

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

March 8th, 2017 | Volume: 3 - 4/3

[Ready for Counter-Terror Cooperation: Pakistan](#)

Outlook Afghanistan | 8th March
As the Durand Line reopened on Tuesday after 18 days of closure, Pakistan signaled its willingness to cooperate with Afghanistan on counter-terrorism measures. Pakistan's Defence Minister Khwaja Asif, speaking in the National Assembly, stoutly defended the government's decision to close the border with Afghanistan. He assailed Kabul for its failure to take action against the terrorists using Afghan soil against Pakistan. Blocking the border was Pakistan's sovereign right, he insisted. Earlier, some opposition members hit out at Prime Minister's Nawaz Sharif's government for the border blockade. They denounced the move as an unilateral act of victimising the Pakhtuns.

[India eyes big defence pact with Bangladesh during PM Hasina's April visit](#)

bdnews24 | 6th March
India and Bangladesh are discussing a 'comprehensive defence pact' which New Delhi hopes to ink during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit in April. "What India is eyeing is a comprehensive defence pact that encompasses training, the sale of military hardware and military to military cooperation," leading Indian daily, the Hindustan Times reported. "India is also willing to commit up to \$500 million as the line of credit for military cooperation with Dhaka," it added.

[Kuwait lifts visa restrictions on Pakistanis after six years'](#)

Express Tribune | 8th March
Authorities in Kuwait have decided to lift a six-year-old ban on visas for Pakistani citizens, the state-run APP news agency quoted a news channel as saying. The decision reportedly came after Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif took up the matter of visa restrictions with his Kuwaiti counterpart Sheikh Jaber al Mubarak al Hamad al Sabah on Tuesday. The premier insisted that lifting the restrictions would remove a major hurdle for the 'free movement of the business community'. He informed his Kuwaiti counterpart that Pakistan was an investment-friendly country and an attractive destination for foreign investors, due to its liberal investment policy and high rate of return.

AFGHANISTAN

[Detained militants claim Taliban and ISI assigned them to kill MP in Kabul](#)

Khaama Press | 7th March

The Afghan security forces have thwarted a plot by the anti-government armed militant groups to assassinate a lawmaker of the Lower House of the Parliament, Wolesi Jirga. The Afghan Intelligence, National Directorate of Security (NDS), said two terrorists appointed for the attack were arrested by the intelligence operatives before they manage to carry out the attack. A statement by NDS said the two terrorists have been identified as Abdul Wahid son of Syed Hussain and Salahuddin son of Syed Ali.

[Senior Taliban leaders from Qatar office visit China](#)

Khaama Press | 7th March

A delegation of senior Taliban leaders have visited China from their political office in Qatar, it has been reported. Informed Taliban sources have said the delegation is led by Sher Abbas Stanikzai have visited the country on invitation of the government of China. The delegation comprise of senior leaders including Maulvi Shahabuddin Dilawar, Jan Muhammad Madani, Salam Hanafi and Dr Saleh. The Taliban sources have said the leaders are meeting with the Chinese officials to discuss peace and findings ways to end the ongoing conflict through negotiations. The sources have further added that the visit is part of the political office's ongoing efforts to build up relations with the countries, including the European and Asian, and regional countries.

[Afghan govt approves 8 contracts worth AFN 25 billion](#)

Khaama Press | 7th March

The Afghan government has approved at least eight contracts worth around AFN 25 billion, the Office of the President, ARG Palace said. The contracts were approved during the National Procurement Commission meeting chaired by President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani. The contracts approved during the meeting include third phase project for Kamal Khan Dam in Nimroz, design and construction of dam in Dahana-e-Dara Band area of Pashtun Kot district in Faryab, and the CASA-1000 transmission line which was approved in principle.

[HIA Demands Govt. Action on Peace Accord](#)

Outlook Afghanistan/ Tolonews | 8th March

A list of 200 Hizb-e-Islami inmates has been sent to the president and they will be released soon, the commission overseeing the implementation of peace accord between the Afghan government and Hizb-e-Islami group said on Tuesday. But, Hizb-e-Islami has blasted the government for dealing with the implementation of the deal with reluctance. They said the government has yet to meet the preconditions of Hizb-e-Islami before group's leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar arrives in Kabul. The release of the 200 Hizb-e-Islami inmates; providing a safe residence for Hekmatyar and the allotment of 1000 residential plots for Hizb-e-Islami refugees are among the preconditions set by Hizb-e-Islami.

[Two heroin factories destroyed in Nangarhar](#)

Afghanistan Times | 7th March

The Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) carried out operations against heroin makers and destroyed two factories in the eastern Nangarhar province of Afghanistan. According to the local government officials, Special Forces of the Interior Ministry were succeeded to discover two factories of heroin in Kambo area of the Khogyani district. The officials added that the operation against two heroin factories was carried out around 8pm and ended in the early hours of Monday morning.

