Late bloomer

In a week when government ministers and officials have been scrambling to accommodate a visiting multi-billionaire Saudi royal, it’s ironic that the newspapers have made so much of what he might invest in. Didn’t the government tell him Nepal hasn’t had a proper budget for four months?

Thankfully, we seem to be finally moving beyond this vacuum. All eyes will now be on the Maoist plenum due to start on 21 November.

P13 Prashant Jha on the wisdom of the Maoists seeing India as the enemy

In the run-up to Nepal Tourism Year 2011, let us remember Sabin Basnyat and Chhewang Nima Sherpa, who gave so much to Himalayan tourism.
NATIONAL SHAME

One of the main reasons for this headache is national Shame (‘Mumbai’s shame’: Pamela Scantarelli and Eugenia Gabela, #525) on many Nepali attitudes – “Well, this is the problem of certain communities and areas of Nepal! This kind of casual, insensitiveness and indifference has not helped at all. What are the women’s organisations of Maoists, UML and other parties doing while many illiterate, innocent village girls/women are being sold and tricked into this kind of slavery? Can’t they carry out ‘bhaulik karbahi’ on the traffickers/pimps?? Finally, stating the obvious: Don’t ignore the present and past. You could have done a lot more.

R Rai

● Michelle Obama will probably have most of her queries answered by the video ‘The day my God died’ on youtube without going to Kathmandu. President Obama will certainly agree with the ‘audacity of hope’ in it as well. Much more needs to be done on both sides of the border. Perhaps female literacy is the main answer.

S Tuladhar

QUAGMIRE

What is the outcome of this quagmire? The Maoists are being cornered in such a way that whether they accept the interlocutors they will lose face (‘Last resort’, Editorial, #527). Without any doubt, they are responsible for this mess and they should face the consequences: the consequences of their unwillingness to embrace the fundamentals of democracy that arms and gangs don’t play key roles in decision making and socio-economic transformation. We should congratulate both NC and UML for this fight which will and has to compel the Maoists to discipline their ‘botters’ gangs and be a civil party.

damkai kishor

ATTITUDE PROBLEM

A great article outlining the shortcomings of the Task Force and attitude problem in the context of ‘urban’ deficit (‘Medieval mindsets’, Damakant Jaiswaly, #527). The author at his best, as usual. Thank you.

Ram B. Chhetri

LAND OF SMILES

A meaningful article in many respects (‘welcomecnn.com’, Rabi Thapa, #527). People visiting Nepal need to be made feel welcome, be with smiles, readiness to help or other gestures. While tourists may find the Serena staffing good and cordial, the same cannot be said about the rest. I often feel an air of snobbishness in the streets of Kathmandu and amongst many shopkeepers, not welcoming the tourist. I think he or she deserves rightly. Approaching them without breaching the security cocoon that a tourist needs is of paramount importance. Certainly, we need to know how to smile to a passerby, how not to intimidate people! Certainly, we need to know how to smile to a passerby, how not to intimidate people!

Santosh Aryal

SAIL

CELEBRATE!

I think this is a thought-provoking article (‘Whose festival is it anyway?’, Artha Beed, #527). It raises two issues in my own mind; one is the issue of different dates for festivals. The other is the issue of productivity. First of all the vaying dates seem to be a function of different calendars used across the country. I don’t even pretend to know them all or about them culturally and have no wish to comment on difference, but this must pose difficulties for interactions within and external to the country. Living in the UK and trying to interpret documents with Nepali/Sambal dates on them does pose the occasional difficulty, as does knowing when to send my relatives a greeting for a specific day which not only varies from year to year but also whether you are a Newar or not! Second there is the sheer volume of holidays which means nobody is ‘producing’ on those dates. Whether you see this as cultural or not, or not whether you are a Newar or not! Second there is the sheer volume of holidays which means nobody is ‘producing’ on those dates. Whether you see this as cultural or not, or not whether you are a Newar or not! Second there is the sheer volume of holidays which means nobody is ‘producing’ on those dates. Whether you see this as cultural or not, or not whether you are a Newar or not!

Dr B

LOMBORG’S MINDGAMES

It’s interesting how after spending years peddling ammunition to the global warming skeptics, starting with his book, ‘The Skeptical Environmentalist’, Lomborg now wants to play both sides [A return to reason, Bjorn Lomborg, #527]. A change of heart? Far enough, people can and must be allowed that freedom. But for Lomborg to now seemingly portray his challenge of global warming. And the ‘pundits’ commenting on this article who label investment in urban solar panels a ‘waste of money’ only need to ask a homeowner in Kathmandu who uses solar panels for water heating and actually learn something. Such commentators laud Lomborg’s article, yet without praising for, then solar panels are a waste of money. Lomborg, at least, is now advocating in alternative energy. Solar panels as an alternative technology are an early entrant in Nepal.

Ajay Pradhan

ON THE WEB

www.nepalitimes.com

Weekly Internet Poll  # 528

Q. Which of the options would you choose?

Total votes: 2,997
GURGAON – Writing about the upcoming Maoist plenum from the capitalist hub of ‘expansionist’ India is not without irony. Corporate offices involved in finance, trading, retail, consumer goods, outsourcing, software, and other services punctuate the landscape of this erstwhile village, now a metaphore for the new urban India. The sheer scale and speed at which a segment of the Indian economy integrating with the global system is staggering. The new capitalists who drive the Indian economy, and increasingly its politics, are aided by a ‘democratic system’ where the affluent possess enough influence to change law and policy and call the shots between elections.

Foreign policy discussions have shifted from non-alignment to multi-alignment. In less than a decade, India’s influence has shifted from non-alignment to multi-alignment. In less than a year, India’s political capital to keep the Maoists at bay has been a key factor in the India-NA-NC meeting of the ruling coalition of 18 parties had supported the Maoist’s proposal to present a full budget on 18 November. The new, clean chit

Power cuts ahoy: Nepal Electricity Authority has imposed 29 hours of weekly power cuts beginning Wednesday, citing decreased water levels in the rivers and the ongoing maintenance of the Middle Marsyangdi hydropower project. There will now be loadshedding in two to three and a half hours to twice a day five days a week, and once a day on the sixth day. Prior to the authority’s announcement, cuts stood at two hours a day six days a week.

