

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

December 9th, 2016 | Volume: 2 - 4/12

[Govt lifts 'undeclared' ban on Indian cotton imports](#)

DAWN| 9th December
Pakistan on Wednesday lifted an 'undeclared' ban on imports of ginned cotton from India, pledging to strictly implementing all phytosanitary and other conditions governing the fibre's imports on future incoming shipments via surface or sea. Earlier, the Department of Plant Protection (DPP) of the Ministry of National Food Security and Research put cotton imports from India on hold through Wahga and Karachi port from Nov 23, saying the shipments did not fulfil phytosanitary conditions.

[BBIN for economic cooperation](#)

Kuensel Online| 8th December
The government is looking at the sub-regional grouping of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN) as an alternative to the dysfunctional SAARC for better economic cooperation. Despite setbacks, the government is determined to ratify the BBIN Motor Vehicle Agreement (MVA), which it says will open gates for cooperation in other areas. The government insists that the sub-regional grouping is not just about the motor vehicle agreement. It believes that the MVA is the precursor to cooperation in other fields including connectivity, energy, trade and ICT.

[India approves MoU with Afghanistan on Space Technology Cooperation](#)

Khaama Press|8th December
The Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has given his ex-post facto approval to the MoU between India and Afghanistan on cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space during the Union Cabinet meeting, it has been reported. According to the local media reports, the MoU envisages cooperation between the two countries for application of space technologies in education, agriculture, weather forecasting, telecommunications, rural health, sanitation, urban development, resource mapping navigation, remote sensing and any other areas mutually agreed upon.

AFGHANISTAN

[Afghan war not winnable due to Pak policy](#)

Afghanistan Times|7th December

The war on terrorism in Afghanistan cannot be won as long as militant safe havens exist in neighbouring Pakistan, a former American general told lawmakers on Tuesday. "The war is not winnable under the current policy. We cannot win, and that's the reality of it. We've got sanctuaries in Pakistan," said the former vice-chief of the army, General (R) John M Keane.

[A Foreign War Underway, but Not a Civil Conflict: Ghani](#)

Outlook Afghanistan|8th December

President Ashraf Ghani on Wednesday warned his country's enemies against harming Afghanistan, saying the country was the land of the brave and enemies will be eliminated here. He said that a foreign war is ongoing in Afghanistan, but not a civil war. Last year the enemies were plotting to overthrow the government, Ghani said, while addressing a gathering of Afghan youths in Kabul. Talking on the contribution of Afghan youths to security,

Ghani said they play a constructive role in the rank and file of the security forces for the safety and defense of the country.

[Plot to attack Kabul city with rockets foiled](#)

Khaama Press | 9th December

The Afghan security forces foiled a plot by the anti-government armed militant groups to attack Kabul city with rockets. The Ministry of Interior (MoI) said two rockets were confiscated before the militants managed to fire them on the city. A statement by MoI said the counterterrorism forces discovered and defused the two rockets which were planted in Mirbacha Kot district.

BANGLADESH

[Controversial 'child marriage' bill goes to Parliament](#)

Bdnews 24 | 8th December

The 'Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2016' will be sent to the Parliamentary Standing Committee for Women and Children Affairs Ministry for a report. Though the Cabinet-approved bill has fixed the minimum age for the marriage of females at 18, it allows exemptions in "special situations, for the best interest of [minor girls], [who] can be married with consent of court and [their] parents". Local and international rights organisations have expressed concerns that the law may be abused or may encourage child marriage instead of preventing it.

[Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina 'postpones' India visit](#)

Bdnews 24 | 8th December

"It has been postponed," a senior official at the foreign ministry told bdnews24.com, but declined to give any reason for the postponement. The date of the prime minister's tour had not been announced officially, but the three-day trip was due to begin from Dec 18, according to officials at the foreign ministry who spoke with bdnews24.com on Tuesday. The Indian authorities had earlier said Dhaka and New Delhi were working on finalising the dates and itinerary of the Bangladesh prime minister's visit after Hasina accepted the invitation from her Indian counterpart Narendra Modi.

