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Editorial Introduction

We are pleased to share the January 2019 issue of the *South Asia SDG Update*. The issue begins with a briefing on UNESCAP's activities in South Asia subregion for September-December 2019. It goes on to provide with briefings on Voluntary National Reviews of South Asian countries and their statements at the United Nations General Assembly pertaining to SDGs, to get an idea of key priorities of the subregion. Finally it has a news round up from across the subregion regarding SDGs, regional cooperation and other means of implementation. The update will appear in January, April, July and October of each year reporting on the highlights and initiatives taken during the previous quarter. Comments and feedback are welcome.

Nagesh Kumar
 Director
 UNESCAP South and South-West Asia Office



1. UNESCAP SUBREGIONAL INITIATIVES



South Asia Forum on the Sustainable Development Goals finds a case for regional cooperation for Sustainable Development Goals achievement NEW DELHI, INDIA – 4-5 October 2018: The second South Asia Forum on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) took place on 4 and 5 October in New Delhi to review progress made towards achieving the goals in the subregion. Organized by the UNESCAP, in collaboration with Niti Aayog (successor of the Planning Commission in India) and Indian think-tank Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), the Forum brought together 200 participants, including governments and civil society representatives from all eight South Asian countries. Designed as a subregional preparatory meeting for the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD), the two-day event focused on the theme of the 2019 High-Level Political Forum, ‘Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality.’

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Experts begin exploration into a regional framework for Sustainable Development Goals in South Asia - DHAKA, BANGLADESH – 20-21 November 2018: The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), UNESCAP and German-based Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) jointly organized a workshop on ‘Interpreting SDGs for South Asia: In search of a regional framework’ in Dhaka on November 20-21, 2018 where all participants stressed the importance of regional cooperation in achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs) in the subregion. They also highlighted that a regional framework should be in place to improve the lives of millions of people living in the subregion. Furthermore, they opined that it would be difficult to bring the results up to the expected level from implementation of SDGs without the collective effort of the stakeholders. The event also launched a research project which will include country studies from South Asia focusing on the perspective of delivering the United Nations 2030 agenda. The studies will seek to design a regional framework to support delivery of the SDGs in these countries.

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Policy dialogue discusses the potential of regional cooperation in South Asia for achieving Sustainable Development Goals - NEW DELHI, INDIA – 6 October 2018: Regional cooperation in South Asia - home to one of the world’s poorest and deprived populations - will be critical to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a high-level United Nations policy dialogue on 6 October in New Delhi concluded.



Organized by UNESCAP Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia, in collaboration with leading South Asian think-tanks, the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS) and the South Asia Centre for Policy Studies (SACEPS), the Policy Dialogue highlighted regional cooperation as one of the critical strategies for South Asian countries in their pursuit of the SDGs.

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Regional conference explores new approaches to public-private partnerships and municipal finance for urban infrastructure in South Asia - NEW DELHI, INDIA – 15-16 November 2018: The National Institution of Transforming India Aayog (NITI Aayog), the successor of India’s Planning Commission partnered with UN ESCAP and the Asian Development Bank to host a “South Asia Regional conference on Urban Infrastructure: New Approaches to Public-Private Partnerships and Municipal Finance Innovations,” 15-16 November 2018. With over 300 participants representing governments, financial institutions, urban local bodies, private sector, international organizations, think-tanks and academia from India and other South Asian countries, the conference provided a vibrant forum for discussion on challenges that the South Asian region faces in financing sustainable urban infrastructure as per the SDG 12.

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Labour market challenges in South Asia in the context of Sustainable Development Goals discussed - MUMBAI, INDIA – 19-21 December 2018: UNESCAP-SSWA and the South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (SANEM), Dhaka organized a panel on the theme of ‘Emerging Labour Markets and Employment Challenges in South Asia in the context of the SDGs’ on 20 December 2018. The 60th Annual Conference of the Indian Society of Labour Economics (ISLE) was held in Mumbai, India during 19-21 December 2018 and commemorated the Diamond Jubilee year of the formation of ISLE hosted by the Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research (IGIDR).

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Sustainable Development Goals and analysis of trends in poverty and inequality presented at Indian Economic Association - VELLORE, INDIA – 27-29 December 2018: The 101st Annual Conference of the Indian Economic Association with the theme “Economic growth, employment, and Human Development” was held in Vellore Institute of Technology (VIT), Vellore, from 27th to 29th December 2018. Dr. Nagesh Kumar, Head of South and South-West Asia office delivered a plenary keynote on “Poverty, Inequalities and Sustainable Development Goals: Challenges before India in a regional comparative perspective” to share findings and messages of UNESCAP’s recent reports on inequality and policy lessons for India. The Annual Conference of the Indian Economic Association (IEA) brought together eminent and distinguished economists and development specialists from across India and beyond.



