

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

March 9, 2018 | Volume - 4 - 03/03

[Sri Lanka Speaker calls on religious leaders to speak out against political powers attempting to divide country on sectarian grounds](#)

Colombo Page | 9th March
Sri Lanka's Speaker Karu Jayasuriya condemning the recent communal clashes against Muslims in strongest terms, called on upon leaders of all religious sectors to speak out against those who attempt to divide Sri Lanka on sectarian grounds. The Speaker in a statement said that the sudden surge of violence against Muslims in Kandy and elsewhere in Sri Lanka over the last several days was clearly not representative of any grassroots communal tensions. "These citizens, equal under our law have lived in harmony with their neighbors of other faiths for centuries. Instead, these acts are very clearly the work of those whose political power and machinations are fueled and fortified by dividing and violating our people," he said.

[Aung San Suu Kyi stresses need to promote role of women](#)

Mizzima | 09th March
Myanmar State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi has stressed the need for giving priority to promoting the role of women in rural areas, voicing support and encouragement to the female population there, Xinhua reported quoting local media. Speaking at the International Women's Day event in Nay Pyi Taw Thursday, Aung San Suu Kyi emphasized the importance of the women's role in rural areas as 30 percent of the gross domestic product of the country comes from the agricultural sector, while 70 percent of the total population is living in rural areas. She also urged the new generation of women to strive for their security and improve their skill while emulating the talented Myanmar women of successive past eras.

['Nepal committed to One-China Policy'](#)

Rastriya Samachar Samiti / The Himalayan Times | 8th March
Defence Minister Ishwor Pokhrel said Nepal was committed to One-China Policy. Minister Pokhrel said this during a meeting with Chinese Ambassador to Nepal Yu Hong at the former's office in Singha Durbar. He also said the relations between the armies of the two countries could also be expanded. Minister Pokhrel assured the Chinese ambassador that all agreements between the governments of the two countries would be implemented. He also hoped that the Chinese government would continue to provide support for infrastructure development in the country.

AFGHANISTAN

[Maternal mortality rates declined from 1100 to 396 in Afghanistan: WB](#)

Khamma Press | 8th March

The World Bank says Afghanistan has made strong gains in health outcomes, health services coverage and health systems performance since 2003. The World Bank informed regarding the gains in its latest report particularly pointing towards the unprecedented decline in maternal mortality and child mortality rates. Citing the United Nations estimates, the World Bank report states that maternal mortality rates (MMR) declined from 1,100 to 396 deaths per 100,000 live births from 2000 to 2015. The report also adds that under-5 child mortality rates (U5MR) fell 34 percent (from 137 to 91 deaths per 1,000 live births). The report finds that such health gains have been made possible by expanded frontline health services and a stronger health system.

[Timely elections inevitable: Ghani](#)

Afghanistan Times | 7th March

Clouds of uncertainty about the holding of upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections began to clear on Wednesday after President Ashraf Ghani said the elections will be held on time. Opening parliament's 8th working year, the president said the parliamentary and presidential elections are the responsibility of the government and will be free and fair and devoid of interferences. Speaking at the opening ceremony, Ghani said holding the elections is inevitable and the Election Commission should be free of politics and work independently. He said the government makes efforts to prevent any political intervention in the election process. The president also reiterated his call on the Taliban to lay down arms and join peace talks.

[Parliament opens after winter recess; People, lawyers say no tangible outcome](#)

Afghanistan Times | 7th March

As the parliament inaugurated its 16th legislation round on Wednesday, most people as well as lawmakers have expressed their discontent over ineffectiveness of the parliament. They sling accusations on the parliamentarians for misusing their authority to serve their personal whims. Some Kabul citizens say that the members of parliament prefer their personal benefits to national interests. "The lawmakers are thinking of their own wealth, they are not thinking about the people's problems," said Attaulrahman, a Kabul resident. "I am not happy with the work of the legislators. I hope the next parliamentarians be useful to people and serve them," another Kabul resident, Hajji Mir Zaman said.

BANGLADESH

[Withdrawal of UK Ban: No cheers for Biman, in fact](#)

The Daily Star | 9th March

Nearly three weeks after the UK government's withdrawal of the ban on Dhaka-London direct cargo flights, Bangladeshi exporters are yet to reap any benefit from the decision. National flag carrier Biman, the only airline having direct flights from Dhaka to London, cannot yet operate such flights because of another ban, slapped by the European Union last year. As for the international airlines, they still need to rescreen their UK-bound cargos originating from Dhaka at a third country's airport, like they have been doing since March 2016, when the UK ban came into effect. So the lifting of the British ban means little to Bangladeshi exporters as the EU ban remains in place.

