

# NEWS FROM USEF NEPAL

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A Bulletin of activities and events from the Commission for Educational Exchange between the United States and Nepal

The Commission for  
Educational Exchange between the  
United States and Nepal

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## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR...

**This edition of the Commission Newsletter is dedicated to the women and men who lost their lives in the helicopter crash in the northern part of Taplejung district on Sept 23, 2006. This tragic accident was not confirmed for two days, as bad weather obstructed all search and rescue efforts. Many of us in Nepal, and countless family members, friends, and colleagues abroad, wept on hearing that there were no survivors among the 24 people on board the World Wildlife Fund copter. We lost not only loved ones and mentors, but trailblazers in the world biodiversity and natural resource conservation movement.**

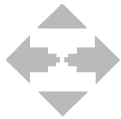
Four of the deceased were air crew, and the twenty others were returning from a ceremony that marked the handing over of stewardship for the protected region of Kangchenjunga (on the northwest border of Nepal with Sikkim) from the Nepal Government to the local communities of the area. In many ways this was an event that echoed Nepal's particular fame in environmental conservation circles, for such a plan involves local people in the protection and sustainable use of their forests and wildlife, much as has been encouraged previously in the Sagarmatha and Annapurna areas. Indeed, among those who perished were Nepalis who had given the greater part of their lives to conservation, and who were giants in the field, both at home and abroad (see the essay inside by Ken Bauer, on his mentor Mingma Norbu Sherpa). The World Wildlife Fund lost a great many of its close knit staff, as did the Government of Nepal's Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation. The US and Finnish Missions also lost beloved colleagues.

At USEF we particularly remember the towering figures of Dr. Tirtha Man Maskey and Dr. Harka Gurung, who mentored many American and Nepali students over the years, and saw them become scholars in their own right; Dr. Chandra Prasad Gurung, who received his Ph.D at the University of Hawai'i and returned to Nepal to continue his leadership in the field; and Mr. Mingma Norbu Sherpa, who went to the US on a special Fulbright Biodiversity Award in 1987, and

who then worked for the WWF as Director of Asian and Pacific programs from its center in Washington, D.C.

### In memoriam:

- Dr. Bijan Acharya,  
Program Development Specialist, USAID
- Ms. Margaret Alexander,  
Deputy Director, USAID
- Mr. Hem Raj Bhandari,  
Nepal Television
- Dr. Jill Bowling,  
Conservation Director, WWF United Kingdom
- Dr. Chandra P. Gurung,  
Country Representative, WWF Nepal
- Dr. Harka Gurung,  
Senior Advisor, WWF Nepal
- Ms. Jennifer Headley,  
Coordinator, WWF United Kingdom
- Mr. Kay Kim,  
Crew Member, Shree Airlines
- Mrs. Yeshi Lama,  
Senior Program Officer, WWF Nepal
- Dr. Tirtha Man Maskey,  
Co-Chair, WWF Nepal
- Mr. Pauli Mustonen,  
Charge d'Affaires, Embassy of Finland
- Dr. Damodar Parajuli,  
Acting Secretary, Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation
- Mr. Narayan Poudel,  
Director General, Dept of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation



- Mr. Matthew Preece,  
Program Officer, WWF United States of America
- Mr. Gopal Rai,  
Minister of State of Forests and Soil Conservation, and his wife Mrs. Mina Rai
- Mr. Sharad Rai,  
Director General, Department of Forests
- Mr. Mingma Norbu Sherpa,  
Managing Director, EHEC, WWF

- Captain Mingma Sherpa,  
Shree Airlines
- Mr. Bijay Kumar Shrestha,  
Federation of Nepal Chamber of Commerce and Industries
- Mr. Tandu Shrestha
- Mr. Valeri Slafronov,  
Shree Airlines
- Mr. Guruwar Tandual,  
Shree Airlines

- Mr. Dawa Tshering,  
Chair, Kangchenjunga Conservation Area Project Management Council

While we mourn their loss, let's act so that their inspirational work is carried forward in Nepal, and beyond. It is more urgent than ever.