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South Asia cooperation for Sustainable Development Goals and transport connectivity highlighted at UNESCAP sessions at the 11th South Asia Economic Summit - ISLAMABAD, PAKISTAN – 4-7 December 2018: The 11th South Asia Economic Summit (SAES XI) with the theme ‘Corridors of Knowledge for Peace and Development’ hosted by the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) was held in Islamabad, Pakistan, during 4-7 December 2018.



ESCAP-SSWA Office and SDPI organized two panels roundtables on “Regional Cooperation for Achieving SDGs in South Asia”; and “Connecting for Trade and Development: Issues and Prospects of Land Transport Corridors of South Asia.” The summit provided a platform for discussions on various policy topics that are of importance to South Asia, including trade, energy, water, transport, environment, climate change, and disaster risk reduction.

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Using evidence-based trade policy for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Least Developed Countries and Landlocked Developing Countries - THIMPHU, BHUTAN – 3-5 September 2018: ESCAP, in collaboration with the Government of Bhutan, organized a regional workshop on “Using Evidence-Based Trade Policy for Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in LDCs and LLDCs” in Thimphu, Bhutan, from 3 to 5 September 2018. The objectives of the workshop were to (a) provide a regional platform for sharing best practices as well as challenges in meeting the SDGs and using trade

as a means of implementation; (b) identify policy options that can help address the above-mentioned challenges; and (c) review the state of data availability with respect to the trade-related targets and indicators.

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Advancing women’s entrepreneurship in South Asia - KATHMANDU, NEPAL – 3-5 September 2018: UNESCAP-SSWA delivered a keynote presentation on “Advancing Women’s Entrepreneurship in South Asia: Lessons from ASEAN Experience” at the International Women Entrepreneurs Annual Summit 2018. The annual summit was organized by the South Asian Women Development Forum (SAWDF) in Kathmandu, Nepal from 3–5 September 2018 with the theme “Equality begins with Economic Empowerment” aimed at addressing challenges associated with gender parity in the economic sphere, advancement of gender-responsive trade facilitation policies and foster deliberations on a wide array of topics, including IT, agriculture, tourism, to name a few.

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Empowering youth with disabilities - NEW DELHI, INDIA – 8-12 November 2018: The ESCAP Executive Secretary’s “the Super Challenger Awards” were presented to two winners with severe disabilities, Sourav Kumar Sinha (India) and Kim Hong-Gu (Republic of Korea) at the 2018 Global IT Challenge (GITC) for Youth with Disabilities held in New Delhi, India, from 8 to 12 November 2018.



Mr. Nagesh Kumar, Head of ESCAP South and South West Asia Office, who presented the awards on behalf of the Executive Secretary said, “In the task of bringing access of IT to young persons with disabilities and in bridging the digital divide, the governments, private sector civil society and other stakeholders have to work together.”

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2. HIGHLIGHTS OF SOUTH ASIAN VNRs 2018

Voluntary National Reviews presented to HLPF 2018 on 9-18 July 2018 in New York

Bhutan and Sri Lanka presented their voluntary national reviews (VNRs) to the High-Level Political Forum 2018 (HLPF 2018) which was held on 9-18 July 2018 in New York. With them, seven of eight South Asian countries have presented their VNRs. Pakistan will present in 2019.

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Bhutan committed to achieving the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development which is consistent with its development philosophy of Gross National Happiness. Its 12th Five-Year (2018-2023) plan is taken as a transition plan towards graduation from the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) status. The country has been making rapid progress in its socio-economic development indicators, especially in the incidences of income poverty, multidimensional poverty, high economic growth, and low unemployment rate. The country has increasingly urbanized, young, and educated the population. However, challenges center around addressing the needs of vulnerable groups, promoting gender equality, enhancing productivity, diversifying investments into other sectors than hydropower, developing human capital through quality education, and the necessity of financing needs assessment. Bhutan looks forward to receiving the support from the international community.

