Crashing physician Govinda KC's fast enters its 10th day on Friday. Even as his health deteriorates, Parliament shows no sign giving in to his demands to clean up the greed and corruption in medical education that keeps Nepal's health care unaffordable and inaccessible to citizens.

This week, Parliament fast tracked the National Medication Education Bill 2016, but not in the way KC has demanded. He had wanted a 10-year moratorium on new private medical colleges, but the draft submitted to the Social Welfare Committee of Parliament to be tabled in the House on Friday does not meet that demand.

In fact, the taskforce is said to have added a clause to the bill allowing medical colleges which had already received their Letter of Intent and built infrastructure, to go ahead. If the bill is passed, at least five new medical colleges will spring up in Kathmandu Valley alone.

KC rejected the draft and his negotiators have refused to talk with the government. After 18 days without food and water on Thursday, the doctor is sinking fast. Physiotherapist Dhya Singh of Teaching Hospital warned: “He may pass out and need medical reassessments at any time.”

Both the ruling and opposition party MPs reject KC’s demand, saying no one can infringe on the right of the legislature to pass laws. Social activist Chaitanya Mishra agrees, but adds: “If owners of banks, private schools and private medical colleges pass bills in the name of MPs it is not acceptable.”

Private medical colleges are either owned by politicians or have political protection. Given the scant disregard politicians showed towards another hunger striker, Nanda Prasad Adhikari, who died during his fast in 2014, there is now reason to fear for Govinda KC’s life.

Om Astha Rai
3-PARTY DICTATORSHIP

Ever since the conflict ended, Nepal’s political transition has inexorably concentrated decision-making power in the hands of the alpha males of the three main political parties. The Nepali Congress (NC), UML and the Maoists are the Father, Son and the Holy Ghost of Nepali politics, and their leaders Sher Bahadur Deuba, KP Oli and Pushpa Kamal Dahal have consolidated power both within their parties, and together over the Kathmandu establishment.

Reading the headlines in the papers these days it may seem like they are at each other’s throats, but that is an illusion. All three work hard to-glove to preserve and protect their strengthening hold over Nepali politics. The 10 governments in the last 10 years have been, in the main, pretensions of these three parties. The last four coalition governments after the 2013 elections have just shuffled the cards, with the weakest of the three parties wielding the most clout because of its king-maker role in government formation.

In normal circumstances it could be considered a good thing that adversarial parties like the NC and the Maoists can work together even though their leaders last we forgot, tried to kill each other off not too long ago. But these are not normal times. The force played out in Bhaktapur is an extreme example of the unprincipled you scratch my back I scratch yours kind of politics today. Dahal confronted Deuba to withdraw the NC’s mayoral candidate in Bhaktapur and support his daughter Sushma. When it looked like she might lose, Maoists tore up ballot papers and later the coalition partners leaned on the Election Commission and the Supreme Court to order a recount.

The NC-Maoist combination regrouped and pipped the UML-candidate by a razor-thin margin. A sign of the times was the photograph of the Maoist and Congress flags stitched together at Sushma Dahal’s victory rally last week.

Shameful collective greed and power was also on full display this week in the talks the three parties held about addressing the demands of Gorakpa KC, who on Friday is on the 19th day of his fast unto death to reform medical education. (See page 1)

The lack of interest has also been hard at work through its MPRs to roll back the gains in devolving power to elected local village councils and municipalities by passing a bill in Parliament to limit their revenue-raising powers.

In the absence of elected VDCs and UDCs, the three parties ruled the country for the past decade through what they cynically called a ‘Political Mechanism’—dividing up the spoils so that local budgets went into personal and party coffers. They either control, or influence, just about every other constitutional institution in the country.

Public apathy and disillusionment with the political class, fed by social media and the ep pages, is at its peak.

Time is now ripe for a credible alternative force to rise and challenge this stagnant status quo.

ONLINE PACKAGES

TALKING BREAST CANCER

Most breast cancer patients in Nepal need palliative care for treatment, due to lack of awareness about the disease and taboos regarding acquiring surgical health. With a young breast cancer survivor speaking about her battle with the disease, how she overcame it, and how she knew it was time to cut out a greater chance of survival.

MUSTANG MONSOON

Mustang has an eye for spectacular photography, scenery, history, culture, adventure. But three months of this region are regarded as off-season and few backpackers visit. This week we take you to the former kingdom and say Mustang, let’s face it where you are missing is staying away.

GUEST EDITORIAL

RAMESHWAR BOHARA

Fix a date

After trailing buddy in the last two phases of local elections, the Nepali Congress and Maoists are trying their best to make up ground in the third phase on 18 September in Province 2. However, in doing so they are being very far from the face of major R-NPs, and also have to connect with the UML, which is trying to build on its gains elsewhere. Both Sher Bahadur Deuba and KP Oli are campaigning in the plains, and the UML is evidently taking the caution of the lowahl in Parliament.

The recently united R-NPs, however, is already on the verge of a split as the party is pushed into a corner in Province 2. It is going to be a tough game on how strategy to push for constitutional amendments before agreeing to contest polls. The Indian ambassador in Kathmandu has, reportedly, met R-NP leaders and urged them to take part, and he also drove over to Baluwat last week to invite Oli to the Indian Republic Day ceremony. Oli is said to have expressed his doubts in his view whether the NC and Maoists were serious about province and parliamentary polls.

There is a constitutional deadline to hold elections by those dates 21 January 2018. There are signs that sections of both the NC and Maoists (still smarting from the general election) locally put up a ticket Four-time prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba’s record on holding elections is also not very good. In 2001, he provoked local polls at the last moment, and they were not held again for 15 years. He was later tricked by King Gyennendra in 2006 for his inability to hold parliamentary elections himself and precipitated a dissolution of the House.

Despite reports that the Indian Ambassador is pushing for elections, there is a talk that some New Delhi don’t want elections under a constitution it still dislikes. Deuba is scheduled to visit New Delhi this month, and there is concern that he may have to take orders there and cut short his stay.

To be sure, the elections in Parliament are ready to be passed. The Elections Commission says it is ready, but may not be able to hold constitutional and parliamentary polls together. It gets a hectic hectic, parliamentary elections can take place and the provincial one can be put off. Senior NC and Maoists admit the government has run out of resources to postpone elections. That boils both, but as long as Deuba is PM there will always be doubt.

Rameshwar Bohara is Senior Correspondent at Nepal Times.
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Different regionalisms

It is important to get SAARC back on its feet, without denying the importance of the sub-regional BIMSTEC syringe. The other heads of government also proved unwilling to take on the Delhi juggernaut. Islamabad did not protest too loudly either, propped up as it was with its own political turmoil and its attempts to reach out to Central Asia, China, Iran and the Gulf emirs.

