

Editorial

Bhutan has recently completed its fourth parliamentary election since starting the 'controlled' democratic exercise in 2008. Each election brings some surprises. It's been very hard to observe the pattern in clear form. This latest election was less controversial compared to the previous three.

The first election gave the smallest opposition party in the world while the second election turned this smallest opposition party into a winner to run the government. The third election surprisingly elected a new party to the government, which had a medical professional as its prime ministerial candidate with no prior political or bureaucratic experiences. The last election pushed the long-time opposition (*Druk Phunseum Tshogpa* or DPT) - the party with longest history of political participation in the parliamentary practice in the country - out of race. The party which ran the government for five years immediately before the election ended in distant fourth. But common feature observed is that whichever party receives southern votes wins the race. The eastern districts remain in opposition. The historical differences of east and west have always been a permanent feature of the popular mandate in Bhutanese democracy.

Between the publication of the fourth and the present issue, an election brought a tested party back to the government. The king has declared an ambitious mega-project in the land belonging to Bhutanese refugees, who await an appropriate welcome for repatriation, further complicating their return. In March 2023, Human Rights Watch released a report stating that only thirty-seven out of the expected sixty political prisoners in Bhutan have been tracked. One person from the list published by the HRW was released in September last year after completing a 25-year sentence. Other political prisoners still anticipate international pressure for their release. As of today, no refugee has been returned.

We have more surprises in this issue.

The mental health issue among the Bhutanese has been a subject of discussion in Diaspora. The issue is not limited, though those in United States have received major attention. The problem had existed while living as refugees in the camps in Nepal. The crisis had not led to disastrous outcomes at that period of time. The resettlement to third countries opened up the pandora's box. We have Devi Katel covering some of the fundamental causes, efforts and treatments alternatives about our community's mental health problem.

We have Tara Lal Shrestha discussing on the empowerment of Bhutanese women and their presence in the public spheres. It talks about women who exist outside the bourgeois public sphere via their case studies. Theoretical insights from Nancy Fraser -on subaltern public spheres – have been used to analyse the role of women in the Bhutanese society. Presenting available foundations and insights, this paper posits possible ways to articulate plural public spheres for the Bhutanese women in exile.

Govinda Rizal discusses the narratives and imperatives of interim government in Bhutan. Globally, interim governments function as transitional entities managing governance during crises or regime transitions, facilitating the shift towards a stable governance structure. Their roles include supervising elections, maintaining law and order, addressing immediate socio-political challenges, fostering reconciliation, and upholding democratic values. In Bhutan, these bodies rectify political deviations, reconnect to autocratic governance norms, and transition selective authority to the succeeding government. During this transition phase, the interim governments orchestrate conditions conducive to a particular party's success in the later election, thus influencing the forthcoming government's composition.

I P Adhikari analysis the historical and contemporary security connection between Bhutan and India and its implication on increasing geopolitical tension along the Himalayan belts. This article looks into the geo-political shift in the Himalayan belt, its influence in Bhutan and tuning of the Bhutanese security policies to suit the need of the hour. It also examines the reasons for shift in those security policies at different time periods.

We have reached out to DNS Dhakal for his view on current Bhutanese refugee stalemate, future of those still in camps and political opportunities that we had and will have.

Enjoy reading them and provide us with your critical feedback.