Clean chit: The Parliamentary Special Hearing Committee (PSHC) Tuesday approved the nomination of three permanent justices of the Supreme Court. The Judicial Council had recommended Abadesh Kumar Yadav, Girish Chandra Lal and Sushila Karki to the parliament. The Judicial Council had recommended Abadesh Kumar Yadav, Girish Chandra Lal and Sushila Karki to the Supreme Court. The Parliamentary Special Hearing Committee (PSHC) Tuesday approved the nomination of three permanent justices of the Supreme Court.

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THIS WEEK

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Bayalpata Hospital in Achham is a busy health care centre. Every day, more than 100 patients come here with their complaints. Every week, about four babies are delivered. At any given time, five to six beds at the hospital are occupied. “We are always overloaded with patients. Some come from far away, walking many days to get here,” says Drona Acharya Awasthi, Laboratory Assistant at Bayalpata. It is hard to believe that until last June, there was just an abandoned building here.

Resurrection Achham

Bayalpata Hospital was set up by the government 30 years ago but even before the first patient arrived, all of its equipment was moved to Mangalsen, six hours away. “Ever since, the locals have been lobbying the government to restart the hospital,” explains Bibhav Acharya, a member of Nyaya Health’s board. “When Nyaya Health stepped in, it was the perfect opportunity for all parties involved.”

Nyaya Health INGO was established by Jason Andrews and Duncan Smith-Rohrberg Maru of Harvard Medical School, and Sanjay Basu of UCSF School of Medicine. Andrews had visited Achham in 2006 to learn about its HIV epidemic, and was motivated to form an organisation with several medical and public health practitioners based in universities in the US. Its sister organisation, Nyaya Health NGO, has been working to transform Bayalpata Hospital.

Today, the hospital is a 15-bed facility with a staff of 27 and two volunteers who work to provide free, quality health care to the people of Achham and neighbouring areas. The funds come from its partners and anyone willing to contribute.

While it was the increasing number of HIV/AIDS cases in Achham that first caught the attention of Nyaya Health, it now provides specialised treatment for tuberculosis, leprosy and maternity care along with general health problems. People here have been able to access X-ray and ultrasound facilities for the first time, and the hospital’s ambulance offers 24-hour transport services throughout the far west region.

“The most challenging task here is to provide expensive services like X-rays and comprehensive abortion care, free of cost. Sometimes the patients do not understand our limitations and the need to properly utilise costly medical services,” says Bikash Gauchan, Medical Director at the hospital.

Bayalpata also provides Clinical Management of Acute Malnutrition (CMAM) in collaboration with UNICEF and the Ministry of Health in Achham, where an estimated 60 per cent of children are malnourished. The immunisation clinic of the hospital runs in collaboration with the District Health Office. In addition, Bayalpata is involved in training female community health volunteers from the neighboring villages.

The working conditions in Achham are difficult but the hospital’s development has had a chain effect on the surrounding areas. “We have lobbied to pave the road to the hospital, partnered with local communities to bring reliable water supply to the region, and re-connected electricity to the hospital,” says Acharya. Nyaya Health has also installed a satellite internet connection, providing wireless internet in one of the most remote parts of the country. When it comes to staffing, priority is given to locals and the result is that 70 per cent of the hospital staff is from Achham, with the remainder from neighbouring districts.

Still, the hospital has to refer extremely serious cases to a better equipped hospital in Dadeldhura, six hours away. Now, Bayalpata is trying to expand its surgical services so it can be a full-service hospital. This aim might soon become a reality, with the Ministry of Health’s recent commitment to contribute Rs 3 million a year for infrastructural development, the largest government investment in health in the region. This may have seemed unimaginable until a couple of years ago. But it goes to show how a few determined individuals can kickstart a revolution that really does transform the lives of people.
Princely returns?

Investors will invest when they are ready, but we have to be ready for them.

Business at scale, but to earn a livelihood so that they can live in this country, which they have come to have affection for. Still, talk to any one of them, and the list of business-related grievances—unclear tax procedures, nightmares at customs offices, corruption in the bureaucracy, political interference, weak legal enforcement, big disagreements with local partners over minor issues etc.—just gets longer and longer. Given the problems faced by existing investors, it’s prudent for the government to start finding solutions, which can then be publicized to attract the attention of more investors. The idea of going out of our way to find newer investors when the ones we already have are unhappy and may start packing their bags does not make sense.

Create an autonomous national investment board: Nepal can be an attractive destination for big-size investment deals, but not anytime in the near future. Much work needs to be done first. Investment opportunities—hydropower, tourism, infrastructure, etc.—need to be researched, marketed, analysed, vetted, marketed and sold. These sets of operational activities are best done by trained and experienced professionals. Politicians and bureaucrats can help by lowering regulatory burdens, simplifying doing business procedures, and insisting that investments create jobs locally. As such, the first step towards eventually making Nepal an attractive investment destination is to create an autonomous national investment board, accountable to a broad base of shareholders, including the government. Such a board needs to be led at least at the start, by Nepali and foreign professionals with relevant global investment management experiences in New York, London, Mumbai and elsewhere. Such professionals bring credibility, competence, contacts and energy—all necessary ingredients to get the board up and running.

Prepare for a long road ahead: Potential is exciting. It fires up the imagination. But the very thought of engaging in brutal hard work over many years to turn that potential into something of value can dampen enthusiasm. We rarely get caught up with euphoria over Nepal’s unending potential. But we do not realise that the potential can only be realised through painstaking, glamour-less drudgery that must go on for years and years before the results of the world takes notice of Nepal as an investment destination.

The Prince may invest in Nepal when he’s ready. Until then, our ideas and activities should be channeled along this line: what can we do soon to make Nepal ready for the Prince and other investors? 

Luxury hire

Sixt, an international mobility service provider, has opened its first branch in Nepal. In addition to regular car rentals, Sixt offers exclusive luxury services, as well as the services of well-trained chauffeurs. Sixt Nepal deals can be viewed and booked at www.sixt.com.

New cell

The new Nokia C3 has been launched. This model comes with Ovi Mail and Ovi Chat and is equipped with Wi-Fi connectivity, a 2-megapixel camera and a rich colour 2.4 inch screen. Nokia C3 supports memory cards of up to 8GB and is available at Rs 12,440.