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Sri Lanka has started transforming into a sustainable and resilient society following three-decade terrorist conflicts. The poverty rate declined to 4.1 percent in 2016 and unemployment rate stood below 5 percent for the last seven years. A free education and health policies have driven high youth literacy and high life expectancy. Sri Lanka, aiming at increasing the multi-stakeholder engagement through a newly developed online engagement platform, adopted mainstreaming SDGs into institutional plans as per the government's "Vision 2025. An eco-friendly environment through a "Blue Green Economy" is aimed to be created as addressed within the National Budget 2018. Inequality across districts, increasing non-communicable diseases, the need for quality education, gender inequality in labour force participation, disparities in access to sanitation and clean water, rising dependency on imports and cost of energy, traffic congestion in urban areas, increasing private vehicle usage, road accidents, deforestation, and strengthening the democracy remain challenging for the country.

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3. SDG PRIORITIES OF SOUTH ASIAN COUNTRIES:

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Highlights from country statements by the leaders of South Asian countries at the annual General Debate of the United Nations General Assembly of the 73rd session.

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Bangladesh:

Bangladesh has integrated the SDGs into its 7th Five-Year Plan.

- **Increase in access to sanitation:** In Bangladesh, 99 percent of the population has access to sanitation.
- **Inequality in education and labor force participation:** Bangladesh has promoted women's empowerment through education opportunities and facilitating their political and economic emancipation.

- **Climate change:** Bangladesh spends over 1 percent of its GDP to address climate change impacts and aimed at increasing tree coverage from 22 to 24 percent in the next five years.

[Read more on Bangladesh's statement](#)



Bhutan:

- Five-Year Plan as a transition plan towards LDC graduation.thBhutan takes its 12**Integration of SDGs into national plans:**
- **Climate change:** Bhutan's 72.6 percent forest coverage serve as a carbon sink for greenhouse gas emissions as well as valuable ecosystem services of clean water for drinking, agriculture, and hydropower generation.

[Read more on Bhutan's statement](#)



India:

- **Inequality in education and labor force participation:** India has initiated Maternity Benefit Scheme allowing up to 26 weeks paid leave for women.
- **Increase in access to sanitation:** India has launched the world's biggest health insurance scheme which will benefit 500 million Indians.

[Read more on India's statement](#)



The Maldives:

- **Democratization:** The Maldives, supported by the accelerated pace of democratization together with social and economic growth, obtained one of its region's highest human development indicators.

[Read more on Maldives' statement](#)



Pakistan:

- **Climate change:** Pakistan launched a 10 billion trees project across the country after completing a billion trees project in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

[Read more on Pakistan's statement](#)



4. SDGs IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS

a. SDGs: priorities, actions and means of implementation

Bangladeshi Prime Minister's proposal on migration adopted at UN meeting (Source: Daily Star) 12 December 2018: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's Proposal of UN Global Compact on Migration was adopted in Marrakech at the 11th Global Forum on Migration and Development hosted by Morocco. Read more: [Here](#)

Prime Minister Hasina: Cooperatives can help end the curse of poverty (Source: Dhaka Tribune) 27 November 2018: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has called for strengthening the cooperatives movement in Bangladesh, saying that cooperatives can play a big role in the country's development. Read more: [Here](#)

Bhutan enters preparatory period to shed Less Developed Countries status (Source: Kuensel) 17 December 2018: The country has officially entered into the preparatory period of five-years to graduate from the least developed country (LDC) category that will end on December 13, 2023. Read more: [Here](#)

United Nations selects Noida to participate in Global Sustainable Cities 2025 initiative (Source: Economic Times) 27 November 2018: The United Nations Sunday officially invited Uttar Pradesh's Noida and Greater Noida to become a member of its initiative which aims to create 25 model cities across the world that will be fully compliant with the sustainable development goals by 2025, officials said. Read more: [Here](#)

Invest India wins the award for boosting investment in sustainable development (Source: United News of India) 23 October 2018: Invest India has received the UN Investment Promotion Award for excellence in boosting investment to meet SDGs. Invest India received the award for excellence in servicing and supporting a major global wind turbines company in the establishment of a blade manufacturing plant in India while committing to train local staff and produce 1 gigawatt of renewable energy. Read more: [Here](#)

Call to focus on sustainable development model in India (Source: The Hindu) 11 September 2018: The post-flood reconstruction of Kerala should provide the bedrock for a sustainable development model ensuring social, economic and environmental justice and a corruption-free administration, former Director, Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Bureau, Jacob Thomas, has said. Read more: [Here](#)

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b. Regional cooperation and other means of implementation