South Asian regionalism was thus allowed to slide in a manner that does not do justice to a region with nearly a fourth of the world’s population, with its shared history, and the need for economic growth and social justice. With all its obvious weaknesses, SAARC signifies acceptance by the rulers of the need for peace, stability and cooperation in southern Asia.

Besides losing three decades, allowing SAARC to gather dust on the top shelf would mean massive lost opportunities, and lead to exacerbated tensions among the region’s countries. It would also push Pakistan further away from the South Asian fold, denying our civilizational history that began in the Indus plains. Certainly, SAARC could not function without participation of the second most populous member. The entire BIMSTEC Secretariat, officers and staff, headquartered in Dhaka, have moved to Kathmandu for the foreign minister’s summit here this week, while the SAARC Secretariat at Thane is jobless. The new SAARC Secretary General from Pakistan is finally at his desk, but there is no saying when he can get really active – much hinges on when Narendra Modi decides that the time is right to allow the 19th Summit to happen.

For now, the Indian prime minister seems intent on excluding Pakistan from regional activities, and does not seem shy even of using BIMSTEC for the purpose. The ‘outcome document’ signed at the BIMSTEC summit in Goa in October 2016 included a pointed reference to Pakistan in the paragraph condemning terrorism. BIMSTEC was started in June 1997 as a sub-regional grouping for inter-state cooperation, the acronym originally signifying ‘Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Myanmar – Economic Cooperation’. With the accession of Nepal and Bhutan in 2004, a title was required to justify the original acronym, and hence the day of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation. Quite a mouthful.

The overall collaborative regional format for the nations of South- and Southeast Asia should be such that organisations are complementary and cross-cutting. SAARC should prosper and so must BIMSTEC, and while the regionalism of BIMSTEC may emphasise peace, security and economic cooperation, the sub-regional grouping may more efficiently manage infrastructure and socio-economic matters.

India’s interest in promoting BIMSTEC should therefore be seen as positive and forward looking, while its insistence on putting SAARC in cold storage must be critiqued. A weakened SAARC can only make South Asia a more dangerous place, which is why we must try to get SAARC back on its feet. The first step for which would have to be holding the 19th Summit in Islamabad.

As current chair of both SAARC and BIMSTEC, Nepal has the responsibility to push for both organisations forward. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif’s visit to New Delhi in March 2023 can be seen as a positive sign. The only way forward is through the mechanism of BIMSTEC, which has been shown to be a platform for regional cooperation.

The next step is for India to bring Pakistan back into the fold. This will require a change in mindset, but it is essential for the long-term stability of the region. The SAARC summit scheduled for November 2023 in Islamabad provides an opportunity to do so. It is important for India to take the lead in this process, as it has a key role to play in bringing the region together.

In conclusion, it is crucial for India to consider the long-term benefits of regional cooperation, both through SAARC and BIMSTEC. The recent developments in the region have shown that exclusion does not work, and that cooperation is necessary for peace and stability. The next steps are crucial for the future of the region, and India must take the lead in this process.
Rebuilding a dream

Progress for many who lost homes in the earthquake is painfully slow, still slower for others

More than two years after the earthquake of 2015, most people whose houses were heavily damaged or destroyed still haven't started rebuilding. The figure is 50% or greater in 11 districts except for Gorkha (48%); Syangja (57%) and Solukhumbu, where an estimated 91% have begun the task, unlike earlier results of the fourth survey in a series led by the Asia Foundation.

Other results are equally shocking. For instance, 23% of people in the 11 earthquake-affected districts were still living in temporary shelters. In Sindhupalchowk, the figure was 84%. At the other end of the scale was Lamjung (1%).

Among people who had received the first tranche of the housing grant, 47% did not know the requirements for getting the second tranche, that included 51% of women and 60% of so-called low-caste people.

There has been improvement. Sixty-two percent of people in the most-affected districts reported being in temporary shelters, compared to 71% in September 2016. The survey is part of the Independent Impacts and Recovery Monitoring Project carried out in April 2017 by interdisciplinary analyists of the Asia Foundation (TIA), with support from UK aid agency DFID and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

“The shelter and housing situation is improving but there is still a long way to go and progress has been slower than that following many other disasters in the region,” says TIA’s conflict lead, Patrick Barron. “There are some areas where progress has been particularly slow.”

Marginalised and displaced are recovering more slowly. Across all districts, 58% of people with a low income (below Rs10,000 per month) are still in shelters, compared to 20% with a medium income (Rs10,000-19,999) and 10% with a high income (Rs20,000 or more), while 14% of low-caste people whose houses were damaged were still in shelters, compared to 33% of high-caste people who had the same housing damage, Barron said.

The TIA briefing notes points out that the differences are a result of differing abilities to recover rather than differing initial impacts from the earthquake.

In a recent article in this paper, Gaunt Raj Bhandari of the Nepal Reconstruction Authority (NRA) said work in the coming year would focus on ensuring that deprived and marginalised groups, including single parents, the elderly, people with disabilities, the poor, youth, and Dalits, are not left behind.

Bo Paudel’s downplayed expectations: “Our institutional capacities are weak, we lack skilled human resources and flexible financial mechanisms, and the country is in the midst of a political transition. Today the resource gap for physical rebuilding stands at $3.3billion but if we can add financing, we can complete most reconstruction in the next three years.”

In its latest report in May 2017 following the third survey in the series, the NRA calls for urgent action on shelter and housing.

As in the earlier three surveys (June 2015, Feb-March 2016 and Sept 2016), 4,384 people were interviewed, while possible the same areas. Full results of the survey will be released in September. - Marty Logan

Tibetan Airlines lands

Tibet Airlines has started direct Chengdu-Kathmandu flights four days a week. The U-turn-based flight will operate Airbus 319s on the route, bringing the number of flights to Chinese cities to and from Kathmandu to 25 a week.

Gas station strike

Oil men have started striking at petrol stations as private dealers put pressure on Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) to increase compensation for transportation during transport. NOC itself is under investigation for a land scam.

Baby-friendly Turkish

Turkish Airlines has introduced specially designed baby pools for Turkish women with babies up to two years of age. They include a diaper changing mat, disposable baby bib, rash cream, baby lotion, baby shampoo, wipe and breast pad.

Fisa-free entry

Visa will allow visa-free entry for citizens of 82 countries, effective immediately.

Styleback in town

Sukshodan, being launched in Nepal the ‘Styleback’ line of tiger which is said to be intelligently engineered with superior ingredients, is priced at Rs2.34 million for the Brazilian 1.01L (petrol variant).
India and China at tri-junctures

The Doklam standoff has driven a wedge between India and Bhutan

NEW DELHI — Nearly two months after it flared up, the standoff between China and India in the Doklam region of Bhutan is showing no sign of resolution. For New Delhi, the best possible scenario would be a mutual troop withdrawal by both armies and a return to the pre-16 June status quo near the strategic point where the borders of India, China and Bhutan meet.