Modified ride

The Next Generation i10 has been launched in two petrol engines: 1.1 iRDE2 and 1.2 Kappa2. YTVT. The new 1.1 iRDE2 Next Gen i10 has ARAI certified mileage of 19.81km/litre while the 1.2 Kappa2 YTVT boasts a mileage of 20.36 km/litre. Both engines are Bharat Stage IV compliant.

Bank online

Nepal SBI has started mobile banking services under the name Nepal SBI Mobile Shakkha. Customers can enjoy inquiry, alert and transaction services on their accounts. They can also buy NTC CDMA and GSM prepaid recharge cards and make other utility payments.

Lucky winner

Niroj Thapa has won the Carlsberg England Promotion 2010. Thapa has already left on an all-expenses paid trip to England to watch an international friendly between England and France at Wembley Stadium.

Welcome winter

The annual tradition of ‘the lighting of the chimney’ took place on Tuesday at the Chimney Restaurant at Hotel Yak & Yeti to mark the onset of winter. Original recipes by the restaurant’s founder, Boris Lissanevitch, were served, including Smoked Bekti and Grilled Chicken a’la Boris.

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aoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal has emerged as the most flexible of Nepali politicians. He is ready to strike a compromise on almost everything to return to the prime minister’s quarters at Baluwatar. This is both a challenge and an opportunity for other political parties.

Should the non-Maoist parties believe Dahal this time? After all, there is no lack of evidence to question his intentions: the infamous Shaktikhor video tape in which he speaks of the ‘real’ goals of entering the peace process, the tape from Khanna Garment vilifying Baburam Bhattarai and India, and the very visible contradictions between what he has said in public over honouring commitments made in peace agreements and his assertions in the party’s internal documents.

Chairman Dahal is on a tightrope, but it’s best not to try push him off decades without the benefit of an election. Talk about the hypocrisy of those who question the legitimacy of Madhav Kumar Nepal as prime minister.

Dahal, therefore, is under pressure the likes of which he has never experienced before. He knows he has to walk a tightrope when it comes to dealing with non-Maoist parties, his detractors within the party, and India.

Given Dahal’s precarious situation, it might be tempting for the Nepali Congress and the UML faction led by MK Nepal-KP Oli to try to push him to the wall. Nothing could be more counterproductive.

The chairman still calls the shots in the party, since he controls its money and muscle. If Dahal can portray himself as a man cornered by an India-internal party rivals-NC/UML combine, he can generate a huge sympathy wave for himself and break free from the shackles he himself helped create in the first place. A teary chairman is very much capable of pulling off this stunt.

So the NC and UML should focus on the tasks at hand and concentrate on consolidating the gains made since the People’s Movement II of 2006. An under-pressure but secure-of-position-and-perks Dahal is a better bet than a completely humiliated one in taking the peace process to its logical end and ensuring the writing of the constitution by May 2011.

damakant@gmail.com

Maoist

The chairman’s flexibility springs from three other factors. China has asked him to mend relations with India. Remember his Nepal-China-India dialogue proposal after his return from Shanghai? It was a ruse to hide his failed attempt to play the ‘China card’.

Second, India has gone very public in turning the heat up on the man and his party, which they sheltered and funded while it waged the ‘people’s war’ in Nepal. All these leaks about the UCPN (Maoist)’s alleged support to the Indian Maoists are very deliberate and are intended to unsettle Dahal.

The third and most important factor is the ugly display of an internal feud over the Maoist party’s next course of action and the alleged misuse of party funds on a grand scale. The funds of the richest party in the poorest country are managed by Dahal’s close relatives. Add to this the question of the legitimacy of his leadership, which is popping up here and there, ever so softly. Dahal has been leading the party for two decades without the benefit of an election. Talk about the hypocrisy of those who question the legitimacy of Madhav Kumar Nepal as prime minister.

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damakant@gmail.com
The politics may be deadlocked, and the peace process may be stuck. But on Nepal’s airwaves the people haven’t forgotten what their leaders have – that all this was supposed to be about a new constitution. While political leaders sipped tea at soirees over the past month, a live political leaders sipped tea at a radio discussion program has been airing on 24 FM stations around the country. The program, which started in Radio Audio’s studio across the road from the Constituent Assembly building in Baneswor, moved it from the studio to outdoor locations, where it is now recorded as live street theatre.

The drama often gets to the point where the audience takes over and the actors take a back seat. Quite like the state the country is in right now, the actors don’t have all the answers. “We leave it to the audience to decide after we act out the issues,” says Shri Prasad Thapa, who plays Gharbeti Ba, a driver watching the drama from the roof of his truck.

The audience is engrossed in the drama. “We need BP’s socialism.” shouts a disgruntled Govinda Shrestha, a driver watching the drama from the roof of his truck.

Most audiences are not hopeful that the constitution drafted will serve the interest of the people. Sakhi Chaudhary, a cobbler from Sarlahi, is fixing a pair of jogging shoes near the makeshift stage. Still engrossed in his work, he replies to Ghoda Dai, “What can be expected of these thieves?”

Such cynicism is becoming increasingly common and the actors know how to respond. Muna explains how the constitution will affect their lives. “People are now familiar with the voicing of their demands,” says a young man who was following the debate between Muna and Gharbeti Ba, and burst onto the stage shouting, “We need BP Koirala, we need BP’s socialism.”

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“We don’t expect Chiya Chautari to solve all the country’s problems,” says Shikha Sharma. “We want common people who have no way of making their voices heard to participate in the constitutional dialogue.”

Chiya Chautari airs on Radio Audio, FM 106.3 MegaHertz every Saturday from 1-2pm.

Real people, real drama

Nepal talks about its constitution in a tea shop

Chiya Chautari, the radio drama series produced by Radio Audio in Kathmandu and aired on 24 FMs across the country, has gone viral because of the serious way it tackles serious issues like the constitution, the peace process, and reconciliation.

“The easy-on-the-ear conversational format is woven around a simple plot and is enacted spontaneously, without scripts. The drama often gets to the point where the audience takes over and the actors take a back seat. Quite like the state the country is in right now, the actors don’t have all the answers. “We leave it to the audience to decide after we act out both sides of the problem,” says Shri Prasad Thapa, who plays Gharbeti Ba’s character.