[Govt working for women empowerment: PM](#)

DailyStar | 9th December

Stressing the need for women empowerment, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said Bangladesh women are doing a great job for the development of the country. "In every sector women are coming forward. These all are happening just for the influence of Begum Rokeya and our government is working for the development of women," the premier said. The prime minister was speaking at an award giving ceremony of the winners of Begum Rokeya Padak-2016 at the Osmani Memorial Auditorium in Dhaka, marking the Begum Rokeya Day.

[Attack on Hindus in Brahmanbaria: Ambition, not religion](#)

Bdnews 24 | 9th December

On October 30, hundreds of religious zealots launched a synchronised attack on six Hindu villages in Brahmanbaria's Nasirnagar upazila and vandalised 100 houses and 17 temples. They also looted whatever valuables they could find. Before the attack, they spread communal hatred for two days using a Facebook post on the wall of a Hindu fisherman. To instigate and mobilise people, the post was shared among the locals via phone and hard copies.

BHUTAN

[More chillies on the way](#)

Kuensel Online | 8th December

The Food Corporation of Bhutan Ltd (FCBL) is importing 20 metric tonnes (MT) of green chillies from Kolkata in India. The first consignment of 7,951kg was delivered in Phuentsholing yesterday evening. Officials with FCBL said that the chillies are transported in trucks from Kolkata. FCBL marketing advisor Bhimraj Gurung said about 10MT will go to the Centenary Farmers Market in Thimphu given the high demand there.

[More than Nu 7B of budget underutilised](#)

Kuensel Online | 8th December

In the first two fiscal years of the 11th Plan, more than Nu 7 billion (B) of the capital budget was underutilised. The Royal Audit Authority (RAA) in its annual report 2015 pointed out that there was a decline in the utilisation of capital budget as compared to the previous years. The revised capital budget in the 2013-14 fiscal year was Nu 19.44B while the actual expenditure reported was Nu 16.66B, resulting in underutilisation of Nu 2.820B.

MALDIVES

[FM: Japan's contribution to development of Maldives is incalculable](#)

Sun Online | 7th December

Minister of Foreign Affairs of Maldives, Dr. Mohamed Asim has thanked the Japanese government for its continued contribution to social and economic development of Maldives, commenting that the Japanese government had provided incalculable assistance to the country. Minister Asim made the comment during the function held by the Japanese embassy in Maldives at Hotel Jen last Tuesday night to celebrate the birthday of Japanese Emperor Akihito.

MYANMAR

[Companies in Myanmar express concern about regulation, but optimism remains: Survey](#)

Mizzima | 7th December

Companies in Myanmar expressed concerns about government regulation and policy, despite showing optimism for future growth, in a recently completed survey, said Thomas Klotz Tuesday morning at a press conference in Yangon. Klotz, the Managing Partner for Southeast Asia for Roland Berger, the German consulting firm that conducted the survey, said, "Seeing from our conversations in the market, there's a bit of nervousness."

[Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Myanmar reiterates concerns over Northern Rakhine State](#)

Mizzima | 9th December

Mr. Vijay Nambiar, Special Adviser of The United Nations Secretary-General on Myanmar has reiterated the international body's concerns regarding the situation in Northern Rakhine State in a statement issued on the 8 December. The following is the statement in full. "As Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Myanmar, I wish to underline that the United Nations remains seriously concerned by the developing situation in Northern Rakhine.

[11 killed in northern Myanmar rebel clashes: state media](#)

Mizzima | 9th December

At least 11 people have died this month in northern Myanmar in escalating clashes between security forces and armed insurgents that have undercut Aung San Suu Kyi's bid for peace. Thousands have fled their homes in northern Shan state since the fighting erupted in late November, with many crossing the border into China.

NEPAL

[ADB to provide over Rs 2 bln grant to Nepal from Climate Fund](#)

Rastriya Samachar Samiti / The Himalayan Times | 8th December

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) said it would provide a grant assistance of more than Rs 2 billion for generating 25 megawatts solar power. The ADB has declared to provide the amount from the Climate Fund for the promotion of solar energy in view of energy needs and demand.