But India’s offer last week for a mutual 20km withdrawal from the border has been already rejected by the Chinese, who instead claim that since India is in a third country’s territory, there is little to negotiate about unless Indian soldiers withdraw unilaterally first.

India, on the other hand, has maintained an unusual silence over the matter. External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj did speak in Parliament, stating that the problem could be resolved only through dialogue. But there has been only one MEA statement, on 30 June, which said that the construction of a new road by China was a violation of the 1986 and 1998 agreements between Bhutan and China. It added that this had serious security implications for India.

There is speculation that the two governments are in touch, but what, if any, progress has been made is unknown. India’s national security adviser, Ajit Doval, took up Indian concerns with the Chinese during his visit to China last month. But nothing public was said and in fact, China since then has stepped up criticism of India through its media.

What complicates things is that India and Bhutan do not seem to be on the same page over the crisis. Some Indian security experts say India unilaterally sent additional troops to the Bhutan-China border without Bhutan’s consent. It has emerged that Thimphu has long desired to end its border dispute with China. In 2002 and 2012 China-Bhutan talks, Beijing is said to have wanted to swap territory in north-western Bhutan with a region along the central border as a package deal. India opposed this as it would have weakened its own border talks with the Chinese.

For the first time, Bhutanese academics and journalists have been openly critical of India, and some young Bhutanese have expressed strong anti-Indian positions in their blogs and on social networking sites. The standoff, therefore, has driven a wedge between India and Bhutan.

Given the rigid positions of India and China there are indications the crisis may drag on till winter. Neither nuclear power may want to risk a full-fledged war, but the dispute has opened some important facets. First, it has exposed the possibility of future flare-ups along either disputed parts of the Himalayan border. There have been standoffs before, notably in Depsang in Ladakh four years ago, which took three weeks to resolve. This time, the Chinese want Indian troops to withdraw even before any dialogue can take place.

Second, China is openly challenging India’s traditional space in South Asia. Besides its all-weather friendship with Pakistan, China is competing with India for influence in Nepal and Sri Lanka, and now with India’s closest ally Bhutan. All this is a reflection of China’s increasing international clout at a time when the United States appears to be taking a back seat.

Third, China appears to be sensitive to Indian efforts to seek strategic partnerships with the US and Japan — especially because of their joint naval exercises in the Indian Ocean. South Asia’s smaller countries, like Nepal and Bhutan, need to urge their giant neighbours to arrive for greater strategic maturity. Nepal Foreign Minister Krishna Bahadur Mahara rightly stated this week that Nepal will not take sides in the current dispute, an important position statement just before Prime Minister Dr Baburam Bhattarai arrives here next week for his first visit after taking office.

India needs to tread carefully since Nepal has a similar tri-junction dispute in Lipu Lekh, and Chinese officials have hinted that the Sin-o-Indian understanding of it (which left out Nepal) could be raised. Nepal’s interest was dented when India and China were friends, but it will be much more damaging for us if the India and China dispute intensifies.
The guilt of freedom
Saga of an Indian-Chinese family interned during the 1962 war has resonance today

As the Quit India movement gathered strength, the British colonial authorities in Delhi built an internment camp in the village of Dooli in the Rajasthan desert. One of the inmates in the many huts there in the 1930s was Jawaharlal Nehru. The British finally left India in 1947. Nehru became prime minister, and to the spirit of pan-Asian solidarity built strong rapport with Mao Zedong. ‘Hindi Chini Bhai Bhai’ was the rallying cry to those post-colonial times. This friendship did not last, and a dispute over sections of the 2,500km Himalayan border between the two countries (demarcated by Henry McMahon in 1913 but never officially recognised by China) fared into open warfare in 1962.

More than 2,000 Chinese traders and businessmen who had settled down during British times in Calcutta, Darjeeling and Northeastern India were rounded up, jailed and then transported in trains to Dooli, where many spent up to five years. Yie Marsh was 19 then, and her family was assigned the shed (pictured above) in which 30 years previously the same Nehru, who ordered the internment of Indians of Chinese origin, had been detained by the British.

Marsh (left) and her eight-year-old brother were released after a few months with the help of her mother, who had moved to Kathmandu to set up a hotel, restaurant and beauty parlour. Among her customers were members of Nepal’s royal family, and the American Embassy staff helped get the siblings out of Dooli and flew them to Kathmandu.

Marsh had decided to forget the injustice, pain and separation of her early life, and after marrying an American diplomat at the Kathmandu embassy moved to the United States. But upon learning how little even the younger generation of Indian-Chinese knew about the internment camps, she decided to write Doing Time with Nehru.

The book has resonance today as relations between India and China are once more strained. Marsh begins her book with a harsh reminder of the high-handedness of Indian officials when a rude policeman at Dum Dum threatened to arrest her for taking pictures as her extended family returns to Calcutta for a reunion in 2001.

Doing Time with Nehru doesn’t have the sweeping historical tour d’horizon of Wendy Ng’s Japanese-American Internment During World War II, or others like Kimi Cunningham Grant’s epic story of her grandmother in Silver Like Dust: One Family’s Story of America’s Japanese Internment. But Yie Marsh paints a raw picture of the consequences to individual lives when recurring racial artificialities lead to internment for an entire ethnic population as an enemy when war breaks out.

Like Yie Marsh’s family, most Indian-Chinese never got their property back, many returned to Mao’s China after being released and others are scattered all over the world. Her book is another tragic reminder of how families are torn apart and lives ruined when they are trapped in wars waged by men. F

Kama Dutt

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As breast cancer cases multiply, survivors break taboos and talk about the disease so it can be detected and treated early

SONIA AWALE

By the time she was 32, Suvreksha Ghimire had a promising career: a supportive family and breast cancer. For the first time in her young life the UK-based consultant overcome social taboos to talk openly about reproductive health (see box article, below). As she underwent treatment, she is determined to spread awareness about the disease so it can be detected and treated early.

Breast cancer is one of the most common cancer among females worldwide and the second most common in Nepal after cervical cancer. About 1 in every 10 female cancers in the country is breast cancer, and that proportion is increasing. Public health expert Aruna Upreti thinks the incidence could be even higher because a large number of breast cancer cases still go undetected in rural Nepal. "This could just be the tip of the iceberg," she told us.

Studies in 2013 and 2016 concluded that a quarter of all breast cancer patients are below age 40, and that the malignancy is at an advanced stage and spreading by the time they are diagnosed. "Breast cancer in younger women are more aggressive. We need to give special attention to early diagnosis in younger age groups," says Suresh.

Unlike cancer of the cervix, breast cancer spreads rapidly due to its close proximity to the lungs, often leading to pulmonary metastasis. Follow-ups are also important, because 10% of breast cancer cases suffer relapse after treatment of the primary tumour. Studies have shown that the average onset age of breast cancer in the high-risk age group is 10 years earlier than in developed western countries.