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QC Awards 2010: The Poetry Slam, Quiote Cove and the US Embassy call for applications for a slam poetry competition. Submission deadline 30 November, 5pm to 8pm, contest on 14 December, Jawalakhel.

Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre, one-day program, Practicing Compassion by Geshe Thubten Sherab. 20 November, 10am to 4pm, 5000091048, www.fm7-hbtc.org

Photos of Risk, a photo contest organised by UNDP on the themes of School and Hospital Safety, Emergency Response, Flood Management and Communities. Submission deadline 24 November, for details and submission log on to www.un.org.np/mpc/photos4risk, photos4risk@gmail.com

Chagati in Nepal: The Magic of Colour, an exhibition of lithographs and original posters by Marc Chagali. Till 21 November, 5pm to 7pm, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhaka, 5552214.

Dreaming of Player Flags: Mantra on the Wind, an exhibition of impressionistic photography by Sandy Shum. 18 November to 6 December, Kathmandu Contemporary Arts Centre, Jamshikel, 5552120.

Sanskriti Festival, jam session with eight young Nepali artists followed by documentary screenings, theatre show and live music by Narakar Yaktumba and friends. 20 November, 10am onwards. Moksh, Pulchok and KCAC, Jamshikel.

Golden Moments, the best bands in nepali pay tribute to classic rock. The Factory, Thamel, 19 November, 7pm onwards, performance by Abhaya and the Steam Jinnies

Bhumi Restaurant, Lazimpat, 20 and 21 November, 7pm onwards, performance by Prism Band on the second day

Moksh Restaurant, Jamshikel, 26 November, 7pm onwards, performance by Jigme and the Strings

Cafeena Restaurant, Darbar Marg, 27 November, 7pm onwards, performance by Rustic Nails 1905 Restaurant, Kantipath, 3 December, 7pm onwards, all star performance

Himalayan Blues Festival 2010 19 November, Friday Masalabazaar, Kathmandu, 7pm to 10.45 pm for dinner, live music, Roses, Ramalaya, Steam Injuns and Dreaming of Player Flags. Admission Rs 400

The Blue Tone, charcoal sketches and original posters by artist Annika Hed. Till 19 November, 4pm, Park Gallery, Pulchok, 5522307, parkgallery@wiklink.com.np

Balgo, an exhibition of contemporary Australian indigenous art. 21 November to 5 December. 11am to 6pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal revisited, 4218048.

Once in a lifetime, an exhibition of mixed media works by the Australian artist Donato Rosella. 21 November to 5 December, 11am to 6pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal revisited, 4218048.

Kathmandu International Theatre Festival 2010. 17 November to 7 December, Gorkul, Old Baneshwor, for details see schedule on opposite page.

Arpan (Shirish Thapa) looking at a photo of his girlfriend, Shila, in a scene from the latest storyline photo of his girlfriend, Shila, in a scene from the latest storyline of thebbc's photo of his girlfriend, Shila, in a scene from the latest storyline of thebbc's latest story line of the Valley at 8.15pm tonight, you can also listen to the drama online on bbcnepalidrama.com

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The Factory, Thamel, 19 November, 7pm onwards, performance by Abhaya and the Steam Jinnies

Bhumi Restaurant, Lazimpat, 20 and 21 November, 7pm onwards, performance by Prism Band on the second day

Moksh Restaurant, Jamshikel, 26 November, 7pm onwards, performance by Jigme and the Strings

Cafeena Restaurant, Darbar Marg, 27 November, 7pm onwards, performance by Rustic Nails 1905 Restaurant, Kantipath, 3 December, 7pm onwards, all star performance

Himalayan Blues Festival 2010 19 November, Friday Masalabazaar, Kathmandu, 7pm to 10.45 pm for dinner, live music, Roses, Ramalaya, Steam Injuns and Dreaming of Player Flags. Admission Rs 400

The Blue Tone, charcoal sketches and original posters by artist Annika Hed. Till 19 November, 4pm, Park Gallery, Pulchok, 5522307, parkgallery@wiklink.com.np

Balgo, an exhibition of contemporary Australian indigenous art. 21 November to 5 December. 11am to 6pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal revisited, 4218048.

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There’s something innately colourful and vibrant about indigenous art. The Balgo paintings that come from the western part of Australia capture the spirit and essence of aboriginal life. Balgo art is known for its daring style, indulgent use of colours and powerful imagery. In Nepal, they are being exhibited by the Australian embassy to commemorate 50 years of diplomatic ties between the two countries. The exhibition is part of the Australian Government’s worldwide art tour to promote greater understanding and awareness of its indigenous cultures. It features works by some of the most renowned Balgo artists and will be inaugurated by the Australian Ambassador to Nepal, Susan Grace, on 21 November.

Kathmandu International Theatre Festival 2010

17 November to 7 December
Rimal/Sama Theatre, Gurukul, Old Baneswor, Kathmandu

Performances at 5pm

Friday 19 November
Workshop: The Art of Transformation by Ronald Rand and performance of Death of a scarecrow directed by Adam Darius and Kazimir Kolesnik

Saturday 20 November
A James Joyce Cycle in 3 parts directed by Nikša Eterović

Sunday 21 November
Let it be art directed by Gregory Abeles

Monday 22 November
The Wizards of Oz directed by Irena Rajh Karanov

Tuesday 23 November
A kiss of a spider woman directed by Deborah Merola

Wednesday 24 November
Andre and Dorine directed by Ihaksi Rikaitė

Thursday 25 November
Nightwind directed by B.J. Dodge

Friday 26 November
The Messenger: A tribute to the Life and Spirit of Nina Simone directed by Hazel Roy
Naturally high

What does a Nepali drinking milk (and getting the usual upset stomach) have common with a Nepali running up a mountain? It’s not in the stars, that’s for sure. But it may be DNA-based.

About 7,000 years ago Northern Europeans learnt how to digest milk, a clear human evolutionary change. But people in South Asia never made this genetic change, so many suffer from lactose intolerance (milk indigestion), which accounts for our ‘pet gadyung gushing’ after drinking a glass or two of milk. A new example of documented evolutionary change may well be in the field of high-altitude adaptation by Tibetans; and possibly (by extrapolation) our Sherpas, as well as other ethnic groups with Tibetan ancestry.

