrested with a court order. A member of the Mundoo Island Council told Sun Media last night that the incident took place last night and the Vice President of the Council is suspected in the crime. Police Media Official said that two men were arrested in Mundoo last night regarding an assault. No further details were offered.

MYANMAR

[Bilateral trade between Myanmar and South Korea at over US\\$458 million](#)

Mizzima | 8th January

Bilateral trade between Myanmar and the Republic of Korea was valued at over US\$458 million this financial year, according to the monthly statistical report of the Ministry of Commerce, state media reported on 8 January. Over the first seven months of this fiscal year (FY), Myanmar's exports to the East Asian country reached \$175 million, while its imports topped \$283 million. Bilateral trade, just in October, was over \$56 million, including over \$154 million in exports and \$247 million in imports. Myanmar imports cosmetics, food products, electronic equipment, mobile devices and other goods from South Korea, and exports agricultural products, including cashew nuts, mangoes, rice, beans and pulses. The trade between the two countries last fiscal year was valued at \$866 million.

[China donates prefabricated houses to displaced people in Myanmar's Rakhine state](#)

Mizzima | 8th January

China on Saturday handed over about 100 prefabricated houses for displaced persons in Myanmar's western Rakhine state at the Myanmar Industrial Port, Xinhua reported. Each assembled-board house can accommodate eight people and can be used for at least 20 years. The houses can endure an 8.0-magnitude earthquake. Speaking at the handover ceremony, Chinese Ambassador Hong Liang pledged to continue China's assistance to conflict-displaced people in the region.

[Hindu refugees eagerly await return to Myanmar](#)

AFP / Mizzima | 8th January

Hindu farmer Surodhon Pal has packed his bags, eager to return to Myanmar after fleeing for Bangladesh during a wave of violence last year, but he is in a tiny minority -- most of the refugees are terrified of going home. Bangladesh wants the more than 655,000 refugees who have flooded into the country since late August to start returning to Myanmar by the end of this month under a controversial agreement between the two nations. The vast majority are Rohingya Muslims who have faced decades of persecution in Myanmar, which sees them as illegal immigrants, even though many have lived there for generations. They say they would rather stay in the squalid camps in Bangladesh than return to the scene of violence the US and the United Nations have said amounts to ethnic cleansing. But a small community of Hindus who lived alongside the Rohingya in Myanmar's Rakhine state and were caught up in the turmoil say they do want to return. "We want security and we want food. If the authorities can give us those assurances we'll happily go back".

NEPAL

[Contractors flay 'artificial hike' in cement, steel prices](#)

MyRepublica | 8th January

Civil work contractors have blamed cement and steel manufacturers for arbitrary rise in price of cement and steel rod - key construction materials. Organizing a press meet in Kathmandu on Sunday, Federation of Contractors Association of Nepal (FCAN) said that price of cement has gone up by Rs 100 per bag (50 kg), while steel rod has become dearer by Rs 7 per kg compared to prices before the provincial and federal elections.

[Ex-King in Lucknow, meets UP CM Adityanath](#)

MyRepublica | 8th January

Former King Gyanendra Shah, who is in a tour of the western region, has reached Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India.

Former King Shah met pro-Hindu BJP leader and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Monday morning at the latter official residence in Lucknow, according to twitter of CM Adityanath.

PAKISTAN

[Pakistan cautions US about consequences of anti-Taliban offensive](#)

Dawn | 8th January

Pakistan is believed to have told US interlocutors that a major military offensive against the Taliban from both sides of the Afghan border, if ending in failure, will have negative consequences for the entire region. Diplomatic sources, who spoke to Dawn, believe that the key element in the new US strategy for Afghanistan is to launch a two-pronged military offensive that inflicts a military defeat on the Taliban and forces them to join the Afghan reconciliation process on Kabul's conditions. Pakistanis do not disagree with the basic thrust of the American argument but they have one major worry: What if it fails? "We've been working with Pakistan, on the South Asia Strategy... and it's how do we work together to take out the terrorists," said US Secretary of Defence James Mattis while explaining the new strategy, which he said at this weekend news briefing was a strategy for entire South Asia.

[Pak US relations: Businesses in the hot seat](#)

Dawn | 8th January

There was anxiety in business circles over a harsher US stance towards Pakistan that evoked an angry response from the people. The government's response, however, was muted. Senior government officials did admit that the situation was abnormal and could aggravate external-front vulnerabilities by depressing exports and foreign direct investment prospects. They did not, however, see the shock assuming a crisis proportions as the direct US economic support has already waned over the past few years. According to the information available online, combined civilian and military aid since 2001 totals \$14.7 billion. Another \$14.5bn has been disbursed on account of Coalition Support Fund (CSF) between 2002 and 2015 in return for the logistic support Pakistan provided for the 'war on terror', according to an independent website Citizen Security Monitor. It comes to an average \$1.8bn annual inflow on the two counts. The disbursement graph, however, has been anything but linear. According to the USAID country report, the American aid to Pakistan touched its peak at \$2bn in 2011 after which it dipped but trickled till 2016.

SRI LANKA

[Sri Lanka PM requests public to give a clear mandate to UNP at local polls to accelerate economic development](#)

Colombo Page| 7th January

Sri Lanka's Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe today asked the public to give a clear mandate to the United National Party (UNP), the party that he leads, at the upcoming local government polls to accelerate economic development and continue the good governance in the country. Addressing the masses at the special UNP convention held in Campbell Park this morning, the Prime Minister said the United National Party is the only party that can develop the rural Sri Lanka.

[Sri Lanka's reforms need to be targeted to support the poor, World Bank says](#)

Colombo Page| 8th January

While Sri Lanka can claim a low poverty rate compared to other countries in in South Asia, significant poverty still exists in certain areas and the social safety net programs need to be better targeted to support the poor, a World Bank senior economist says. Ralph van Doorn, Senior Country Economist for Sri Lanka and the Maldives, says in a blog that a large share of the population subsists on little more than the extreme poverty line and the families who are living below the poverty line, are extremely vulnerable to the natural disasters such as last year's floods and landslides and the prolonged drought.

[Sri Lanka's Digital Economic Strategy will be ready to launch in early April](#)

Colombo Page| 7th December

In the middle of December 2017, the Ministry of Telecommunication and Digital Infrastructure with the support of McKinsey and Company embarked on the process of developing Sri Lanka's Digital Economy Strategy. The initiative will enable Sri Lanka to scientifically identify appropriate opportunities for promoting Sri Lanka's Digital Economy and the key enablers to promote the Digital Economy as well as initiate three flagship programs that would promote Sri Lanka's Digital Economy Strategy.

About Ananta Aspen Centre

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