Peter K. Moran

# Ongoing “Democracy Forum” Comes to Neighborhoods in Kathmandu

*A report by Hriseekesh Upadhyay, FAAN General Secretary*

On August 19, 2006, the Fulbright Alumni Association of Nepal (FAAN) organized the second of ten Democracy Forums (first launched in June this year) in Koteshwar, an eastern suburb of Kathmandu. The theme of Forum-II was “Constitution, Rule of Law and Democracy: Citizens and the State Apparatus.” In all, some 170 invited participants attended this public interaction which focused on the issues of constitution drafting currently underway in Nepal and how best to encapsulate the people’s aspiration in this major political document.

As the Forum event was well underway, the streets of Kathmandu witnessed a massive demonstration of protests against the steep petroleum price rise announced the previous night by the government. All the streets were barricaded, tyres were set on fire, and vehicles were stoned or torched. As organizers, we were concerned whether to go ahead with the Forum: in spite of the careful planning made for the event we were in no position to avert the



Why Democracy ?

angry street protests. As the program was planned weeks earlier and the volunteers were mobilized to contact and prepare the participants to join in the important public discussion, we decided to go ahead and conduct the planned event in a public temple complex as best as we could.



Let's Take Pride in Being Nepali--Let's Do Something For Nepal!

Fortunately, our plan of inviting participants from certain contiguous areas for each Forum proved very helpful and prescient; as the Koteshwar area covers a densely populated suburb of Kathmandu, we were very much encouraged by the presence of a large number of people who came—walking but rather uncertain—even on a tense day when most parts of the city were closed. We were expecting some 250 strong audience but we felt lucky to have highly motivated group of 170 participants on such a tense Saturday afternoon. The program began at 2 pm and continued till 4.30 pm as planned without any untoward incident. FAAN executive officials, community leaders of Koteshwar, Min Bhavan, Baneshwar and nearby areas of Kathmandu attended the Forum. The FAAN President Dr. Sangita Rayamajhi presided the Forum proceedings. Special posters depicting women, youth, and a democratic future were put on display and attracted considerable attention. A 42 page bilingual booklet titled *Reflections on Democracy* containing some 200 quotations from Jefferson to Mahatma Gandhi, from Kennedy to Judge Brandeis was also released. This booklet is compiled by the FAAN General Secretary with a Foreword by the President.

One key question raised during the discussion was the modality of representation: as democratic



Some of the participants at the Democracy Forum in Dhalkhu

governance has to be based on representation, and by definition a representative mechanism can only be based on the abstraction of one elected person trying to safeguard the interest of many thousands of their constituency, the call for having each and every group—marked by gender, ethnicity, caste, region, religion, language—present at every level of discussion may distract the whole political process. Many participants expressed the view that the constitution and constitution-making process should facilitate democracy and not the other way round, i.e., the exercise of constitution making should not derail the democratic process. It means the whole political process underway in the country now must not be bogged down in mere technicalities. Justice, fairness, inclusiveness and accommodation should be the guiding principles of constitution making for the new century.

Then, on September 9, the Third Democracy Forum (Giving Voice to Voiceless: Women in Democracy) was organized in Dhalku, Kathmandu.

Attended by some 260 participants from Wards 5, 6, 7, 8 and 10, over half the participants were women.

The Forum was conducted in two sessions: the inaugural session was attended by the Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives Honorable (Mrs.) Chitralkha Yadav; Deputy Director of the Public

Affairs Office, US Embassy, Ms. Sharon Hudson-Dean; Fulbright Nepal Executive Director Dr. Peter Moran; FAAN Officials and invited guests.

The inaugural session highlighted the goals and objectives of Democracy Forum with special significance given to women's participation in democracy..

Dr. Sangita Rayamajhi, prominent academic feminist and FAAN President, traced the eventful struggle women had to undertake in the modern Western world—in Britain, USA and France—to be considered equal citizen and worthy participants in democracy. Even in advanced Western democracies, women are yet to be heard in all their diverse concerns and voices and taken seriously as capable leaders and public officials. In Nepal, the struggle has just begun and public discussion like FAAN Democracy Forum has offered a rare public airing of this important issue. Then, Mr. Tikaram Bhattarai, a civil lawyer/social activist based in Kathmandu, called upon Nepalese women to take every opportunity to gain access to public fora and not to shy away from fighting for their rights to be heard and taken seriously. Altogether 15 participants added their comments and asked various questions to the lead speakers to elaborate further. Eight of the floor participants were women; they voiced the confidence that given a fair deal and opportunity, Nepalese women were able and willing to secure their rightful place in society.