Recent, independent reports from the Beijing Genomics Institute, Case Western Reserve University, and the University of Utah have detected a gene that helps Tibetans adapt to high altitudes. This gene is called Hypoxia Inducible Factor (HIF 2 alpha, to be precise), and seems to assist adaptation to high altitudes, just as Europeans avoid it.

It’s not in the stars, that’s for sure.

HOLY DAY: The Muslim community came together at Kashmiri Mosque in Kathmandu to celebrate Bakr Eid on Wednesday.

HAPPY CHHAT: Devotees offer prayers at Rani Pokhari on Saturday morning to celebrate Chhat. The Sun is worshipped during Chhat to ensure longevity and prosperity.

CELEBRATION OF FREEDOM: Nepali human rights activists celebrate the release of Myanmar’s pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi in Basantapur on Sunday. Nobel Peace Prize-winner Suu Kyi was freed on Saturday after her latest period of house arrest expired.

WEEKEND WEATHER

This week dramatic weather patterns along the Kaligandaki corridor puzzled many trekkers on the Annapurna Circuit. Though the monsoon front that caused over most of western Nepal early this week had no effect along 250m. higher treks were affected by the frequent changes of wind direction along with quick cloud movements that usually mark the beginning of a spell of bad weather. The satellite images shows that the axis of the monsoon is shifting westward and a high pressure system has been developing over the western Himalayas. This will bring the first severe cold wave over western Nepal which will also cause the low temperatures in central Nepal over the weekend. Prepare to don chilly clothes over the weekend with cloudy days.

GREEN SCENE

Crafts for care

Another addition to the vibrant Mandala Street of Thamel is the shop Recycling for Goodness, stocked with intriguing products crafted from recycled plastic, cloth, rubber and paper. A plethora of items are available here, including sturdy plastic-woven stools, baskets and cushions, funky plastic belts, Christmas decorations, shopping bags, coasters, and iPod holders.

The shop is the retail outlet of Himalayan HealthCare (HHC), which opened 29 September. HHC is funded by and collaborates with the Spiral Foundation Centre (US). HHC products are also exported, and a market has been clearly established among global consumers.

Raw materials for HHC products include junk food wrappers collected from Kathmandu’s movie halls and streets, and rubber from old tires in garages. Says Parajuli: “We make only what is available around us.” Artisans who make, earns its maker Rs 400. With their monthly earnings, artisans contribute 10 per cent to a credit savings scheme that functions as a revolving fund for loans in the VDC. Artisans from HHC are very much in demand, and some have even gone to the Gulf to practice their vocation.

About 1,000 artisans benefit from such vocations. A plastic-woven stool, which takes a day and a half to make, earns its maker Rs 400. With their monthly earnings, artisans contribute 10 per cent to a credit savings scheme that functions as a revolving fund for loans in the VDC. Artisans from HHC are very much in demand, and some have even gone to the Gulf to practice their vocation.

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Similarly, the Sherpas, as well as other ethnic groups with Tibetan ancestry, have made arrangements with the Spiral Foundation Centre (US). HHC products are also exported, and a market has been clearly established among global consumers.

Our approach is tri-pronged because that education, health care and income generation are interdependent,” says Sonie KC Parajuli, Senior Executive Officer of HHC. “Though income generation is a first priority, we prefer the recipients in our program to be educated so that they are able to take care of their health as well as participate in our vocational programs. Thus we have incentives – those who participate in our literacy programs get bonus income-generating opportunities.”

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19-10 20-9 21-8

FRI SAT SUN

KIRAN PANDAY

KIRAN PANDAY
Roll the dice

People should be allowed to be waste their money if they want to

Rahul Wadhwa—casino king, stalwart defender of the free market, and journalist-turned-novelist—surprised his invitees when he failed to show up at the launch of his own book, The Dealmaker, at an upmarket eatery in the capital last week. Kathmandu elites were reportedly sniggered when the police suggested that he might have done a runner before the event because they were cracking down on casinos, issuing arrest warrants for managers of letting Nepali nationals gamble. The casino tycoon was apparently being investigated by the authorities for tax evasion.

It was a perfect mix of glitz, money and crime and the media had a field day. News of men who had lost all their assets in casinos covered the pages.

Then came the stories of those who had resorted to kidnapping and murder to procure money they owed to loan sharks.

Meanwhile, greed capitalist were breaking a 42-year-old law by letting Nepalis willingly gamble their money away, not paying taxes on the money they earned making illegally, and, according to some, feeding deadly crimes in the country.

But if you follow the money, it isn’t just going to the Goldfinger Casino in Goa that Wadhwa is said to be starting soon. Ex-home minister Barande Gautam, who tried unsuccessfully to keep the locals out of the casinos, has claimed that members of the police force routinely took bribes to turn a blind eye to casinos. When asked to conduct routine checks, police would alert the managers of their impending arrival.

Gautam’s attempt to crack down might have been motivated by his claim that the Masists had a stronghold in the casinos. About 1,000 people, most of them Masist-affiliated union members, are employed in various casinos in Kathmandu and Pokhara. He has accused Masist minister Hisila Yami of complicity. For protecting the union that resisted enforcement of the no-Nepali rule, which took to the streets to make sure they continued to gamble.

So the fingers are pointing in all directions. The question that seems to have fallen between the cracks is why not just legalise gambling altogether? After all, it is a voluntary tax on idiots. Reports state that 60 per cent of the casinos’ income comes from their Nepali patrons. Like drugs, porn and alcohol, there are choices people are going to make with or without the government’s help. If they are determined to squander their money why not tax it, and use it for something better?

“If you hear the man addicted to gambling, who kidnapped and killed a girl?” asked the reporter who wrote a news story titled “Casino breeds crimes” (Himl Khabarpatrika, 17 November). Yes, and did you hear about the man who shocked his two daughters to death with an axe last week because his new wife didn’t want to look after them? It is not the wife’s fault the crime occurred; it is the murderer’s lack of a moral compass that is to blame.

Locking down the casinos does not solve crime, nor does it prevent people from gambling. May I remind you of the online gambling sites that will be happy to take your money, minus the free drinks? In fact, the more we allow the government to intervene in our lives, the more opportunities there are for corruption. Only individuals can be their own moral agents. The government should not be in the business of wiping everyone’s asses because people are too lazy to do it themselves.

