

53rd Birthday of His Majesty King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev

and National Day of Nepal



The Daily Star Special Supplement December 28, 1997

His Majesty King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev

b: Dec. 1945; Kathmandu
sof: His late Majesty King Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah and late Crown Princess Indra Rajya Laxmi Devi Shah.

e: Early education at St. Joseph's School, Darjeeling (India); Higher studies at Eton College (England), 1959-1964; University of Tokyo (Japan) and Harvard University (USA), (1967-1968).

ms: Married Her Majesty Queen Aishwarya Rajya Laxmi Devi Shah, 1970; s:2; d:1.

Royal Career: Declared Heir-Apparent to the Throne of the Kingdom of Nepal, 1955; Coming-of-Age Ceremony, conferred the title of Grand Master of all Orders of the Kingdom of Nepal and Colonel-in-Chief of the Royal Nepalese Army, 1964; Ascended the Throne, 1972; Patron, Royal Nepal Academy of Science of Technology, King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation, Lumbini Development Trust and Pashupati Area Development Trust; Chancellor, Tribhuvan University and Mahendra Sanskrit University.

Participation: Observer: First Non-Aligned Summit, Belgrade, (Yugoslavia), 1961; Tenth Anniversary Celebrations of Bandung Conference, Jakarta (Indonesia), 1965.

Leader of Nepalese Delegation: Fourth Non-Aligned Summit, Algiers (Algeria), 1973; Fifth Non-Aligned Summit, Colombo (Sri Lanka), 1976; Sixth Non-Aligned Summit, Havana, (Cuba), 1979; Seventh Non-Aligned Summit, New Delhi (India), 1983; First SAARC Summit, Dhaka (Bangladesh), 1985; Eighth Non-Aligned Summit, Harare (Zimbabwe), 1986; Second SAARC Summit, Bangalore (India), 1986; Third SAARC Summit, Kathmandu (Nepal), 1987; Fourth SAARC Summit, Islamabad (Pakistan), 1988; Ninth Non-Aligned Summit, Belgrade (Yugoslavia), 1989.

Others: Inaugurated the World Conference on Religion and Culture, Madurai (India), 1977; Addressed the UN Conference on Problems of Least Developed Countries, Paris (France), 1981; Attended the Nepal National Day at Tsukuba Expo '85, Tsukuba (Japan), 1985; Attended the Commemoration of 50 years of peace after the end of the Second World War in Europe (United



His Majesty King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev and Her Majesty Queen Aishwarya Rajya Laxmi Devi Shah (Kingdom), 1995.

Visited: State Visits: India, 1973; China, 1973; Yugoslavia, 1975; USSR, 1976; Bangladesh, 1978; Japan, 1978; Sri Lanka, 1980; United Kingdom, 1980; Egypt, 1981; Spain, 1983; United States of America, 1983; Thailand, 1984; Australia, 1985; Federal Republic of Germany, 1986; Finland, 1989; Denmark, 1989; India, 1993; China, 1993; Republic of France, 1994.

Official Visits: India, 1980 and 1985; China, 1987.

Other Visits (Friendly and Unofficial): China, 1966; Japan, 1967; USA, Argentina, Brazil, Iran and Israel, 1967-68; Federal Republic of Germany, United Kingdom and France, 1970; China, India, Kuwait, Holland, Canada, Iceland and United Kingdom, 1970; Szechuan and Tibet of China, 1976; China, Malaysia and the Philippines, 1978; Bangladesh,

Burma and Singapore, 1980; Pakistan, Cyprus, Belgium and Yugoslavia, 1980; Bahrain, Pakistan and Italy, 1981; Gansu and Tibet of China, 1982; Italy, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Malta and The Maldives, 1983; Switzerland, Luxembourg, Japan and Hongkong, 1983; Brunei, Malaysia and Japan, 1985; Seychelles, Tanzania, Zambia, Kenya and Oman, 1986; Yugoslavia, Turkey, Kuwait, Czechoslovakia, France and Greece, 1989; Austria, Italy and United Arab Emirates, 1994; China, 1996.