A study last year by the Nepal Cancer Hospital and Research Centre, confirmed by other surveys, showed that women in

Let’s talk about boobs

As a teenager, my mother told me about two things: one was my periods and the other was about growing breasts. The only other information I received about reproductive health was about sanitary pads and sports bras.

Since then, every so often, if my dress was too low she would give me that stare. My father, like most fathers in Nepal, never acknowledged my growing womanhood and left the responsibility to my mother.

We are told not to speak openly about our breasts or our reproductive organs. Our culture celebrates women as goddesses, but also puts women behind bars in chhaupadi. Some argue that it’s our culture, but this means internalising the taboos.

Women feel forced into unsafe abortions. They contract STIs and are too embarrassed or too afraid of judgment to seek help. Parents don’t feel comfortable to discuss these issues and few schools include them as part of their curriculum.

After having gone through treatment for breast cancer I realised that breaking taboos is the first step to saving lives. It is as important as medical treatment.

I was living a perfectly healthy life: doing regular yoga for over three years, eating mostly organic, and had a balanced life in general. I didn’t smoke, I was a social drinker — just an average girl.

That morning in May, before going for a shower, my mom said something was not right when I looked at myself in the mirror. My doctor confirmed these were no visible lumps, no discomfort, no discharge, no inversion of the nipples. I didn’t want to leave it at that, and insisted on seeing a specialist. I got an inconclusive ultrasound that led to a biopsy, which then confirmed invasive carcinoma, Stage 2.

Past forward through all the emotional turmoil and the most daunting part: The Treatment. That I had cancer was an inescapable fact. A year on, the doctors are saying I’ve made an extremely fast recovery. I speak about it openly with my friends and families. I am writing this piece.

I’ve had people tell me that this happened to me because I’ve eaten meat, or because I have bad karma hangover from my previous life. I just remind them that 1 in every 10 women has cancer, so let’s hope you also don’t have a nasty karma.

What do you do when you don’t have any of the obvious symptoms? My lump was too small to feel from the outside. My husband, though ever so supportive and positive, also thought I was being paranoid. But I know my own body better
their 40s are most at risk, with 33% of all cases in the 40-49 age bracket. Besides the economic burden on the family, breast cancer patients also suffer psychological trauma and will need family support.

Says Aruna Upreti: “When a patient has to get a mastectomy, she might go through severe depression due to stigma and taboo, and would also need counselling.”

Kalyan, a breast cancer support group in Haridwar, is the first to introduce peer counselling by cancer survivors. A member, Pratima Kharal, explains: “My experience as a cancer survivor made me think that if an educated, career woman like me has a hard time with it, how will rural women with no help deal with the disease? So I decided to help, and I have found them motivated and determined to fight back after proper counselling.”

Although treatment of breast cancer is now available in Nepal, it is still expensive and not affordable or accessible to everyone. The government provides Rs 100,000 for treatment but it involves time-consuming paperwork.

Public awareness and early detection remain the best options, and every woman above 20 should ideally perform monthly self-examination. This requires adolescents to be educated about breast cancer in schools and government to reach out to the public so as to no longer a taboo. Rural areas can be reached through radio, tv and mobile camps.

“Government hospitals should add breast examination days to spread awareness, promote regular examination to detect hidden cases,” senior gynaecologist Bimala Malla at Valley Maternity Nursing Home told Nepal Times.

Risk factors for breast cancer include food habits, one’s genes, environmental toxins, obesity and smoking. Up to 10% of cases can be hereditary, so those who have two or more close relatives with the ailment should have regular examinations, along with women who have cervical cancer and all women under 35. Few people know that 1% of breast cancer patients in Nepal are male.

Management of breast cancer requires early diagnosis, availability of proper treatment, insurance, and easy-to-access state subsidies.

Says Pratima Kharal of Kalyan: “If identified early, if there is positive thinking, strong willpower and family support, breast cancer isn’t a big thing. We can defeat it and lead normal lives.”

TELL TALE SIGNS

- Swelling even in no distinct lump
- Skin irritation or dimpling
- Breast or nipple pain
- Nipple inversion
- Thickening of breast skin
- Nipple discharge

You should be doing a self-examination every month. The world does it on the 1st of every month and so should you. When something goes wrong, your body will give you signs that you should not ignore. Girls as young as 19 can develop breast cancer; it can happen to anyone.

We are eating more processed food than ever; it contains chemicals. We have no idea where it is coming from and we believe that imported food is better. It is not. We think cancer is a disease of the western world, but denial doesn’t help. A small percentage of us will still get the disease, and this number is increasing.

A tumor is not a disease in itself, rather a product of something that is malfunctioning in our bodies. Until research can pinpoint the cause, we must take care of our minds, bodies and surroundings.

This is not only a problem in a culture that doesn’t talk about reproduction openly. The main issue is self-awareness and public awareness. Let’s be brave. Let’s talk about it.

Suekhyaa Ghimire is a Senior Partnership and Resource Consultant in the UK.

TALKING BREAST CANCER

Go online to watch Suekhyaa Ghimire speak about her battle with breast cancer and how the awareness social taboos to talk about reproductive health. Learn how early detection improves the survival rate.
The connection, Participate in this charity event to support hand-capped dogs. Money collected will be used to build a home for 14 underprivileged and elderly dogs.
7 September, 2pm onwards, The Heritage Garden, Serendib, 91-3000, 9807139008

Comic con in Nepal
Fans of Marvel, DC, Anime, games and the comic genre are in for a treat. The event will also host international cosplay artists from Japan, the Philippines and India.
9 September, 10am-6pm, Heritage Garden, Serendib, 91-3000-8906

Vocal workshop, Register to learn singing techniques from renowned jazz vocalist Diantra Dalimi, hosted by Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory.
5-7 October, 10am-6pm, http://www.jazz.com.np/vocal-teacher-diantra-dalimi/

Obstacle race, Be adventurous and test your strength in Nepal’s first obstacle race.
9 September, 6 am, Godawari Football Ground. Rs 1,000, free for ultra-run.