"We are open for business" Afghan president tells United Nations conference (Source: Reuters) 28 November 2018: Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani made an investment pitch at a UN conference on Tuesday, describing the business opportunities and challenges in a country where millions are displaced or close to starvation. Read more: [Here](#)

World Bank pledges \$298 million for education in Afghanistan (Source: The Times of Central Asia) 24 October 2018: Afghan government ministers announced that the World Bank had pledged \$298 million for the improvement of Afghanistan's education at a ceremony in Kabul. According to the officials, the funds will be spent on projects for rural areas – mostly for education. Read more: [Here](#)

USAID to invest \$110 million in Afghanistan's agriculture in five years (Source: The Times of Central Asia) 5 September 2018: Afghanistan's Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) signed an agreement based on which USAID will invest \$110 million in the country's agriculture sector in the next five years. The money will be invested in two projects, Afghanistan Value Chains (AVC) and High-Value Crops (HVC) to improve Afghanistan's agricultural sector. Read more: [Here](#)

\$300 million World Bank loans to boost cash transfer for the poor (Source: Daily Star) 29 October 2018: The government of Bangladesh on Sunday signed a \$300 million financing agreement with the World Bank to improve the transparency and efficiency of its major cash transfer programs for the poorest and

India offers many roads, says President Kovind (Source: The Hindu) 22 November 2018: India and Vietnam "share a vision for the Indo-Pacific" and will launch their first "Bilateral Maritime Security Dialogue" in early January, announced President Ramnath Kovind during a visit to Hanoi, as he took a broad swipe at China's "Belt and Road Initiative" in an address to the National Assembly on Wednesday. Read more: [Here](#)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi arrives in Singapore for Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Summit (Source: Livemint) 15 November 2018: Prime Minister Narendra Modi arrived in Singapore on Wednesday for a two-day visit during which he will attend the East Asia Summit, an ASEAN-India informal meet, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership summit and hold a meeting with U.S. Vice-President Mike Pence. Mr. Modi said on Wednesday that financial inclusion had become a reality for 1.3 billion Indians as he pitched India as a favorite destination for investment at the Fintech Festival. Read more: [Here](#)

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World Bank: South Asia can triple intra-regional trade (Source: Asia Times) 21 September 2018: South Asia, the world's fastest-growing region, can triple its regional trade from \$23 billion to \$67 billion by reducing trade barriers, according to a new World Bank report. Titled "A Glass Half Full: The Promise of Regional Trade in South Asia," the report was unveiled in Bangladesh's capital city Dhaka on Wednesday. Documenting the gap between current and potential trade in South Asia, the report provides a roadmap for expanding regional trade. South Asia's rate of intra-regional trade remains among the lowest in the world, accounting for only 5% of the region's total trade. The comparable figure for East Asia and the Pacific is 50%. The report identifies four critical barriers to regional trade in South Asia: tariffs and para tariffs, real and perceived non-tariff barriers, connectivity costs, and a broader trust deficit. Read more: [Here](#)

9,000MW power to be imported by 2041 (Source: Daily Star) 11 September 2018: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, and her Indian counterpart Narendra Modi and West Bengal Chief Minister (CM) Mamata Banerjee jointly inaugurated the HVDC (2nd Block) Station at Bheramara in Kushtia. The power station has been set up for the import of additional 500MW of power from India by Bangladesh. The two prime ministers along with Tripura Chief Minister Biplab Kumar Deb also launched groundbreaking of Agartala-Akhaura rail link as well as groundbreaking for rehabilitation of Kulaura-Shahbazzpur section of Bangladesh Railways. Read more: [Here](#)

world's most expensive spice, a bounty that makes this dusty corner of Iran a crucial part of global cuisine. Read more: [Here](#)

Nepal to join hands with China on Tibet-Kathmandu railway (Source: Nikkei) 26 November 2018: Nepal will work with China to link its capital to Tibet by rail as the Himalayan nation strengthens ties with its giant northern neighbor to propel its development, Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali told Nikkei in a recent interview. Read more: [Here](#)

Blueprint for boosting economy formally submitted to International Monetary Fund (Source: Dawn) 18 December 2018: Pakistan has formally submitted to IMF its Memorandum of Economic and Financial Policies (MEFP) envisaging macroeconomic stabilization graduating into growth strategy over the next three years. Read more: [Here](#)