Democracy Forum in Dhalkhu



Deputy Director of Public Affairs Section, US Embassy, Ms. Sharon Hudson-Dean and FAAN General Secretary, Mr. Hriseekesh Upadhyay.

# INTRODUCING THE NEW NEPALI AND AMERICAN FULBRIGHT GRANTEES IN THE US & NEPAL...

**A**merican Fulbright Senior Scholar Research Grantee: Ms. Rachel B. Stevens, Associate Professor, Department of Art, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces. Research: “Sojourner for Form: Sacred Sites and Newari Metal Techniques of the Kathmandu Valley as a Source for Contemporary Sculpture” (August 2006 – December 2006).

American Fulbright Senior Scholar Regional Research Grantee: Dr. Cheryl G. Colopy, Independent Scholar/Producer, from Oakland, CA. Research: “South Asian Rivers in Crisis” (September 2006 – June 2007).

TU Lecturer/Researcher Grant: Dr. Sean D. Cleary, Associate Professor, Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, School of Public Health and Health Services, George Washington University, Washington, D.C., will teach public/global health at the

Department of Microbiology, TU, Kirtipur main campus (January – July 2007); and Dr. Onkar P. Sharma, Professor and Director, School of Computer Science and Mathematics, Marist College, Poughkeepsie, NY, will teach computer science at the Central Department of Computer Science and Information Technology TU, Kirtipur (January – August 2007).

KU Lecturer/Researcher Grant: Dr. Marsha L. Greer, Associate Professor, Department of Health Science and Human Ecology, California State University-San Bernardino, is teaching public/global health at the Kathmandu College of Management, affiliated to KU (August 2006 – January 2007); Dr. Prashanth U. Nyer, Associate Professor, Department of Marketing, Chapman University, Orange – Main Campus, is teaching business administration

at the KU School of Management (July – December 2006); and Dr. Luis A. Ruedas, Director, Department of Biology, Portland State University, Portland, OR, is teaching environmental sciences at the Department of Environmental Sciences and Engineering at KU (August 2006 – January 2007).

American IIE Fulbright Students Currently in Nepal and their Research Topics: Mr. Michael G. Engle, Pepperdine University, CA, Project: Psychology – “On Educating Attention: Perspectives from Buddhist Traditions”; Ms. Mary E. Jonas, Kenyon College, Ohio, Project: Theology & Religion – “Empowerment through Dharma: Theravada Nuns in Nepal”; Ms. Neema K. Khatri, Smith College, Massachusetts, Project: International Relations – “International Nepalese Labor Migration”; Mr. Ian J. MacCormack, Rice University, Texas, Project:

## New American Fulbrighters welcomed...

**O**n September 25, 2006, Mr. Robert L. Hugins, Chairman of the Fulbright Commission Board and Public Affairs Officer of the U.S. Embassy in Nepal, hosted a reception to welcome new American Fulbright students and professors to Kathmandu. The reception was attended by Nepali alumni of the Fulbright, Humphrey and East-West Center programs, as well as by Nepali scholars, artists and professionals who are currently collaborating with American Fulbright professors. Ambassador James F. Moriarty gave the Fulbrighters a warm welcome, and they were then individually introduced by Executive Director Peter Moran to the assembled guests. Here’s wishing our Fulbright guests and their Nepali hosts a mutually enriching experience, and successful work together.



Ambassador James F. Moriarty, Fulbright Commission Board member Ms. Christina Monson, and Fulbright Hays scholar Mr. Brandon Kohrt at the reception.

Theology & Religion – “Madhyamaka Interpretations of Phenomena, Consciousness, and Emptiness”; and Mr. Michael D. Smith, At-Large, Louisiana, Project: South Asian Studies – “Contemporary Synthesis in Buddhism”.

American Fulbright-Hays Students Currently (or soon to be) in Nepal & Their Research Topics: Ms. Rebecca M. Edwards, University of California, Los Angeles, Education – “Impacts of Educational Decentralization in Nepal”; Mr. Brandon A. Kohrt, Emory University, Georgia, Anthropology – “Heart Wounds; The Language of Trauma and Emotion in Nepal”; Ms. Amanda T. Snellinger, Cornell University, New York, Anthropology – “Transfiguration of Political Imaginary: The Role of Generational Change in Nepali Student Activism”; and Ms. Anna T. Stirr, Columbia University, New York, Ethnomusicology – “Negotiating Nepalipan: Migration, Gender and Nation in Nepali Music and Language”.