ABHAYA SHRESTHA

L ast summer, a friend challenged me to run a marathon. Despite not being a runner, I took up the challenge and submitted my name for the New York marathon lottery, promising myself that if I got entry, I would train to run the 26.2 mile (42km) race and raise money for a good cause. In April, I received the news that I was in. I decided to fund mine for the Help Nepal Network, an organisation I’d volunteered with and contributed to over a number of years.

Training for the marathon was one of the most physically taxing things I had ever done: five months; three to six miles a day five days a week, and long runs of between twelve and twenty miles on the weekends. It didn’t feel natural for the human body, at least not for mine. However, after many weeks of knee-ting, Advil and energy bar consumption, and the unyielding support of friends and family, I attempted my longest training run — twenty miles.

I ran through the last mile and spent the next couple of days nursing my horriby sore knees. They seemed to need much longer to recover than implied by my training schedule. I stopped running to give myself a complete rest.

When marathon day rolled around, I had run more than a few miles over the final three weeks. Running up at the start, I was anxious that I would not be able to push through to the end without stopping. I pulled out my music player and headphones for motivation. But the noise of the crowd drowned the music out. At the next hydrating station, I gulped down some Gatorade and tried my last trick.

Marathon man

“You’re almost there!” said a spectator’s sign at the two-mile mark

out loud, “one, two, one, two, one, two...”, and focused only on putting one foot forward after the next. Left foot on “one”, right on “two”. I kept me moving.

Then I passed the twenty-five mile marker. A lot of energy coursed through me. The finish was within reach! I mustered up whatever I had left in me and ran as fast as my legs would go. 400 metres to go, and I saw a cheering crowd clearly as I ran past. And then it was over.

I was a drop of water in the river of runners pushed along by the will of the spectators. I felt a strange connection to the people around me — to the runners who had given their all, to the spectators who cheered the runners on, to the kids who held out cups of water at hydrating stations, the musicians along the route, the YMCA dancers in Brooklyn, to the many faces of the streets of New York City and the people who populate them.

I expected to finish in about 5 hours. I made it in 4 hours and 16 minutes. The experience of crossing that line is unforgettable. Of all the other runners, of hearing the cheering of innumerable people along the course, the encouragement from family and friends, and the motivation to help a cause like the Help Nepal Network enabled me to exceed my own expectations. It was an amazing experience.

There were 45,350 registered runners in the NYC New York 2010 marathon, including myself. I saw this marathon as a chance to help Nepal, and a chance to see a number of blind and disabled people.
Eighty years ago, in the autumn of 1930, Joseph Stalin enforced a policy that changed the course of history, and led to tens of millions of deaths across the decades and around the world. In a violent and massive campaign of ‘collectivisation’, he brought Soviet agriculture under state control.

Stalin pursued collectivisation despite the massive resistance that had followed when Soviet authorities first tried to introduce the policy the previous spring. The Soviet leadership had relied then upon shootings and deportations to the Gulag to preempt opposition. Yet Soviet citizens resisted in large numbers; Kazakh nomads fled to China, Ukrainian farmers to Poland. In the autumn, the shootings and deportations resumed, complemented by famine. In Ukraine, the harvest failed in 1931. The reasons were many: poor weather, pests, shortages of animal power after peasants slaughtered livestock rather than losing it to the collective, shortfalls of tractors, the shooting and deportation of the best farmers, and the disruption of sowing and reaping caused by collectivisation itself.

“How can we be expected to build the socialist economy,” asked a Ukrainian peasant, “when we are all doomed to hunger?” We now know, after 20 years of discussion of Soviet documents, that in 1932 Stalin knowingly transformed the collectivisation famine in Ukraine into a deliberate campaign of politically motivated starvation. Stalin presented the crop failure as a sign of Ukrainian national resistance, requiring firmness rather than concessions. As famine spread that summer, Stalin refined his explanation: hunger was sabotage, as a sign of Ukrainian national resistance, requiring firmness rather than concessions. As famine spread that summer, Stalin refined his explanation: hunger was sabotage, local Communist activists were the saboteurs, protected by higher authorities, and all were paid by foreign spies. In the autumn of 1932, the Kremlin issued a series of decrees that guaranteed mass death. One of them cut off all supplies to communities that failed to make their grain quotas. Yet control is not creation. It proved impossible to make Central Asian nomads into productive farmers in a single growing season. Beginning in 1930, some 1.3 million people starved in Kazakhstan as their meagre crops were requisitioned according to central directives.

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Meanwhile, the Communists took whatever food they could find, as one peasant remembered, “down to the last little grain”, and in early 1933 the borders of Soviet Ukraine were sealed so that the starving could not seek help. Dying peasants harvested the spring crops under watchtowers. More than five million people starved to death or died of hunger-related disease in the USSR in the early 1930s. 3.3 million of them in Ukraine, of which about three million would have survived had Stalin simply ceased requisitions and exports for a few months and granted people access to grain stores.

These events remain at the centre of East European politics to this day. Each November, Ukrainians commemorate the victims of 1933. But Viktor Yanukovych, the current Ukrainian President, denies the special suffering of the Ukrainian people – a nod to Russia’s official historical narrative, which seeks to blur the particular evils of collectivisation into a tragedy so vague that it has no clear perpetrators or victims. Rafal Lemkin, the Polish-Jewish lawyer who established the concept of ‘genocide’ and invented the term, would have disagreed: he called the Ukrainian famine a classic case of Soviet genocide. As Lemkin knew, terror followed famine: peasants who survived hunger and the Gulag became Stalin’s next victims. The Great Famine of 1937-1938 began with a shooting campaign – directed chiefly against peasants – that claimed 386,798 lives across the Soviet Union, a disproportionate number of them in Ukraine.

Collectivisation casts a long shadow. When Nazi Germany invaded the western Soviet Union, the Germans kept the collective farms intact, rightly seeing them as the instrument that would allow them to divert Ukrainian food for their own purposes, and starve whom they wished.