Trade potential between Pakistan, India can be an engine for prosperity (Source: Dawn) 10 December 2018: Prime Minister's Adviser on Institutional Reforms and Austerity Dr. Ishrat Hussain said India and Pakistan had a trade potential of \$37 billion which could be proved a powerful engine for the shared prosperity and reducing inequalities in the region. Read more: [Here](#)

Pakistani Prime Minister urges the international community to ensure easy transfer of technology (Source: Daily Star) 26 September 2018: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has urged the international community to ensure easy transfer of technology at low cost among the countries across the world to face the possible challenges during the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. (Daily Star). Read more: [Here](#)

Prime Minister Modi to be invited to Pakistan for SAARC summit, says foreign office spokesman (Source: Reuters) 27 November 2018: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be invited to Pakistan for the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit, Foreign Office Spokesman Dr. Mohammad Faisal said on Tuesday. Read more at: [Here](#)

Pakistan offers conducive environment for foreign investors, businessmen (Source: Business Recorder) 27 November 2018: President Dr. Arif Alvi Monday said Pakistan provided a very conducive environment for better investment and business opportunities and hoped that investors from different countries would

National Board of Revenue to narrow scope of tax evasion (Source: Daily Star) 5 September 2018: Tax authorities plan to audit foreign companies' transactions with their associated entities abroad from next year in order to reduce the scope for illicit fund transfer and tax evasion, said an official. The NBR has reconstituted its Transfer Pricing Cell to bolster its operations to monitor international transactions by foreign companies in line with a law framed in 2012. Read more: [Here](#)

Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank keen to invest in water management, communication projects (Source: the independent) 4 September 2018: The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is interested in investing in the country's water management and communication projects aimed at turning Bangladesh as a developed nation in the global arena, reports BSS. Distribution System Upgrade and Expansion Project is part of a national plan to provide about 2.5 million service connections to rural consumers, upgrade two grid substations and convert 85 kilometers of overhead distribution lines to underground cables. The installation of the 2.5 million service connections is now complete, and approximately 12.5 million Bangladeshis are getting direct benefits from the project. Remaining work of the project is expected to be completed by 2019. Read more: [Here](#)

Modi gives \$1.4 billion aid to the Maldives amid worry over its China debt (Source: Reuters) 18 December 2018: India will give financial assistance of \$1.4 billion to the Maldives, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Monday, the most significant aid yet to the Indian Ocean island nation that is grappling with debt from a Chinese building spree. Read more: [Here](#)

avail them by investing in diverse areas. Read more: [Here](#)

World Bank: South Asia can benefit from trade war (Source: Dawn) 9 October 2018: The World Bank says South Asia's export opportunity has not gone away and import demand in the traditional destination markets for South Asian exports – the United States and Europe – will remain robust. Instead of seizing it by reorienting resources towards foreign markets, especially through fiscal consolidation, countries in the region seem to be drifting towards more traditional protectionist policies, says the World Bank in its report on South Asia. In the view of experts on South Asia at the South Asia Economic Policy Network, under the office of World Bank's regional Chief Economist, South Asia could even benefit from the current trade dispute between the US and China through trade diversion. Read more: [Here](#)

Sri Lanka signs port deals with China amid political upheaval (Source: Reuters) 30 November 2018: Sri Lanka signed two multi-million-dollar contracts with Chinese firms for a port upgrade project on Thursday in the middle of a political hiatus that has raised doubts over the legitimacy of the government and the legality of the deals. Read more: [Here](#)

Sri Lanka Has the Potential to More Than Double Its Exports to South Asia (Source: World Bank) 8 October 2018: If trade barriers are overcome, trade within South Asia can increase three-fold, from \$23 billion to \$67 billion, suggests a new World Bank report. Sri Lanka has the potential to double its exports to South Asia. Increased intraregional trade will provide a greater variety of goods and services at lower prices for Sri Lankan consumers, better access to inputs for producers and exporters, increased investment, export diversification, and growth. The report, A Glass Half Full: The Promise of Regional Trade in South Asia, launched today, highlights four critical obstacles to regional trade - border tax distortions, nontariff barriers, connectivity costs, and trust deficits - and offers options for policymakers to address them. Read more: [Here](#)

b. Regional cooperation and other means of implementation

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Blueprint for boosting economy formally submitted to International Monetary Fund (Source: Dawn) 18 December 2018: Pakistan has formally submitted to IMF its Memorandum of Economic and Financial Policies (MEFP) envisaging macroeconomic stabilization graduating into growth strategy over the next three years. Read more: [Here](#)