[IMF for market-based pricing of savings tools](#)

The Financial Express | 9th March

The visiting International Monetary Fund (IMF) mission suggested tighter eligibility criteria and move towards market-based pricing to reduce reliance on national savings certificates, help strengthen financial intermediation and expand the capital market. IMF team leader Daisaku

Kihara made the observations on Thursday while delivering speech in a press conference after concluding its two-week visit in Bangladesh. The IMF team visited Dhaka from February 25 to March 08 to hold discussions on the 2018 Article IV consultation with Bangladesh. The team also focused on strengthening banking regulations through effective supervision to combat ongoing challenges in the banking system, including higher non-performing loans.

BHUTAN

[Provident fund scheme mandatory for private firms: MoLHR](#)

Kuensel | 08th March

All organisations in the private sector should start provident fund (PF) scheme for their employees latest by May 31 this year, either with the Royal Insurance Corporation of Bhutan or Bhutan Insurance Limited, the labour ministry has notified. Department of labour's director, Sonam Wangdi, said that as per Section 99 of the Labour and Employment Act of Bhutan, 2007 and its regulations, an employee is entitled to PF and gratuity upon retirement from service. "Although some big firms and corporations have implemented this scheme, most private firms have not," he said. "The Act requires to have PF but it was not implemented immediately." The ministry will start monitoring its implementation from June this year.

[Situation in Sri Lanka monitored: Foreign Secretary](#)

Kuensel | 08th March

The foreign affairs ministry has contacted Bhutan's ambassador in Dhaka, Bangladesh who is also accredited to Colombo, Sri Lanka to monitor the situation regarding the state of emergency declared in Sri Lanka, foreign secretary, Sonam Tshong said. Secretary Sonam Tshong told Kuensel said that the ministry has not received any reports of Bhutanese in Sri Lanka being adversely affected. Foreign minister Damcho Dorji on his Facebook page advised Bhutanese pilgrims to avoid travel to Sri Lanka until the situation improves. When contacted for comments, he said that the post is his personal message to the people and not as a foreign minister. According to foreign media, Sri Lanka declared a state of emergency to stop the spread of communal violence between Sinhalese and Muslim communities.

MALDIVES

[3 top officials arrested from meeting at MDP headquarters](#)

Sun Online | 8th March

Police broke up a meeting at the opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) headquarters and arrested three senior party officials this Thursday morning. The three senior MDP officials were arrested under the declaration of State of Emergency in Maldives. The three officials are: MDP's National Congress member Hassan Ahmed (Hasantey), Former MP Ilyaas Labeeb, Ahmed Shahid (Saabe), spouse of North Galolhu MP Eva Abdulla. "They were arrested in the middle of a meeting at the meeting room inside MDP headquarters by SO [Special Operations] officers who said they were being arrested under the SoE [State of Emergency]," reported an eye witness to "Sun".

[Law to be amended so judges convicted of a crime are disqualified](#)

Sun Online | 8th March

Ruling, Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM) has submitted an amendment to the Judges Act, which will disqualify judges who are convicted of a criminal offense by a court of law. The amendment was submitted to the People's Majlis on behalf of PPM by Fonadhoo MP Abdul Raheem Abdulla (Adhurey). The proposed amendments include an additional point to the criteria for judges. The addition, Article 15 (b) (v) of Judges Act states a judge cannot be someone serving a sentence for a criminal offense. Adhurey has also proposed adding Article 24, which states judges arrested for a criminal investigation must be suspended with pay, and that judges charged with a crime must be put on suspension without pay.

MYANMAR

[UN rights chief calls for Myanmar war crimes panel](#)

Mizzima | 08th March

The UN human rights chief on Wednesday called for a new body tasked with preparing criminal indictments over alleged abuses committed in Myanmar, after a similar panel was created for the Syrian conflict. The Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council has set up multiple investigations and fact-finding missions into major trouble spots, including an active one for Myanmar. But some have expressed concern over the limitations of those probes, which focus on gathering a broad range of evidence about alleged atrocities, rather than assembling specific legal cases against individuals that can be taken to court.

[eVisas only available through official website](#)

Mizzima | 09th March

Foreign visitors can only apply for an eVisa through the official website of the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population: <https://www.evisa.moip.gov.mm>, state media reported on 9 March. According to the report, some foreign tourists had been found to have entered the country by correcting certain data and information in the eVisa approval letter that was earlier issued through the ministry's eVisa website. Some websites were also found to be charging additional fees to apply for eVisa through the ministry's official website. The ministry has not permitted tour agents to charge an additional fee to help visitors procure eVisa through the ministry's official website, the report said.