hms: Sovereign of all Orders of the Kingdom of Nepal: Supreme Commander of the Royal Nepalese Army; Subha Rajyabhisheka Padaka, 1956; Para Wing, 1969; Bishesh Sewa Padaka, 1970; Helicopter flying wings, 1976; Order of Million Elephants and White Umbrella Grade of the Grand Cross (Laos), 1970; Grand Cordon of the Supreme Order of the Chrysanthemum (Japan), 1970; Nishan-e-Imtiaz (Pakistan), 1970; Honorary General of the British Army (United Kingdom), 1973; Honorary Degree of Doctor of Laws (Delhi University, India), 1973; Grand Cordon of Yugoslav Great Star (Yugoslavia), 1974; The Collar of the Nile (Egypt), 1974; The Royal Victorian Chain (United Kingdom), 1975; Collar of the Supreme Order of the Chrysanthemum (Japan), 1975; l'Ordre Du Regne Du Laos "Medaille en Vermeil" (Laos), 1975; Grand Cross of the Netherlands Lion (Netherlands), 1975; The Most Auspicious Order of the Rajamitrabhorn (Thailand), 1979; Grand Collar of the Order of Macarius III (Cyprus), 1980; Field Marshal (United Kingdom), 1980; Gold Mercury Medal (Gold Mercury International), 1983; Grand Cross of Legion of Honour (France), 1983; Nishan-e-Pakistan (Pakistan), 1983; Collar De Carlos III (Spain), 1983; The UC Berkeley Medal (USA), 1983; The Doctorate of Public Health, honoris Causa (Mahidol University, Thailand), 1984; First Honorary Award of Grand Marshall Medal (Brooklyn College, USA), 1985; Special Level of the Grand Cross Order of Merit (Federal Republic of Germany), 1986; Order of the Republic Star First Class (Romania), 1987; Grand Cross of the Order of the White Rose with Collar (Finland), 1988; The order of the Elephant (Denmark), 1989; Arden Al Merito De Chile (Chile), 1988; Head of State Medal (The International Association of Lions Clubs), 1991; Honorary Doctor of Humanities (West Virginia Institute of Technology, USA), 1994; Honorary Doctorate (Soka University, Japan), 1995.

motto: "Knowledge is power, work is worship."
hobby: Nature conservation, riding and painting.
add: Narayanhity Royal Palace, Kathmandu.