Trade potential between Pakistan, India can be an engine for prosperity (Source: Dawn) 10 December 2018: Prime Minister's Adviser on Institutional Reforms and Austerity Dr. Ishrat Hussain said India and

Asia, the world's fastest-growing region, can triple its regional trade from \$23 billion to \$67 billion by reducing trade barriers, according to a new World Bank report. Titled "A Glass Half Full: The Promise of Regional Trade in South Asia," the report was unveiled in Bangladesh's capital city Dhaka on Wednesday. Documenting the gap between current and potential trade in South Asia, the report provides a roadmap for expanding regional trade. South Asia's rate of intra-regional trade remains among the lowest in the world, accounting for only 5% of the region's total trade. The comparable figure for East Asia and the Pacific is 50%. The report identifies four critical barriers to regional trade in South Asia: tariffs and para tariffs, real and perceived non-tariff barriers, connectivity costs, and a broader trust deficit. Read more: [Here](#)

9,000MW power to be imported by 2041 (Source: Daily Star) 11 September 2018: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, and her Indian counterpart Narendra Modi and West Bengal Chief Minister (CM) Mamata Banerjee jointly inaugurated the HVDC (2nd Block) Station at Bheramara in Kushtia. The power station has been set up for the import of additional 500MW of power from India by Bangladesh. The two prime ministers along with Tripura Chief Minister Biplab Kumar Deb also launched groundbreaking of Agartala-Akhaura rail link as well as groundbreaking for rehabilitation of Kulaura-Shahbazpur section of Bangladesh Railways. Read more: [Here](#)

National Board of Revenue to narrow scope of tax evasion (Source: Daily Star) 5 September 2018: Tax authorities plan to audit foreign companies' transactions with their associated entities abroad from next year in order to reduce the scope for illicit fund transfer and tax evasion, said an official. The NBR has reconstituted its Transfer Pricing Cell to bolster its operations to monitor international transactions by foreign companies in line with a law framed in 2012. Read more: [Here](#)

Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank keen to invest in water management, communication projects (Source: the independent) 4 September 2018: The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is interested in investing in the country's water management and communication projects aimed at turning Bangladesh as a developed nation in the global arena, reports BSS. Distribution System Upgrade and Expansion Project is part of a national plan to provide about 2.5 million service connections to rural consumers, upgrade two grid substations and convert 85 kilometers of overhead distribution lines to underground cables. The installation of the 2.5 million

Pakistan had a trade potential of \$37 billion which could be proved a powerful engine for the shared prosperity and reducing inequalities in the region. Read more: [Here](#)

Pakistani Prime Minister urges the international community to ensure easy transfer of technology(Source: Daily Star) 26 September 2018: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has urged the international community to ensure easy transfer of technology at low cost among the countries across the world to face the possible challenges during the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. (Daily Star). Read more: [Here](#)

Prime Minister Modi to be invited to Pakistan for SAARC summit, says foreign office spokesman (Source: Reuters) 27 November 2018: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be invited to Pakistan for the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit, Foreign Office Spokesman Dr. Mohammad Faisal said on Tuesday. Read more at: [Here](#)

Pakistan offers conducive environment for foreign investors, businessmen (Source: Business Recorder) 27 November 2018: President Dr. Arif Alvi Monday said Pakistan provided a very conducive environment for better investment and business opportunities and hoped that investors from different countries would avail them by investing in diverse areas. Read more: [Here](#)

World Bank: South Asia can benefit from trade war (Source: Dawn) 9 October 2018: The World Bank says South Asia's export opportunity has not gone away and import demand in the traditional destination markets for South Asian exports – the United States and Europe – will remain robust. Instead of seizing it by reorienting resources towards foreign markets, especially through fiscal consolidation, countries in the region seem to be drifting towards more traditional protectionist policies, says the World Bank in its report on South Asia. In the view of experts on South Asia at the South Asia Economic Policy Network, under the office of World Bank's regional Chief Economist, South Asia could even benefit from the current trade dispute between the US and China through trade diversion. Read more: [Here](#)

Sri Lanka signs port deals with China amid political upheaval (Source: Reuters) 30 November 2018: Sri Lanka signed two multi-million-dollar contracts with

service connections is now complete, and approximately 12.5 million Bangladeshis are getting direct benefits from the project. Remaining work of the project is expected to be completed by 2019. Read more: [Here](#)