BANGLADESH

[PM seeks Jakarta help to send back Myanmar refugees](#)

BSS/ the Daily Star | 7th March

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina today requested the Indonesian government to play a role in sending back the Myanmar refugees from Bangladesh. "The Myanmar refugee issue is a big problem for Bangladesh and it needs to be resolved," the prime minister said during a bilateral meeting with Indonesian President Joko Widodo on the sidelines of the IORA Leaders' Summit.

[India plans Dhaka-Istanbul container train](#)

bdnews24 | 7th March

Indian Railway Minister Suresh Prabhu plans to run a trans-continental container train full of goods from Dhaka to Istanbul, reports India's business daily 'Financial Express'. The train would cover a 6,000-km journey across five countries – Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Iran and Turkey. The report says the project is codenamed as ITI-DKD-Y corridor and the route the container train will follow will be Dhaka-Kolkata-Delhi-Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul.

[PM urges UAE to ease visa for Bangladeshis](#)

The Financial Express | 7th March

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Tuesday urged the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to ease visa regime for

Bangladeshi nationals, especially for business visas. The prime minister made the request when State Minister of UAE Dr. Maitha Salem Al-Shamsi called on her at the Jakarta Convention Centre on the sidelines of the first-ever Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) Leaders' Summit, reports BSS. Foreign Secretary M Shahidul Haque briefed reporters, after the session.

[Dhaka eyes IORA action to boost maritime cooperation](#)

The Financial Express | 7th March

Bangladesh wants to see IORA as tool for maritime cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region, reports UNB. Bangladesh Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali said it sees the action plan of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) as a new avenue to make the organisation a vehicle to boost maritime cooperation in the region.

BHUTAN

[Japan provides Nu 334.2M for four grant projects](#)

KuenselOnline | 7th March

The ambassador of Bhutan to Japan, V Namgyel and the ambassador of Japan to Bhutan, Kenji Hiramatsu signed the Exchange of Notes for the Japanese grant aid 'The Project for Improvement of Medical Equipment' at the national and regional referral hospitals on March 3 in New Delhi, India, according to a press release issued by the Japanese embassy in New Delhi. Japan provided Nu 334.2 million (M) or Yen 551M for the project. The ambassadors also signed three grant contracts under the Grant Assistant for Grassroots Projects. For provision of equipment to the National Mushroom Centre, Japan provided Nu 4.87M (Yen 8.4M).

MALDIVES

[Saudia to launch flight operations between Male', Jeddah on April 8](#)

Sun Online | 7th March

Confirmation has been received from Saudi Arabian Airlines (Saudia) that direct scheduled flight operations between the Saudi Arabian city of Jeddah and Male' City will commence on April 8. Saudia began direct scheduled flight operations between Saudi Arabian capital, Riyadh and Male' City on March 30, 2016 and operates two weekly scheduled flights between the two cities. Maldivian embassy in Saudi Arabia tweeted last Monday night that it has received confirmation from Saudia that scheduled flight operation between Jeddah and Male' City will begin on April 8.

[Finance and Treasury Minister Munawar: More opportunities needed in local tourism insurance](#)

Sun Online | 7th March

Minister of Finance and Treasury, Ahmed Munawar has said that local insurance is very important in the Maldivian tourism industry and the sector needs more local insurance companies. Speaking at the Liability Insurance Seminar yesterday at Hotel Jen, Minister Munawar said that the amount of natural resources in the Maldives is higher in the scale of global percentage and the insurance companies need to expand into that market. He said that the Maldivian tourism receives 2-5 billion in investments annually. And while over ten new resorts are set to open this year, insurance companies need to enter that market as well.

MYANMAR

[Northern Myanmar fighting calls for Beijing's tactical involvement](#)

Mizzima | 8th March

Fighting has erupted in northern Myanmar again. According to the office of Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar's de facto leader, rebels from a local armed ethnic group launched a surprise attack early on Monday against police and military posts in Kokang, a region bordering China. The clashes killed at least 30 people, including many civilians. Pictures of dead bodies of some Chinese civilians were circulated online on Tuesday. Although we don't know if the pictures are real, some Chinese netizens vehemently called on the Chinese government to "unify" Kokang.

NEPAL

[Govt recalls Saptari CDO, security chiefs](#)

The Kathmandu Post | 8th March

The government recalled chief district officer and top cops from Saptari on Tuesday, a day after three persons were fatally shot during clashes between protesters and police in Maleth of the district. CDO Udhav Prasad Timilsina, SP Debesh Lohani, DSP Dan Bahadur Karki and SP Jaya Bahadur Khadka of the APF have been recalled, said Home Ministry Spokesperson Balkrishna Panthi. CDO Timilsina was posted in Saptari only a week ago.