After Mao made his revolution in 1949, Chinese communists followed the Stalinist model of development. This meant that some 30 million Chinese starved to death in 1958-1961, in a famine very similar to that in the Soviet Union. Maoist collectivisation, too, was followed by mass shooting campaigns. Even today, collective agriculture is the basis for tyrannical power in North Korea, where hundreds of thousands of people starved in the 1990s. And in Belarus, Europe’s last dictatorship, collective farming was never undone, and a former collective farm director, Aleksandr Lukashenko, runs the country.

Lukashenko is running for a fourth consecutive presidential term in December. Controlling the land, he also controls the vote. Eighty years after the collectivisation campaign, Stalin’s world remains with us.

Timothy Snyder is Professor of History at Yale University. His most recent book is Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin. www.project-syndicate.org
Losing lives to save them

The recent crash of a Fishtail chopper has highlighted the human costs of daredevil rescue missions

DAMBAR KRISHNA SHRESTHA

Death on the mountain

On 23 October, Chhewang Nima Sherpa (pic) went missing following an avalanche on Baruntse (7129m), a neighbour to Lhotse and Everest. He had been fixing ropes below the summit on the north face of the mountain for an international expedition. He was 43.

Chhewang was no ordinary Sherpa. He had summited Everest 19 times, one short of Apa Sherpa’s world record, and had completed many difficult climbs on peaks such as Cho Oyu, Manaslu and Siachen,

Following the abandonment of the search for Chhewang, Nepali Times spoke to his cousin, Lakpa Rita Sherpa, the first Nepali to climb the highest peak in all seven continents, and himself a 14-time Everest summitter.

Nepali Times: What went wrong on Baruntse?
Lakpa Rita Sherpa: I am not sure what happened, but I have climbed Baruntse twice in the last couple of years. It’s very technical in the last five to six hundred metres below the summit. You are climbing on a knife-edge ridge with a huge drop on both sides, with very soft snow. If anything happens, or if you make a small mistake, there is no chance of survival. When I first heard the tragic news, I was speechless. Tears were running down my face, my wife and kids were crying beside me. It was a very sad moment for us.

Did Chhewang hope to one day hold the world record for climbing Everest? Since he was only one short of the world record by Apa Sherpa, he had dreams to claim the record. In fact he was due to climb Everest twice in the spring next year.

Tell us about your experiences with Chhewang. Chhewang and I had lots of great times while we were climbing together. We summited Everest together eight times, and celebrating our success on the summit made for unforgettable memories. His main goal was to help other mountaineers when they were in trouble; we did this twice together, for instance when he helped rescue the Nepali climber, Usha Bista.

How risky is mountaineering as a profession, and why do Nepalis do it? As a mountain guide, it is risky whether you are climbing the world’s tallest or smallest mountain. You never know how and when accidents may occur, even if you are very good at what you do. It all depends on Mother Nature. No one can beat nature. At the same time, you need to take care of your clients, and doing this on a mountain is riskier than climbing by yourself.

In a country like Nepal, people like us do not have many options other than climbing. Most Nepalis who climb in order to make a living, only a few do it for fun.

What will you remember most about Chhewang? He was in the US, where I am based, a month before his accident. His cousin Norbu Tenzing Sherpa had invited him to attend a fundraiser for the American Himalayan Foundation on 13 October, where he would have met former US Vice President Al Gore. My wife and I tried very hard to get him to stay on with us for another month and a half, but he said, “Sorry, I can’t stay longer this time but I’ll definitely be back next year.” I wish I had agreed with us. Chhewang was always very humble, he was always smiling, and we will miss him a lot. Our family’s deepest sympathies and prayers are with his family.
Spinning for consensus

Interview with UML Chairman Jhalanath Khanal in Himal Khabarpatrika, 17 Nov-1 Dec

Khalanath Khanal: Where is the country heading? Jhalanath Khanal: All are trying to find a point of consensus. Considering the recent developments, the country is moving towards a consensus.

How can you say that? The meetings held in Hattiban and Gokarna have made headway. This will yield results if we consolidate our ideas and sentiments and give it a shape.

What did you discuss in the Hattiban and Gokarna meetings? The Hattiban meeting helped identify the root cause of the problems, find potential solutions and understand the stance of the political parties. These meetings were crucial to sort out differences and build confidence. Both sides have agreed to conclude the peace process, institute a special committee, establish a secretariat and appoint a secretary. The Maoist combatants will be brought under the special committee within a week. They will be divided into three groups to be integrated and rehabs. The paramilitary structure of the YCL will be dissolved within a month and a half.

What is barring you from reaching a consensus then? Power sharing along with issues related to the peace process and constitution writing should be finalized in a package to reach a consensus.

Then the dispute is about who should lead the new government. The Maoists have exhibited flexibility regarding the leadership of the new government and so have we. It makes no difference who leads a consensus government.

Then why not form the government under the leadership of the lone candidate Ram Chandra Poudel? This is not possible. Our party has concluded that a fresh process should be initiated as the current process is faulty. The Supreme Court recently instructed the speaker to end the futile election process.

The SC directive can also be interpreted in favour of Poudel? What is barring you from reaching a consensus then? Yes, the SC directive can also be interpreted in favour of Poudel but we need a consensus government.

What guarantee is there that it won’t lead to a consensus? The SUPREME COURT recently instructed the speaker to end the futile election process. The government of Nepal can be formed under the leadership of Ram Chandra Poudel on the basis of the SC directive. But one has to take care that the Supreme Court’s directive, the political parties and the NC are not at cross purposes. As far as the UML-led government is concerned, the central committee decided, with the agreement of Madhav Nepal, that it would not make the SC directive a mere political tool.

How can this government succeed in advancing the peace process and constitution writing? No, it has failed.

Kamalari to teacher

Rajdhani, 15 November

Mahendranagar: Eighteen-year-old Rima Chaudhary spent a year of her childhood as a bonded labourer. But now she is an 11th grader who also teaches in her village.

Rima is part of the non-formal education classes operated jointly by World Education Nepal and Backward Society Education (BASE). She runs tuition classes for around 35 students from class one to seven and uses the earnings to buy her own books and stationery.

Her family's poor financial condition forced her into bonded labour for Rs 5,600 a year when she was just 10 years old. But she broke free and returned home, with a deep desire to go to school. “I wanted to study earlier too and had told my father about it. But I could not because we were too poor,” says Rima.