Modi gives \$1.4 billion aid to the Maldives amid worry over its China debt (Source: Reuters) 18 December 2018: India will give financial assistance of \$1.4 billion to the Maldives, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Monday, the most significant aid yet to the Indian Ocean island nation that is grappling with debt from a Chinese building spree. Read more: [Here](#)

Facebook to train 5 million Indians in digital skills by 2021 (Source: Khaleej Times) 27 November 2018: To help small businesses in India reach the global economy, Facebook is planning to train five million people with digital skills in three years, a top company executive said. Read more: [Here](#)

c. Gender equality and empowerment

Bangladesh most gender equal country in South Asia (Source: Daily Star) 20 December 2018: Bangladesh ranked top among the countries of South Asia in closing the gender gap, according to a report by World Economic Forum published. Read more: [Here](#)

Bid to weed out hazardous child labor by 2020 (Source: Daily Star) 13 December 2018: The government has taken up a Tk 284 crore project to lift one lakh children out of a dangerous form of labor by 2020 with a view to brightening the country's image, said a top official of the labor ministry. Read more: [Here](#)

Bangladesh clothing factories would face squeeze if safety push blocked (Source: Reuters) 22 November 2019: A group set up to improve safety in Bangladesh's garment industry after the Rana Plaza disaster in 2013 is warning global fashion firms that they will have to stop sourcing from some factories if the watchdog is forced to close next week. Read more: [Here](#)

India needs to address "deeply rooted social norms" that discriminate against women, UNICEF (Source: Times of India) 17 December 2018: India needs to address "deeply rooted social norms" that discriminate against women as it could prevent the country's

Chinese firms for a port upgrade project on Thursday in the middle of a political hiatus that has raised doubts over the legitimacy of the government and the legality of the deals. Read more: [Here](#)

Sri Lanka Has the Potential to More Than Double Its Exports to South Asia (Source: World Bank) 8 October 2018: If trade barriers are overcome, trade within South Asia can increase three-fold, from \$23 billion to \$67 billion, suggests a new World Bank report. Sri Lanka has the potential to double its exports to South Asia. Increased intraregional trade will provide a greater variety of goods and services at lower prices for Sri Lankan consumers, better access to inputs for producers and exporters, increased investment, export diversification, and growth. The report, A Glass Half Full: The Promise of Regional Trade in South Asia, launched today, highlights four critical obstacles to regional trade - border tax distortions, nontariff barriers, connectivity costs, and trust deficits - and offers options for policymakers to address them. Read more: [Here](#)

The trajectory towards realizing the SDG targets is not going to be easy with the current levels of political commitment to these issues. Budgets for service delivery must be increased substantially without further delay. Read more: [Here](#)

Pakistan attaches high priority to objectives of human rights, democracy (Source: Associated Press of Pakistan) 11 December 2018: President Dr. Arif Alvi has said as a member state of the United Nations, Pakistan fully endorses the Charter of the United Nations which strives to promote and encourage respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms without any discrimination of race, gender, language or religion. Read more: [Here](#)

Pakistani Prime Minister calls for concerted efforts to safeguard rights of vulnerable segments (Source: Associated Press of Pakistan) 10 December 2018: Prime Minister Imran Khan has stressed upon the need to work against the exploitation and marginalization of vulnerable groups which deprives them of their fundamental rights, thus leading them to a life of dignity and equality. Read more: [Here](#)

Women's fight for toilets in rural Pakistan (Hindustan Times) 26 November 2018: For as long as she can remember, Ayeesha Siddiqua has fought her male relatives for access to toilets -- but a

development, UNICEF's deputy executive director Omar Abdi said. Read more: [Here](#)

To meet gender-related SDG targets, improve the resource allocation (Source: Hindustan Times) 16 October 2018: Gender equity is at the core of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) framework. However, inadequate resource allocation accounts for the continued deficit in health, nutrition and welfare outcomes for women and girls in India

d. Environmental sustainability and disaster resilience

Government signs World Bank deal for livestock funds (Source: Daily Star) 20 December 2018: The World Bank has approved USD 500 million to improve livestock and dairy production in Bangladesh so that the country can meet the growing demand for egg, meat and milk to improve the nutritional intake of its citizens. Read more: [Here](#)

Green projects barely attract banks (Source: Daily Star) 10 December 2018: Banks are reluctant to disburse green loans due to lack of awareness, found a study of the Bangladesh Institute of Bank Management, in a significant setback for the Bangladesh Bank's green banking initiative. Read more: [Here](#)