[PM expresses Nepal's firm commitment to Saarc process](#)

The Kathmandu Post | 9th December

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal has said that Nepal's unflinching commitment to Saarc process is very much intact as enshrined in the Saarc Charter. In his message on the occasion of the 31st Saarc Charter Day on Thursday, PM Dahal, on behalf of the government of Nepal and as a founding member and current chair of the Saarc, said, "I take this opportunity to reiterate Nepal's unflinching commitments to the ideals, values, principles and objectives as enshrined in the SAARC Charter.

[Speaker's bid to end House deadlock fails](#)

The Kathmandu Post | 9th December

Speaker Onasari Gharti's bid to end the deadlock in Legislature-Parliament over the constitution amendment bill has failed to yield results. Speaker Gharti on Thursday held separate meetings with Nepali Congress President Sher Bahadur Deuba and CPN-UML Chairman KP Sharma Oli. Taking exception to the government move of registering the constitution amendment bill, the UML, which has launched protests, has been obstructing parliamentary proceedings, saying it will block the bill at any cost. The government on November 29 registered the amendment bill at the Parliament Secretariat in a bid to address the concerns voiced by the agitating Madhes-based parties.

PAKISTAN

[Chinese bourses keen on acquiring PSX stake](#)

Express Tribune/APP | 8th December

Three of China's financial market operators intend to jointly buy a combined stake of up to 40% in the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX), a person with close knowledge of the potential deal told China Daily. The source, who is with the Shanghai Stock Exchange (SSE), said the SSE and two other bourses in China have submitted a letter of intent to the PSX, China Daily reported.

[Panic grips Karachi as pro-Taliban graffiti surfaces](#)

The Express Tribune | 8th December

Panic gripped the western parts of the city as wall chalking, bearing slogans of a faction of Taliban militants, appeared overnight on Thursday. The wall chalking by Tehrik-e-Taliban Waziristan, with the mention of Khalid Mehsud Sajna group, appeared on walls in Manghopir and Sultanabad areas. Some of the slogans read 'Sub per nazar hai [Eyes on everyone]' and 'Taliban Zindabad [Long live Taliban]'.

[Govt allows import of life-saving drugs from India](#)

The Express Tribune | 9th December

Pakistan will allow the import of life-saving drugs from India but only on the condition that the drugs are used for non-commercial purposes. The decision was taken at a cabinet meeting held on November 23 and chaired by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. The cabinet authorised the commerce ministry to allow the import of such medicines on "a case-by-case basis".

[Pakistan, Iran look to revisit gas pipeline agreement](#)

DAWN | 9th December

Pakistan has shared with Iran amendments to gas sale and purchase agreement (GSPA) to extend implementation schedule and revise pricing under the \$1.35-billion gas pipeline project. A senior government official on Thursday told Dawn that the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet hasn't yet allowed the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Resources to start formal negotiations with Iran over fresh pricing.

SRI LANKA

[World Bank approves \\$75 Million to strengthen Sri Lanka's social safety net program](#)

Colombo Page | 8th December

The World Bank Board has approved a \$75 million credit from the International Development Association (IDA) to support Sri Lanka's main welfare programs by developing an integrated system to better manage the selection, administration, and payments to beneficiaries of the programs.

[Sri Lankan President to ink several bilateral MOUs during visit to Malaysia](#)

Colombo Page | 8th December

Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena during his upcoming official visit to Malaysia will ink several Memorandums of Understanding in several sectors enhancing the bilateral relations between the two countries.

[All stakeholders to be briefed on ETCA and China FTA](#)

Colombo Gazette| 7th December

The Government today informed Parliament that all stakeholders will be briefed on the proposed Economic and Technology Cooperative Agreement (ETCA) with India and the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with China.

[Canada, UNFPA-Sri Lanka to end gender-based violence](#)

Colombo Page| 8th December

As part of the 16 Days of Activism in Sri Lanka, the Canadian High Commission and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) co-hosted a panel discussion on the importance of zero-tolerance for Gender-based Violence (GBV) within the workplace.

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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