Getaway

Divine live
Popular Indian hip hop singer Divine will perform live in Kathmandu for the first time.
16 August, 6pm onwards, The Factory, Chanak, 91-4707185

Kanta dab dab
Book your seats for a musical night with Nepali fusion band “Kanta dab dab.”
16 August, 5-8pm onwards, Bose Camp, Outdoor Lounge, Tallakot, Kalimati, 9840212189

Gypsy Jazz
Groove to the tunes of gypsy jazz with international artists and Nepali gurry maestro Irai Maharjan.
17 August, 7-10pm onwards, Bose Camp, Outdoor Lounge, Tallakot, Kalimati, 9841212619

Asitwada, Enjoy a live performance by Asitwada.
12 August, 7-10pm, Atlas Lounge Restaurant, Tallakot, 9807139008

Become a photographer, Register for a 10-day photography workshop.
August, 7-15, Atlas, Chinnori Hospital Road, Fee Rs 5,500, 9807377077, 9861180088, atlasbody@hotmail.com

Music for a cause, Your favourite band BPG and singer Sapana Thapa Rimal will perform live to support the students of Palanath Shivapuri Secondary School.
26 August, 6pm onwards, Bose Camp Lounge, Tallakot, Kalimati, 9841443747

Atartandum, Book your seats for a musical event by bands MA and Fye, from Kathmandu University, and get a taste of folk, traditional ensemble and a rare combination of sound.
14 August, 7pm, Swasthyana Theatre, Kailbahad, Kathmandu, Rs 10,000 (gur front), Rs 7,500 (door side), 91-4717707

Before the flood, Support bird conservation by participating in a charity dinner and screening of the documentary before the flood.
11 August, 7pm, Gurne Dr. Chef, CTI Mall, Sundarwak, Kalimati, 9842113895, 9840212312

Musician in Kathmandu on 11 August

Art without borders, Save the date for this exhibition themed ‘Buddhism in Modern Times.’
12-16 August, 10am-6pm, Siraha Dhru Art Gallery, Kwitshina Road, 91-5339262

Vegan night, Treat your taste buds with a special vegan dishes and savour a carnival of tastes.
17 August, 6pm onwards, Introdu Modesto, Germany, Poland, 9847755700, 9807325548

Monsoon Sundays, Food connoisseurs can relish a succulent barbecue with a choice of African, Arabic or Mediterranean specialties, along with access to the swimming pool.
22 July onwards, 12.30-2.30pm, Rs 3,999 per person, Introdu Regency www.kathmandu.regencyhotels.net

Embers, A large and easy dining den serving continental and Nepali flavours.
Kishore Gul, Patan, 91-5554708, embers.in@gmail.com, www.embers-restaurant.com

La Bella Cafe, Come and join us for this weekend.
Chholing Marg, Thamel, 91-4700678

Rupakot Resort, Overlook the valley and enjoy stunning views of the Annapurna range.
Modesto R, Rupakot, Kaski. 91-623686 / 6233687, 9862353943, 9862363952, www.rupakot-hotel.com

Kasara Resort, A luxury resort located in the lush setting of Chitwan National Park. For those who value their privacy and prefer to have secluded stay, Kasara offers two private villas with private pools.
Chitwan (91)467/351497/5, 9862363943, 9862363952, info@kasarakia.com

Patalien Vineyard Resort, 15min west of Kathmandu, this resort is a perfect place to spend your weekend with food and wine. It offers astounding views of the sunsets and mountains.
Chandpal Bhanepal, road, 91-4316377

Gokarna Forest Resort, A luxurious and tranquil retreat in Pokhara.
Gokarna, 91-4857372, info@gokarna.net

Dwarika’s Hotel, A little slice of paradise hidden in the middle of the city. Start the day with yoga classes in this award winning heritage hotel.
Battisputali, Khotondra, 91-4470770

The Last Resort, Canyoning, hiking, rock climbing, rafting, mountain biking, bungee jumping – test your limits at the Last Resort.
Bhagsu, 91-401224/484020, info@hiltonresort.com.np

Solid Rock, Enjoy a relaxing stay in this traditional Nepali Farmhouse away from the hustle and bustle of Kathmandu.
Solid Rock Lodge & Restaurant, Dalli, near Mong, 9862303907

European Bakery, For pastries, cookies, cakes, rolls, cakes and many more. Don’t miss the Saturday special doughnuts.
Chamchini, 986234348

Tabela, Satisfy your taste buds with exotic cuisines this weekend.
Narasuwor,Thamel, 9857209975

Barahi Jungle Lodge, The first eco-jungle lodge in Chitwan directly overlooks Chitwan National Park, Spa, boutique guest-room, individual and two-room guruta villas, including a suite with a private swimming pool.
Megpau, Chitwan, 91-4451802

Café Jireh, For a peaceful evening and the best firewood pizza.
Bhaisepati, 91-5528162
Jomsom in the off-season

Don’t let the rains deter you from visiting Mustang in the monsoon

SEAN SHOEMAKER
in MUSTANG

The monsoon season is finally scuttling to an end, but as we know from previous years, it will not pass without a bang and some squalls are still in store.

These three months of rain are traditionally regarded as the ‘off season’ and do not precipitate tourists into Nepal. Though visitors are often discouraged from visiting at the height of the trans-Himalayan rain shadow, they don’t know what they are missing.

That information gap is what some in the industry are trying to correct, with a new type of tourism: promote the rain as an attraction itself in the arid but oil-rich sheikhdoms of the Persian Gulf. Or, as some have done in Mustang and Manang, sell the areas where the rains don’t reach.

Visitor arrival statistics show that the volume of tourists coming to Nepal decreases in May each year. These numbers stay low until August, picking up again at the end of September. Monsoon tourism is restricted to Indian pilgrims or Tibet-bound tourists making a stopover in Kathmandu.

But there is tremendous untapped potential for tourism in the districts behind the Annapurnas because the high mountains stop the monsoon clouds, says Tripple Gurung, owner of Om’s Home in Jomsom.

“The government needs to promote the monsoon, it needs to advertise, we need more visitors in the rainy season,” says Gurung, who also runs the Red House Hotel in Kagbeni.

Jomsom gets a flood of Indian and Nepali pilgrim traffic going to Muktinath, and there are also high-end trekking groups to Upper Mustang that are ready to pay the extra fees for visiting the restricted area.

Hotels like Gurung are doing their own promotion, inviting guests staying in Jomsom to also spend a night or two in Kagbeni. The challenge for them is to fill up their hotels during the monsoon slump, when numbers are down 80% from the peak in September-October.

“Most of our guests in the monsoon are pilgrims, but even that is erratic because the road to Pokhara is often blocked by landslides,” says Karma Gurung, owner of Hotel Bob Marley in Muktinath where the famous Jamaican reggae singer is rumored to have stayed. Legend has it Jimi Hendrix also visited.

The seven-hour jeep ride to Pokhara is not for the faint-hearted, and flights are irregular during the monsoon due to weather. Priya Giri, who runs Mach, is a South Indian who lives in Oman. “Muktinath has always been on my mind: this happens to be the most difficult and sought after pilgrimage,” she says, “but it is a very bumpy ride. Our jeep was going backwards and suddenly it stopped. Our driver wasn’t able to go up and the tyres were skidding: I was really scared.”