After breaking away from bonded labour, Rima joined a nine-month course conducted by BASE and then was admitted into class four at the local school. She was among the top five students in her class and eventually passed SLC in second division. The village was astonished by her academic accomplishment, especially because most students drop out within a few years. “I want to graduate,” says Rima. “But my father cannot fund my education. If I can earn, I will study.”

According to BASE, there are about 25 informal education classes running in the district. Children who are unable to join a formal school or are so weak in their studies that they need to drop out join such informal classes. In addition to academic tuition, vocational training is also given. Rima’s success story has encouraged others to enrol themselves into schools and value education, says BASE district coordinator Laxman Chaudhary, adding that the program will be continued in line with the interest of locals. And others like Rima will get an opportunity to earn as well.

Local efforts

Gajendra Bohara in Nagarik, 13 November

Whenever a woman suffers from labour pains in any of the 25 villages in Rolpa everyone thinks of Tiija didi, a local female health worker.

Forty-year-old Tiija became interested in working as a health worker when she interacted with a female health worker after the birth of her first child. “Eventually I received training and gained experience in the field,” says Tiija. She has now been working as a health worker for 17 years and is posted at a primary health centre in Mijhing VDC of Rolpa. Locals trust Tiija more than the doctor at the centre.

Recently, Tiija encountered a rare case. Tika Bista was brought in labour to Tiija’s home. The case looked complicated so she suggested that Bista be admitted to the local health centre. Because the doctor was on leave, Tiija herself attended Bista’s delivery. That day, Bista gave birth to four babies. At Tiija’s initiative, the villagers pooled money for Bista’s treatment at Nepalgunj Hospital. She says that she appreciates the villagers’ help, adding, “Everyone is in the city but no one cares for the villages, that is why I am here.”
Editorial in Kantipur, 16 November

The Supreme Court’s directive to the Speaker of the House, Subash Chandra Nembang, to intervene to end the futile prime ministerial elections has been interpreted by different political parties in terms that suit their own interests. Since the directive was issued, the Nepali Congress has been pushing for the unanimous election of Ram Chandra Poudel as prime minister while the UML and the Maoists are demanding a new election process. Some are even demanding action be taken as if the Supreme Court’s directive were an order. But these are only suggestions to the government on the part of the Supreme Court. The directive, however, has definitely given the parties the opportunity to rethink their positions and move in a new direction. If the parties want to take the country forward, this is their chance to work together. And it is the speaker of the legislative parliament who has to assume the leading role in making this happen.

About 100 tonnes of expired and banned pesticides are lying in warehouses in Khumaltar, Nepalganj, Amlekhganj and the Cotton Development Board store in Khajura. These pesticides pose significant health risks.

The environment ministry signed an agreement with GTZ on 3 April to safely dispose of this stockpile of poison but nothing has been done. “GTZ should have begun the disposal works two weeks after this, we can’t do anything about it,” said Mina Khanal, spokesperson of the ministry. GTZ was meant to open bids in Germany for disposal.

Some of these expired pesticides have been lying in warehouses for over 30 years. They include such banned chemicals as DDT, aldrin, edrin, mercury compounds, BHC, methyl bromides, stored in liquid form in rotting containers.

Nepal does not have the technology or the expertise to deal with such pesticides, which is why they have to be sent abroad to be destroyed. European countries destroy such chemicals in atomic power plants as the process requires temperature of 500-1000°C. Environmental organisations like Greenpeace, meanwhile, advocate that those countries that produce pesticides should take the responsibility for disposing of them.

The political parties should be drafting the constitution instead of holding inconclusive meetings. The never-ending prime ministerial election has been rescheduled for 19 November. They have come up with a new date but without concrete decisions as to what should be done on that day.

NC has been claiming the lone candidate Ram Chandra Poudel should be declared winner unopposed while UCPN (Maoist) and UML have been insisting on a fresh start to the election.

Date expired poison

Finalise understanding

The deadline of constitution writing is drawing near but the political parties have different priorities. They should come up with a concrete understanding or the deadline will be missed again.
Royal pain in the ass

Nepal may be a republic, but it still has a massive royal hangover. And any royal will do, even a itinerant Oil Sheikh. How does one explain awarding the Gorkha Dakshin Bahu (Revolutionary) to a Royal Highness from Saudi Arabia when we have put our own royalty in the doghouse? If the intention was to lick the regal backside to jharo one arab from One Arab, as usual we failed miserably. Sri Punch Alwaleed Bin Talaal and Amira threatened to fly out immediately to Bhutan when they heard at the hotel that the medals were not ready yet. This was republican Nepal’s new honour and due to the usual delays known as the MRP Syndrome the medal and sash hadn’t been finished by the time the Shake got here. Rumour has it the civil servants in the concerned ministry dragged their feet purposely because they rightly asked: “Who dis guy, and why he get medal?” Bhutan being still a monarchy, and a country that has developed buttering dignitaries to a fine art, the Mr and Mrs Sheikh will probably be more impressed. However, the danger now is that the guy may be back collect his award, and we will close down our airport again for the whole day.

That’s it. Enough is enough. We used to inflict monstrous traffic jams on ourselves every time our royalty travelled anywhere, now we do it when imported royalty come in and out. Who decides these things anyway? Time to stop closing down the airport every time a domestic or alien VIP is flying in or out. We should also wrest control of the Berry Berry Important People building at the airport away from the army and hand it over to a civilian authority. In fact, while we are at it why not convert that royal-era edifice into the domestic terminal and demolish the current domesticated terminal because it is such a health hazard. And while we are still at it, let’s also hand over the Maiti Ghar to Bhadrakali shortcut back to the people and reduce the traffic congestion. The ex-royal army should in fact return the public property it has seized in Tundikhel over the past three decades, and set an example for the Maobaddies.

It’s not that we haven’t got ideas to end the political deadlock in this country. The Hatiban summit came up with four: revolving prime ministership, revoler prime ministership or revolting prime ministership. One of the three should do the trick.

Just as power came out of the barrel of the gun, today in the Baddie party power comes from whoever controls the money. And Awesome has made sure that the money bags are all loyal to him. They can make their millions as long as they pay a tithe to the party, and this is going to buy him majority support at the Gorkha plenum. What this means is that the party is now in control of warlords up to their necks in crime and corruption. BRB alludes to this tangentially in his plenum report, but even he knows how dangerous it is to tell it like it is.