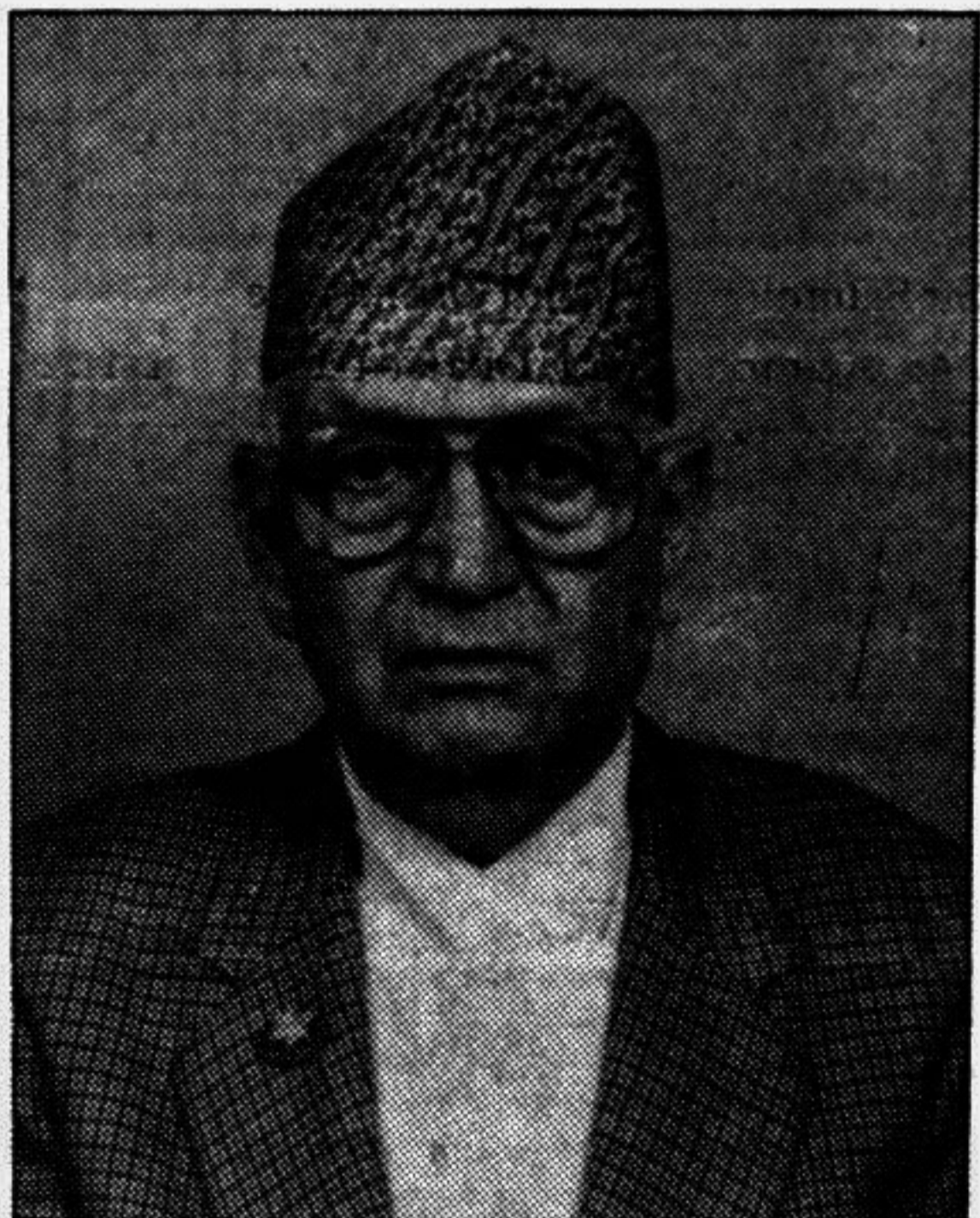
MESSAGE

It gives me great pleasure to know that the fifty-third auspicious birthday of His Majesty the King is being celebrated in the People's Republic of Bangladesh through a special supplement brought out by its fourth estate. We, in Nepal, are also celebrating with great elan and elation the auspicious occasion by organizing different programmes in a befitting manner.

The history of Nepal testifies that Monarchy is an age-old institution attached with the emotion of people and is performing its role in consonance with the popular will. His Majesty the King has been a source of inspiration for promoting national dignity, pride and interest, and the betterment of the people of Nepal. We wish His Majesty good health, happiness and long life.

Ever since the establishment of formal diplomatic relations, Nepal and the People's Republic of Bangladesh cherish close and cordial ties of friendship and cooperation. On behalf of His Majesty's Government and the people of Nepal, I wish the Government and the people of Bangladesh all success in their onerous effort to achieve socio-economic emancipation. I have the full conviction that the mutual and cordial relation so happily existing between our two countries will be further strengthened in the days to come.

Surya Bahadur Thapa
Prime Minister of Nepal



KUMARIS: Nepal's Unique Religious Institutions

by Nagendra Sharma

KATHMANDU'S Indra Jaatra, as is mostly well-known, forms one of Nepal's most famous and colourful annual festivals, especially as it is combined with what is known as the Kumari chariot procession. Justifiably, therefore, this festival has found the pride of a place in almost every single book on Nepalese tourism and culture. Indeed, these unique and highly colourful festivals form the principal attractions around the onset of Nepal's harvest time in Autumn.

The chief distinguishing feature of Nepal's Kumari-worshipping traditions is that they are basically Tantric or Vajracharya Buddhist, although, according to Hindu legends, Kumari is also a classic Hindu deity, the daughter of Lord Shiva and half sister of Lord Ganesha. In Nepal, however, it is more or less known that the Kumaris are traditionally selected from amongst Buddhist communities like the Gubhaju, Vajracharya or Shakya girls on the basis of certain set criteria such as purity, freedom from

physical blemishes and the like. What's more, the girls are also made to undergo certain Tantric rituals as a part of their selection processes, which are mostly believed to be veiled in secrecy.

Interestingly, Kathmandu itself may have, at any given time, two or three other Kumaris, leaving aside the most popular one, the royal or Lyaaku (Palace) Kumari of Hanuman Dhoka is worshipped even by the Kingdom's ruling monarch at least once a year. The other three include, for example, the Mhu (Chief) Kumari normally housed at the Mubaha monastery, Kwabaha Kumari of Bhagawan Baha in Thamel and Kilagar Kumari of Itumbaha near Kilagal. The last named is also said to differ from all the rest in one particular respect — in that, unlike the other Gubhaju/Shakya girls, she is selected from amongst the Jyapu (Farmer) caste ones and is worshipped primarily by the Pradhans of that area.

Patan and Bhadgaon cities, in their turn, also have their own versions of Kumari virgin

deities. The two in Patan include the 'Royal' Habaha Kumari, a Gubhaju and the Sonihama Kumari of Mikabaha, a Jyapu. And in Bhadgaon, we have Kumari living goddesses like the 'Royal' Ekanta Kumari, and the Wala Lakhu Kumari, so named after a Baha — like courtyard of the same name near the Dattatraya temple. The third, Tebukcha Kumari, is also said to be unique in another respect: she must be an unweaned baby and, as such, must be replaced year after year.

As mentioned above, among the category of 'Non Royal' Kumaris, the one at Mu Baha is also of special interest by virtue of the fact that it is she who is regarded as the most perfect representation of such Tantric divinities as Vajra Devi, Vajra Varahi or Trailokya Devi. What's more, she may often be regarded as superior even to the