Pilgrims can now ride all the way to Muktinath. From there, visitors are able to catch views of the dramatic transition from sub-tropical jungle to alpine forest and high-altitude desert within a few hours of driving. The Kali Gandaki Gorge is the deepest in the world, with the river flowing between eight thousanders Mt Bhagashiri and Mt Annapurna.

Says Tripple Gurung: “Mustang is such a unique place. It is blessed compared to other parts of Nepal. It has everything for everyone: pilgrimage, scenery, leisure, adventure.

As challenging as it may be to fight the stigma attached to the monsoon, Gurung seems hopeful and determined. “We need to find a marketing campaign, we need to get this off-season out of our mind.”

Roundup Resort

Shekpa, Jomsom, Mustang, Nepal

Tel: 00977 6 4217111
Fax: 00977 6 4217100

Contact: Chitrakar Ranjit, Shekpa Resort

Web: www.tourism.nepal

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King Arthur and the
Legend of the Sword

I’ve always liked Guy Ritchie’s directing style: his clever, almost glib, films with hilarious no-goods who are forever getting themselves into the most complicated scrapes are a riot. His first film Lock Stock and Two Smoking Barrels (1998) is still a modern screwball classic, and his subsequent attempts, while increasingly sophisticated (think the Sherlock Holmes reboot with none other than Robert Downey Jr and Jude Law in the main roles of Sherlock and his Dr Watson) have never quite been able to replicate the sheer freshness and cheeky fun of his earlier films.

That being said, Ritchie’s latest production, King Arthur and the Legend of the Sword, is nowhere as abysmal rumoured to be. Now out on DVD after a rather horrible run in the cinemas, Ritchie’s version of King Arthur is fresh, funny and hallmarked with his signature style where people speak fast, joke fun at each other, the action is anticipated often by speeding up or slowing down frame rates, and style is sometimes favoured over character development.

The wise guy in this film is the young Arthur (Charlie Hunnam) who, in a pretty decent origin story, ends up in a brothel as a child, and is reared by the unlikely people around him. He grows up with only vague memories of his escape after his father and mother are murdered by the awful Mont-Dreg (Jude Law), his acquisitive uncle who cannot stand the success of his brother Uther’s (Iain Glen) brief reign and uses the magic of the mages to his own dark ends.

Though Merlin is mentioned without making an appearance, the role of Excalibur, which is clearly stated in the film’s title, is rather exciting. The climax of the sword in the stone trope is cleverly used for both dramatic and comic effect, carded up quite well with a cameo by David Beckham wearing a prosthetic nose and recognised only by his distinctly nasal voice.

Charlie Hunnam’s charismatic Arthur is aided by a team of lovable m’er do wells, a few loyal knights who died when Uther was murdered, and perhaps most riveting, the presence of an unnamed, mysterious mage played by Astrid Berges Frisbey, who steals the show with her dark, unconventional beauty, her acid tongue and her uncanny abilities.

This re-imagining is worth watching for those of us who can never quite get enough of swords and magicless. Planned as a six-part series for Guy Ritchie to expand upon the universe he created in this first film, the disaster at the box office creates a real doubt that there will be any sequels. Critics have been accused of skewing who goes to cinema and who doesn’t with review amalgamators like Rotten Tomatoes that are known for making mass generalisations.

The latest iteration of Spidey was pretty boring for anyone over 20 and yet it was reviewed glowinglly for what it really is, a facile action movie, whereas Ritchie’s film, while not a classic, has so much more to it. Again, I will let you all decide.

Hello Nepal: Indian Minister for External Affairs, Sushma Swaraj, arrives in Kathmandu on Thursday for the 15th BIMSTEC meeting (see page 4). Indian Ambassador to Nepal Majors Singh Puri behind her.

No Menors Marketing: President Bidya Devi Bhandari attends the launch of five- year nationwide campaign by World Vision Nepa l ‘It Takes Nepal to End Child Marriage’ in Kathmandu on Thursday.

“Tremendous”: Nepali comedian Manoj Gajurel impersonates US President Donald Trump during the 2016 Gala Jatra in Nepal, which is mainly known for its anti-American sentiments.

Star Architect: Vice President of Nepal, Nanda Kishore Pun (left) and Buddhadev Mukhumtary of Asian Paints congratulate Govind Prasad Mainali, second runner-up of the All Nepal Architecture Students Design Competition 2016-17 Kathmandu on Tuesday.

Very Smooth: Participants of a blood donation and cardiac check-up program organised by Thai Airlines pose for a group picture at Hotel del Annapurna in Kathmandu last week.
**QUOTE OF THE WEEK**

"At times, I feel like going on a hunger strike myself."

Education Expert: Kedar Bhakta Maitima

August 4, 2017

**RPP splits**

Ain Shrestha in, Kathmandu 8 August

**WINRICK VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT**

**POSITION DESCRIPTION**

**Position Title**: Country Manager

**Location**: Kathmandu, Nepal

**Group/Unit**: Clean Energy, Environment, Water (CEEW) Group

**Reports to**: Senior Director, CEEW

**Position Summary**:
The Country Manager has responsibility for the effective management, project implementation, and strategic leadership of the Winrock International CEEW office in Kathmandu, Nepal to achieve the organization’s vision, mission and objectives. The Country Manager is responsible for CEEW program management, staff development, and new business development, among other functions, but will also coordinate with other Winrock Groups and programs (Agriculture and Climate Change, Livelihoods) and the Chiefs of Party and staff for those programs. The Country Manager is responsible for representing Winrock to the Government of Nepal (GoN) and ensuring Winrock Nepal’s good standing with the GoN as an officially registered International NGO (INGO) under the Social Welfare Council (SWC).

**Specific tasks and duties include:**
- Project and program implementation
- Office and project personnel management
- Resource planning and allocation
- Ensuring financial management oversight and operational compliance in accordance with Winrock International’s headquarters in the USA
- Compliance with national laws and client/donor contract requirements
- Used and maintain record of and reporting on performance of projects
- Strategic new business planning for the CEEW/Nepal team and Winrock Nepal
- Identifying, developing proposals, and securing new business opportunities
- Coordinating Winrock Projects, New Business Development Opportunities to promote “One Winrock”

**The Country Manager will focus on CEEW work, but will also be responsible for**

**ESSENTIAL RESPONSIBILITIES**

- **Country Manager/Portfolio Management:**
  - Ensure timely, results-oriented, and successful implementation of service delivery by CEEW office and project staff for projects and programs, including direct technical work.
  - Direct and lead Winrock Nepal CEEW operations and project-performance.
  - Ensure operational compliance with internal Winrock policies and procedures and project compliance with a diverse group of donors and clients.
  - Prepare and effectively manage internal budgets at the office (cont) level and project specific level.
  - Ensure timely and accurate compliance with all reporting, managerial and financial requirements necessary to maintain good standing as an INGO under Nepal law registered under the Social Welfare Council.
  - Represent Winrock in all strategic and program matters related to programs in Nepal, as well as within the broader portfolio of Winrock Groups served.
  - Maintain professional, effective, service-oriented relationships with current and potential funders and partners across the CEEW, Civil Society and NGOs, Agriculture and Enterprise, and other Winrock units or practice areas as needed.
  - Ensure Winrock Nepal is represented at key internal or external events relevant to existing projects, potential new business areas, and technical areas of work. This includes participation in meetings and public speaking engagements, where the Director can showcase Winrock’s relevant expertise, including policies.
  - Ensure Winrock Nepal complies with security standards and that security plans are updated.