Development plans should be climate-smart: Asian Development Bank (Source: Daily Star) 30 November 2018: Bangladesh should introduce environment-friendly public transport for both short and long distances to significantly reduce heat-trapping emissions and adequately address climate change effects, ADB's country director said. Read more: [Here](#)

How climate change could be causing miscarriages in Bangladesh (Source: BBC) 27 November 2018: In small villages along the eastern coast of Bangladesh, researchers have noticed an unexpectedly high rate of miscarriage. As they investigated further, scientists concluded that climate change might be to blame. Read more: [Here](#)

Rice production slows (Source: Daily Star) 20 November 2018: The growth of rice production has slowed to only 0.4 percent since 2010, making it tough to feed the growing population amid a continuous fall in arable land, the chief of International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) said. Read more: [Here](#)

Ninety-two (92pc) of water contaminated in Bangladesh: World Bank (Source: Daily Bangladesh) 11 October 2018: A World Bank report released on

sanitation drive by new premier Imran Khan could make life easier for women in patriarchal Pakistan. Women in the village have long been forced to hide their bodily functions from the conservative, deeply patriarchal society, Siddiqua and other female residents told AFP. Read more: [Here](#)

More river stretches are critically polluted: Central Pollution Control Board (Source: The Hindu) 17 September 2018: The number of polluted stretches of the country's rivers has increased to 351 from 302 two years ago, and the number of critically polluted stretches — where water quality indicators are the poorest — has gone up to 45 from 34, according to an assessment by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). Read more: [Here](#)

Greenhouse gas emissions from Indian paddy fields very high: study (Source: The Hindu) 11 September 2018: Rice farming across the world could be responsible for up to twice the level of climate impact relative to what was previously estimated, according to a study conducted in India. The study, published in PNAS, found that intermittently flooded rice farms can emit 45 times more nitrous oxide as compared to the maximum from continuously flooded farms that predominantly emit methane. Read more: [Here](#)

Asian Development Bank to Boost Disaster Resilience of Quake-Damaged Schools in Nepal (Source: Asian Development Bank) 11 September 2018: The Board of Directors of the Asian Development Bank has approved a loan and grant package totaling more than \$160 million to improve schools' resilience to disasters in three provinces of Nepal. "The project will help the Government of Nepal meet a share of the financing gap to reconstruct schools heavily damaged by the devastating earthquake of 2015," said ADB Country Director in Nepal Mr. Mukhtor Khamudkhanov. "The newly constructed schools will not only be earthquake resilient but also provide a safe learning environment for children with improved facilities and systems." Read more: [Here](#)

Clean, Green Drive: 'CGP covers five factors in list of SDGs' (Source: The Express Tribune) 21 December 2018: Adviser to the Prime Minister on Climate Change Malik Amin Aslam said the Prime Minister's Clean and

Thursday found that E. coli bacteria was present in 80 percent of private piped-water taps sampled across the country, a similar rate to water retrieved from ponds. According to health experts, most E. coli strains are harmless, but some serotypes can cause serious food poisoning in their hosts and are occasionally responsible for product recalls due to food contamination. Read more: [Here](#)

Experts for promoting ‘eco-village’ concept to achieve SDGs (Source: United News of Bangladesh) 2 October 2018: Experts at a knowledge-sharing workshop have demanded government policy and cooperation to promote the ‘eco-village’ concept to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They also opined that the government should adopt the eco-village development as one of their core strategies of low carbon development and ensure the long-term socio-economic development. Read more: [Here](#)

Green Pakistan initiative had directly addressed Sustainable Development Goals, including WASH (water, sanitation, and hygiene) priorities. Read more: [Here](#)

Smog to blanket Karachi for next couple of days, says regional met official (Source: Dawn) 15 November 2018: Unusual smog-like conditions prevailed in Karachi on Wednesday morning, causing poor visibility and difficulty for drivers in various parts of the city, along with exacerbating respiratory issues in people who have asthma. Read more: [Here](#)

Pakistani Ministry of Climate Change to Start Glacial Lake Project to Combat Flooding (Source: Pro Pakistani) 5 September 2018: The Ministry of Climate Change will initiate Glacial Lake Outburst Flood-II (GLOF-II) Project at the cost of US\$ 37 million with the support of Climate Change Fund. According to senior officials of the ministry, under the project, 250 small-scale structures including check dams, mini dams, ponds, spillways, and slope stabilization will be established. Fifty weather monitoring stations and 408 river discharge gauges/sensors will also be built as part of this initiative. Read more: [Here](#)

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