NEPAL

[Association of Private Health Institutions of Nepal agrees to make hospital fees public](#)

Himalayan News Service / The Himalayan Times | 8th March

Association of Private Health Institutions of Nepal has agreed to make public the fees charged by hospitals for different services within 10 days. The government had recently decided to direct private hospitals to make their charges public on their websites. "We will issue a circular to all our member institutions asking them to keep the details of charges for different services on their websites. Those institutions that do not have their own website will have to display the details of charges on citizen's charter," said Homraj Dahal, general secretary of APHIN. More than 250 health institutions are members of APHIN.

[Three weeks on, Oli yet to name 11 ministers](#)

My Republica | 9th March

Prime Minister KP Oli has failed to give full shape to the cabinet even three weeks after he took charge of the government, and this is due to lack of any breakthrough in talks to bring the two Madhes-based parties on board the ruling coalition. Oli, who was appointed head of the government on February 15, two months after he guided the left alliance to poll victory, is yet to induct 11 ministers into the cabinet.

[Prime minister inaugurates Nepal International Trade Fair](#)

My Republica | 9th March

Prime Minister K P Oli Thursday inaugurated the 7th Nepal International Trade Fair at the Bhrikuti Mandap Exhibition Hall in Kathmandu. The expo is being organized by the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) with the support of the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies, Trade and Export Promotion Centre (TEPC), Lalitpur Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) and the Federation of Handicraft Associations of Nepal are co-organizers of the event.

PAKISTAN

[IMF concerned at Pakistan's weakening economy](#)

Dawn | 8th March

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) on Wednesday expressed concern over Pakistan's weakening macroeconomic situation, including widening external and fiscal imbalances, reduction in foreign exchange reserves and emerging risks to economic and financial outlook. The IMF executive board asked the government to immediately refocus on near-term policies to preserve macroeconomic stability and get back to fiscal discipline shown under the three-year \$6.64 billion multi-tranche Extended Fund Facility (EFF) to minimise risks and economic distortions.

[British High Commission announces Asma Jahangir scholarship](#)

The Express Tribune | 8th March

A new annual scholarship, honouring the legacy of late Asma Jahangir was announced on Thursday by the British High Commission. This scholarship will be awarded to the best female Chevening candidate each year, following the scheme's rigorous selection process. Jahangir, one of Pakistan's most prominent rights activists, had passed away in a Lahore hospital on February 11. The Chevening scholarships are awarded to outstanding emerging leaders to pursue a one-year Masters programme at any United Kingdom university.

[US moves to reassure Pakistan as bilateral talks resume](#)

Dawn | 9th March

The United States announced head money on the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) leaders and two other suspected Pakistani militants on Thursday as Islamabad urged Washington to resume a structural dialogue between the two countries. The US Department of Justice has placed a head money of \$5 million on Mullah Fazlullah and of \$3m each on Mangal Bagh and Abdul Wali, official sources told Dawn. "In some areas, they do bring pressure on us, we have made clear that we will do whatever we think is in our national interests," said Foreign Secretary Tehmina Janjua, while explaining the outlines of recent US-Pakistan talks. "The important message that we have to give is, we will do what's in our national interests."

SRI LANKA

[Sri Lanka police arrest 81 suspects including the mastermind over the anti-Muslim clashes](#)

Colombo Page | 8th March

Police Media Spokesman Superintendent of Police Ruwan Gunasekara says that 81 suspects, who instigated communal clashes in the central Kandy district were arrested during the past few days. Police Media Spokesman said that ten persons including the alleged mastermind of the attacks in the Kandy area were arrested by the Police Terrorism Investigation Division (TID) at Digana and Poojapiitiya. The main suspect, who initiated the anti-Muslim riots, Vidana Patharanage Amith Jeewan Weerasinghe was among the arrested persons, the Police Media Spokesman said.

[UN top official arrives in Sri Lanka for a three-day visit](#)

Colombo Page | 8th March

Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Jeffrey Feltman, arrived in Sri Lanka for a three-day visit, UN in Sri Lanka announced. Mr. Feltman is expected to meet with a wide range of Sri Lankan leaders including the President, the Prime Minister and other senior officials of the Government of Sri Lanka, political parties and civil society groups. The visit will take place in the context of ongoing UN engagement with Sri Lanka.

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.

To know more, Please log on to www.anantaaspencentre.in