**New Business Development:**
- **Develop and lead CEEW new business strategy for Nepal (including broader regional pursuits) with specific goals and targets, working with the US CEEW team.
- Provide leadership in identifying, developing, tracking and securing new business in relevant CEEW practice areas.
- Lead and support proposal development.
- In collaboration with Winrock colleagues in Nepal and around the world, strengthen relationships with key clients, organizations, academics, and corporate partners to support business growth and performance.
- Prepare targeted marketing materials and client focused offering presentation in collaboration with office home office program units, New Business Services and Communications teams.
- Coordinate new business efforts with other Winrock Groups’ senior staff in Nepal and the US to foster a One Winrock approach in Nepal.

**Staff Development:**
- **Lead the day-to-day management of operations and technical staff, and facilitate a productive team environment.
- Mentor staff by working closely with them on a specific task or skill (project management, new business development, etc.).
- Identify training needs and opportunities, both internal and external, to support institutional growth and capacity, and arrange for key training to be provided.

**QUALIFICATIONS AND BACKGROUND**

- Education: Advanced degree (Master’s degree or higher) in Environmental Economics, Business Administration, Clean Energy, Environmental Sciences, Water Resources, Forestry, Ecosystem Services, or other relevant advanced degree required

- Management Experience:
  - Minimum 12 years of experience managing or supporting donor-funded programs (preferably USAID).
  - Minimum 8 years’ professional field experience in renewable energy programming in developing countries. Experience in energy efficiency, water and other environmental areas a plus.
  - At least 5 years’ experience working in developing countries, including work in complex, politically charged, unstable environments is crucial.
  - Experience managing to the highest ethical standards international programs valued at $32 million or more.
  - Experience and management of complex, multi-activity programming, on time and on budget.
  - Experience in financial/budget management, budget design, and complex grants program management facility is essential.
  - Orientation toward community-led and - owned programs is preferred.
  - Experience targeting and reaching the most disadvantaged groups especially girls, the disabled, pastoralists, returnees and internally displaced people.
  - Experience leading program design and strategic planning and implementing strategic plans.
  - Expertise designing and implementing or overseeing monitoring & evaluation systems.
  - Experience building capacity of and empowering host-country people and institutions highly desirable.
  - Capacity to build, motivate, and effectively supervise a diverse team of local and expatriate employees.
  - Previous experience managing a large staff and implementing programs in multiple remote locations.
  - Good track record working with and/or partnering with a variety of individuals and organizations, including senior US and host country government officials, international agencies, private sector companies, and donor organizations.
  - Proven ability to demonstrate the highest level of ethical standards; ability to multi-task and juggle competing priorities while ensuring quality output.

**Skills:**
- Fluent English and Nepal language skills required.
- Facility with USAID regulations, policies, and procedures or those of an equivalently complex international government funding organization.
- Demonstrated ability to interface interpersonal skills, creative problem solving, conflict, and ethical management skills.
- Ability to coordinate with home office, stakeholders, and clients is essential.
- Excellent verbal and written communications skills; demonstrated ability to interact effectively and sensitively with multi-cultural staff, external donors and collaborators is essential.
- Computer literate in word processing, spreadsheet, and presentation software (Microsoft).

**APPLICATIONS:**
Applicants should submit a current resume and cover letter referencing Country Manager, CEEW to ndahala@winrock.org by August 21, 2017.

Winrock would like to thank all applicants for their interest but only candidates who meet all requisite criteria and are shortlisted will be contacted.

**“Simultaneous polls not possible”**

Chief Election Commissioner Ayodhi Prasad Yadav on RBC Nepal Service, 9 August

RBC Nepal: Is it possible to hold both parliamentary and provincial polls before the deadline?

Ayodhi Prasad Yadav: We were expecting laws related to parliamentary and provincial elections by mid-July, and the constituency delineation commission’s report by July end. That did not happen, so the possibility of both elections before 21 January 2018 looks very slim. We are now just pushing for timely parliamentary polls, not for both. And even for that, the government needs to fix a date by no later than mid-August.

What about provincial polls after 21 January? The Election Commission is in favour of holding parliamentary elections first, then provincial polls. The government has not officially reacted to our proposal.

How can the Electoral College be formed without provincial polls, and if Parliament get full shape without it? Parliament will not get full shape immediately. It will take time.

The Prime Minister has asked you to hold parliamentary and provincial polls simultaneously. It would be very difficult to do that, not just technically but also in terms of management and voter education. Both polls have mixed systems, which means we will have to print four types of ballot papers, 700 million of them. It is a frightening prospect.

Does the EC want to introduce electronic voting systems for these polls? The government, political parties and the EC need to sit down together to discuss this issue.

You have also proposed the use of the same ballot papers for both First Past The Post (FPTP) and Proportional Representation (PR) systems. How does that help? That was just one idea.

The army, police and government employees were allowed in the past to cast votes under the PR, but not under the FPTP. This time?

We can introduce pre-voting for them. But if they vote prior to other voters, their ballots will just be counted as PR votes. We can arrange that even for voters who are flying abroad on election day.

**FROM THE NEPALI PRESS**

13

11 - 17 AUGUST 2017 #71
Nepalis are increasingly preserving their eggs, semen and embryos but not just for urgent medical reasons

Married for a decade but infertile, Susmita Bhandari now has hopes of motherhood. She is waiting to conceive her first child next month through a frozen embryo transfer, a new technique to perform in-vitro fertilisation (IVF) just introduced to Nepal.

Bhandari’s husband is a migrant worker in Malaysia and is unable to come to Nepal frequently for the IVF. When he was home two months ago the couple froze their embryos at Vatsalya IVF and Fertility Centre, one of the few clinics in Nepal that offers the procedure.

“Even if my pregnancy fails next month I can redo IVF, as four of our frozen embryos are stored in the lab,” says Bhandari. “My husband can only come back next year, but this means I can still try to get pregnant.”

Bhandari married at 20. She has not been able to conceive naturally because of a fallopian tube obstruction but instead of going through the painful treatment to rectify it, she opted for this new technique, which is cost-effective and less invasive.

She has so far paid Rs30,000 to freeze the embryos for later transfer to her womb. But if the pregnancy fails, she can keep the remaining embryos in the lab for Rs30,000 per year.