[PM stresses value-based BFIs for economic growth](#)

Rastriya Samachar Samiti / The Himalayan Times | 7th March

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal said the banks and financial institutions should play a pivotal role in raising the living standard of the people through mobilisation of the financial resources. Addressing to the annual conference of the Global Alliance for Banking on Values (GABV) here today, PM Dahal said, "The theme of this conference 'Shifting the Financial Paradigm-Courage to Act Together' itself emphasises less on profit but more on people and community, good governance, accountability, transparency, corporate social responsibility, accessibility of grass-root people to banking services, and sustainable banking with ethics." The conference is jointly organised by the GABV and NMB Bank Ltd.

PAKISTAN

[IHC directs authorities to block all social media if necessary](#)

Express Tribune | 8th March

The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Tuesday ordered Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan to eliminate access to blasphemous content on social media, even if it means blocking all access to social media platforms. Justice Shaukat Aziz Siddiqui, while ordering the interior minister to appear in person before the court on Wednesday (today) in the case pertaining to blasphemous pages on social media, observed that he expected that the minister "take some steps in his own supervision to eliminate the evil, even at the cost of blocking the entirety social media"

[Foreign countries funding 145 projects, Senate told](#)

Express Tribune | 8th March

The government informed the Senate that foreign countries are funding 145 development projects countrywide, of which 45 are on loans while the rest are on grants. Written details were submitted in the Senate on Tuesday to questions asked by lawmakers of the upper house of parliament. To a question of Senator Nisar Muhammad about the foreign funded projects in the country, Minister for Finance Ishaq Dar replied that the projects are spread across four provinces including Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan.

[Completion of energy projects key to investment: OICCI](#)

Express Tribune | 8th March

Multinationals operating in Pakistan are hopeful that the under-construction energy projects under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) are going to help increase industrialisation in the country. However, they believe the government should take immediate steps to resolve taxation and smuggling issues to take maximum benefits of CPEC investments. "Pakistan will receive foreign direct investment (FDI) once the energy crisis comes under control," Overseas Investors Chambers of Commerce and Industry (OICCI) President Khalid Mansoor said in an interview with The Express Tribune.

['84pc of population lacks access to safe drinking water'](#)

Dawn | 8th March

Eighty-four per cent of the population does not have access to safe drinking water in a country where commercial banks posted windfall profits exceeding Rs475 billion in three years, the Senate was told on Tuesday. Quoting a study, Provision of Safe Drinking Water, conducted by the Pakistan Council of Research in Water Resources (PCRWR), Minister for Science and Technology Rana Tanvir Hussain said only 72pc of water supply schemes were found to be functional, and 84pc of those had supplied water that was not fit for consumption.

[Pakistan first country to benefit from high-quality solar maps: World Bank](#)

Dawn | 8th March

Pakistan has become the first country to benefit from duly validated, high-quality solar maps under a global initiative, allowing it to tap into its renewable energy resources more effectively, the World Bank said in a press release on Tuesday. The new solar maps for Pakistan were unveiled today at a workshop hosted by the Alternative Energy Development Board (AEDB) and the World Bank in Islamabad. According to the World Bank, Pakistan is now part of a small group comprising mainly developed countries with access to sustainable and affordable sources of indigenous energy.

SRI LANKA

[IMF warns reforms process in Sri Lanka falls short of timelines](#)

Colombo Gazette | 7th March

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has warned that progress on implementing structural benchmarks in Sri Lanka was somewhat uneven with some of the reforms lagging behind intended timelines. A staff team from the IMF led by Jaewoo Lee visited Colombo during February 21-March 7, 2017 to hold discussions on the second review of the Sri Lankan authorities' economic program that is being supported by a three-year Extended Fund Facility (EFF). The program aims to support the authorities' ambitious reform agenda to put public finances on a sustainable footing and create space for its social and development program.

[Sri Lanka calls on Indian Ocean countries to work out a stable legal order to combat drug trafficking](#)

Colombo Page | 7th March

Sri Lanka today urged the countries in the Indian Ocean region to confront the challenges associated with maritime security issues, and cooperate to combat drug trafficking in the high seas. Sri Lanka's President Maithripala Sirisena addressing the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) Leaders' Summit, in Jakarta, Indonesia on Tuesday suggested to work out a stable legal order to confront with the issue of illicit drugs, in conformity with the principles of the freedom of navigation.

[Afghanistan seeks to strengthen trade with Sri Lanka via an air corridor](#)

Colombo Page | 8th March

Afghanistan is seeking to strengthen trade relations with Sri Lanka via an air corridor, the President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Mohammad Ashraf Ghani said on Tuesday when he accepted credential of new ambassador of Sri Lanka to Kabul Air Marshal (retd.) Gagan Bulathsinhala. At the occasion President Galani said his country wanted to tighten trade relations via an air-corridor with Sri Lanka like the one with India, Kabul Times reported citing a statement from the president's office.

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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