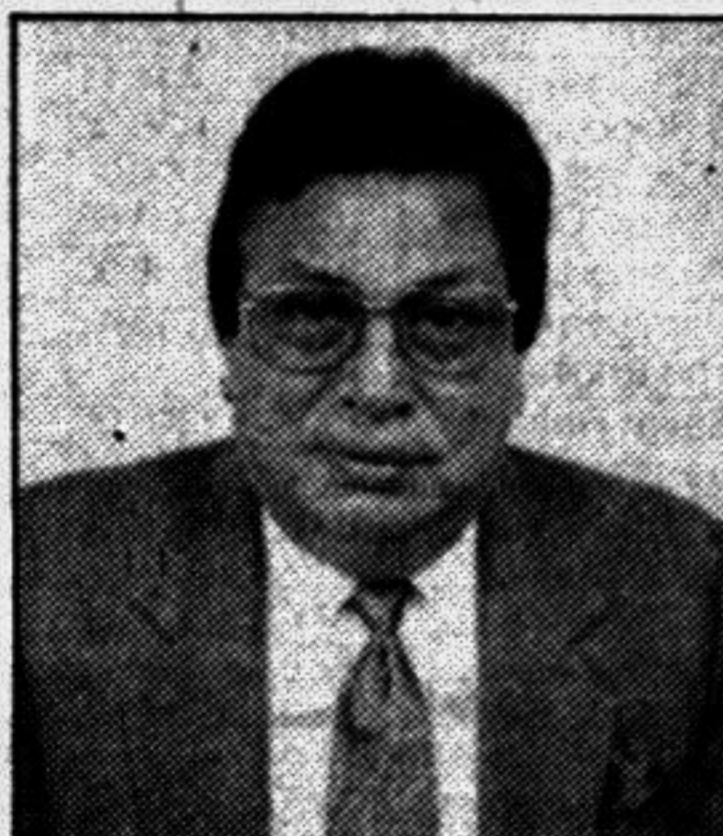
'Royal' Kumari because, in case the latter should fall sick, her attendants are supposed to send offerings to her Mubaha counterpart praying for the Royal Kumari's recovery.

Then we have the Kwa Baha Kumari who is also frequently listed as the scariest in the whole of Kathmandu city. Besides, as briefly referred to above, there are two groups of Pradhans in Kathmandu — those who worship the Kwa Baha Kumari, a Gubhaju girl, and those of the Kilagal area who worship the Itum Baha Kumari, or a Jyapu girl.

In addition to these living Kumaris, there are two other representations of Nepal's virgin goddesses, namely, Baala Kumari and Pancha Kumari. In Kathmandu valley alone, there are said to be four better-known Baala Kumari temples, one each at Thimi (east), Patan (south), Mayati (west) and Mangalpur (north). (Abridged)



MESSAGE



All the Nepalese people staying at home and abroad are happily commemorating the fifty-third auspicious birthday of His Majesty King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev. On this auspicious occasion, we all wish His Majesty good health, happiness and longevity. His Majesty King is a symbol of national unity, pride and integrity in the multi-lingual and multi-ethnic country.

On behalf of His Majesty's Government and the people of Nepal, I feel honoured to extend our heartiest and warmest greetings to the Government and the friendly people of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. We are keenly observing the progress made here in socio-economic and in the field of science and technology during the twenty-five years of the independence of Bangladesh. I deem it pertinent to note that since the establishment of diplomatic relations, Nepal and Bangladesh continue enjoying cordial and warm relations in spite of changes in the systems of governance in both the countries. They remained always excellent. Exchange of high level visits has taken place from time to time which in turn has added new dimension in the annals of Nepal-Bangladesh relations. Their Majesties the King and Queen have paid visit to Bangladesh four times. Similarly, high level leaders of

Bangladesh have been to Nepal on several occasions. Recent goodwill visit of Hon'ble Mr. Abdus Samad Azad, Foreign Minister of Bangladesh to Nepal has opened new vistas of cooperation. It is also pertinent to note here that despite cordial political relations, economic relations between our two countries have remained insignificant till now. However, I believe that opening up of the land route through Banglabandh-Phulbari transit point since September 1st this year will help in boosting up the bilateral trade as well as Nepal's trade with third countries via Bangladesh.

As least developed countries, Nepal and Bangladesh are confronting similar problems and challenges of poverty, malnutrition, underdevelopment and degradation of environment. We have similar views on regional as well as international issues. As the founder members of South-Asian Association of Regional Cooperation, Nepal and Bangladesh have high stake in the maintenance of regional peace, stability and development. We believe that sub-regional cooperation comprising Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and India's north-eastern States under SAARC framework provides a good forum for promoting cooperation among the member countries for the upliftment of the world's poor and underprivileged people of this region.

I wish to extend again my sincere felicitations to the Government and the people of the People's Republic of Bangladesh all success in their all-out efforts to alleviate the poverty and raise the standard of living of the common people. I am fully confident that our bilateral relations will be further strengthened in the future. Long live Nepal-Bangladesh friendship.

Lok Bahadur Shrestha
Ambassador of Nepal to Bangladesh

We share the joy and warmth with the people of Nepal in the celebration of the 53rd Birth Day of His Majesty Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev, the King of Nepal



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