Preshant Subedi of Vatsalya explains: “Frequent steroids and stimulation can deteriorate the ovary. If 20 eggs or sperm are retrieved in one session, up to two embryos can be transferred at a time.” He adds that the remaining eggs and sperm can be frozen in case of failed pregnancy for a later IVF. Studies have found that the success rate for frozen embryos is higher than for fresh embryos.

IVF expert Dr Uma Shrivastava explains: “There is a hormonal influence in the uterus when eggs are retrieved through stimulation. So, embryos are transferred to the womb only after a month.” She adds: “The uterus gets time to heal, ultimately leading to high chances of pregnancy.”

There is no official data on infertility in Nepal and many couples go to India for IVF services, but having seized the demand surge, hospitals and clinics in Kathmandu are also setting up facilities for frozen embryo transfers even though the government hasn’t yet come up with guidelines. (See box)

Until a few years ago, only infertile couples were using IVF but now others who want to delay conception are taking advantage of the technique.

Bhumi Lama, 29, was diagnosed with rectal cancer seven months ago. He will have to go through extended chemo and radiotherapy in the next two months, which carries the risk of permanent infertility. As a precaution, Lama has frozen five vials of semen.

“A little two years of marriage, I want to make sure we can have children: that is why I have frozen my sperm,” Lama told us.

Puja Bhandari, 27, is optimistic about her career. She works for an NGO and doesn’t plan to get married soon despite pressure from her family. She has frozen her eggs just in case she has a late marriage.

“I don’t want to compromise my career and get married right away. I want to have babies in my late thirties, using the 22 eggs that I have frozen now,” she says.

A 2010 UK study found that an average woman will have just 12% of her eggs remaining by 30 and that the quality of those eggs will deteriorate as she gets older.

Prakash (name changed) has been smoking for the last nine years and is aware the habit can reduce fertility by affecting the motility and shape of his sperm. The 22-year-old has had seven vials of his sperm frozen because he is living an unhealthy lifestyle, which includes drinking alcohol and no exercise.

“I am trying hard to change my lifestyle, but just to be on the safe side in the future, I have frozen my sperm,” he explained.
Same-sex parenting

Nepal’s Constitution is hailed as one of the most progressive in South Asia for guaranteeing rights for sexual minorities, but the Supreme Court has curtailed sexual minorities from having surrogate pregnancies. The lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) community_carousel at the Gaithia Parada on Tuesday is lobbying for same-sex marriage and the right to adopt children, but a 2016 verdict ruled that altruistic surrogacy is illegal for sexual minorities. Only infertile Nepali married couples will be able to practise it once the laws are formulated.

Pinky Gurung of Blue Diamond Society opposed the SC verdict and demanded that it be scrapped: “Surrogate pregnancy is the only option for transgender couples to have babies as they are biologically unfit to conceive. The SC doesn’t agree with constitutional guarantees.”

Article 18 of the 2016 Constitution forbids discrimination against gender and sexual minorities. Even in 2007 the SC ruled to allow same-sex marriage, but the decision has not been ratified by Parliament. Nepal emerged as a hub for commercial surrogacy after India in 2013 prevented gay men and couples who had been married for less than two years from opting for it. But the service was banned here in 2013 because of legal loopholes and provided an option of altruistic surrogacy for couples married for at least two years.

Legal limbo

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba was prime minister when he inaugurated Nepal’s first in-vitro fertilisation facility, Om IVF Centre, in 2004. At that time, there were no laws to regulate IVF services. Twelve years later Deuba is now prime minister for the fourth time, but Nepal still lacks laws governing embryo transfers. More than two dozen, private IVF clinics are operating in the Kathmandu Valley alone – none of them have legal standing. The Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP) hasn’t given permission to any hospitals or clinics to provide IVF services. Bhola Ram Shrestha of the MoHP’s curative service division says it is more important that IVF service providers attain a baseline: “They need to meet the standards set by the ministry, but we are working on the regulation.”

After surrogacy was banned in Nepal in 2013, the MoHP formed a committee to address the issue of infertility, but it was unsuccessful. Mahendra Shrestha, who led the committee, told us: “We had prepared a draft outlining the baseline for IVF service providers, but I have been transferred to another department and don’t know what happened to it.”

Shrestha blames insufficient human resources and frequent change of staff at the ministry for the failure to formulate laws on IVF. “We have asked the World Health Organization to help draft legislation and will come up with guidelines in six months hopefully.”

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ANNUAL STUDENT EXCELLENCE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMME
Party time

Here we are at the end of another eventful week in the Confederated Demographic Republic of Nepal, and it is time for our Friday recap of the main points. On Monday came the earth-shaking newsflash, broken as usual by the state-run The Rising Nippla, that the Landlocked Himalayan Republic of Nepal had finally established diplomatic relations with the Volcanic Archipelago of Cape Verde. It is a triumph of Nepal’s mis-aligned foreign policy that the country has managed to forge close bilateral relations with a country that has such profound geo-political significance to our continued existence as an independent and sovereign nation state, all while India and China fight over Bhutan, the HIMSTEAK party is on, and atomic Armageddon threatens the Korean Peninsula.

This development comes hard on the heels of Nepal establishing diplomatic relations with Djibouti on International Friendship Day, as well as the pomp and pageantry with which Nepal marked the joyous occasion of the birthday of His Majesty King Hassan of Morocco in Kathmandu last week. This unusual flurry of diplomatic activity serves one important purpose: it gives all of us an important geography lesson so that every Nepali of school-going age henceforth can point to where Cape Verde, Djibouti and Morocco are located on the world atlas. At a time when democracy is on the retreat across the free world, it is up to Nepal to set the standard for open society and freedom. The way we have conducted local elections should be a lesson for all, political parties in other countries can learn from the municipal race in Sikkim where the losing side snatched victory from the jaws of defeat after tearing up a few ballot papers. It would be wrong to call this cheating, as some pundits have, better ‘creative vote-counting’. This way no party can ever be beaten in elections since all losers can be winners if they play their cards right. The other important example Nepal can offer is in how to split and unite parties. No other country chops parties up into little pieces as ingeniously as we do. So, when the RPP split this week, the splinter group called itself the Nationalist Democratic Party (Democratic), the rump stuck with Nationalist Democratic Party (Nationalist) and if it splits again it will name itself the Nationalist Democratic Party (Party).

By Thursday, just when we thought we had all the excitement we could handle for one week, came news that due to global warming the evaporation rate for petroleum products had risen so sharply that tankers had gone on strike to demand compensation from Nepal Oil Corruption (NOC). Tanker owners, whose breath reeks of petrol from sniffing the stuff out along the highway between Amlekhganj to Kathmandu, have shut down gas stations to protect their right to cheat customers. Just another week in the Fedup Demagogic Republic.

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