Nepali Fulbright Masters Students: Ms. Shanti Karanjit, Environmental Education, Yale

University, New Haven, Connecticut; Mr. Bhaskar Karmacharya, Business Administration, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Ms. Rachana Shrestha, Development Management, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; Ms. Reshma Tuladhar (Tamrakar), Microbiology, Indiana University, Bloomington; and Mr. Deepesh K. Vaidya, Finance, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts.

Nepali East-West Center Student: Mr. Pradip Raj Pant, Ph.D. in Urban & Regional Planning, University of Hawaii.

Nepali Humphrey Fellows: Mr. Sudhir Khanal, Public Health Policy & Management, John Hopkins University; and Mr. Biswas P. Rai, Human Resource Management, Michigan State University.

Nepali Fulbright Post-Doctoral Researchers: Dr. Bhakta B. Ale, Western Michigan University, Engineering – “Development of Low Cost Hydrogen Plant in Nepal”; and Dr. Posh Raj Pandey, Cornell University, New York, Economics – “Agriculture in Doha Round: Implications for Nepal.”

## Humphrey Alumni receive Professional Development Grants

**D**r. Meen B. Poudyal Chhetri, a Humphrey alumnus from 2002-2003 in the area of Substance Abuse research, was awarded a Humphrey Alumni Professional Development Grant from the U. S. Department of State and IIE to attend the 2006 National Institute of Drug Abuse International Forum on “International Trends and Needs in Drug Abuse Research.” The grant also enabled Dr. Chhetri to attend the College on Problems of Drug Dependence Sixty-Eighth Annual Scientific Meeting held in Scottsdale, Arizona from June 16-22, 2006.

Mr. Prachanda Man Shrestha, who attended the Hubert H. Humphrey Program at American University in Washington, D.C. in 1993-1994, was also awarded a Mini-grant from the U.S. Department of State/IIE. Mr. Shrestha plans to attend the World Bank Institute Learning Program on trade policies and the world trading system. He intends to apply what he learns in the development of a Nepal-specific trade capacity building program in December 2006, and we wish him much success in his endeavor.



Dr. Marsha Greer, Dr. Prashanth Nyer, Ms. Puma Shakya, Mr. Sunil Shakya, Ms. Rachel Stevens, and Mr. Santosh Shakya.



Ms. Hemlata Rai, Ms. Anjana Shakya, Ms. Anna Stirr, and Ms. Asha Basnyat.

# MS. BINU SHRESTHA was a **FULBRIGHT GRANTEE** during 2004-06;

**she has just finished her Master's work in the Biology Department of Tufts University, in Medford, Massachusetts.**

**L**ife in Boston has been full of learning experiences and I have grown positively in all aspects of my life. Boston itself is a very international place- full of universities and intellectuals. It is difficult not to overhear or get involved in intellectual conversations.

My first step into the US was in New York City for the “gateway orientation.” Most of the things looked familiar to me, because I had seen them so many times in news reports, documentaries, postcards or in the movies. I couldn't believe I was in a ferry looking at the Statue of Liberty, or walking in New York's famous Central Park and staring at the never-ending lights of Times Square.

In Boston, everyday is a learning experience- be it in the classroom, or in the lab or with friends or in the crowded subway or bus full of

people from all over the world. It has been a great experience having friends and meeting people from different parts of the world. Some of the people I meet tell me that I am the first Nepalese they know and it is always a great opportunity to tell them about my country and culture. Many are surprised to hear the diversity Nepal has to offer in terms of culture, landscape and language, despite its small size. The students here at Tufts University have a lot of access to the scientific journals and numerous opportunities to discuss them with professors and classmates. I wished I had that opportunity as a student in Nepal. As a student here, I can see the immense possibilities for what we could do in Nepal with the knowledge and exposure we obtained here. I totally enjoyed Thanksgiving and Christmas celebrations everywhere I was invited- with my friend's family, with my advisor's family and a big Thanksgiving celebration organized

by Tufts International Students Centre. I meet with my advisor frequently to discuss my research and I feel fortunate to get his support and help. We have weekly seminars where students, professors and guest speakers present their research and I love listening to those sessions. I got to present my research too.

I also got to participate in the “enrichment seminar” in Arizona, which was yet another opportunity to meet Fulbright scholars from so many parts of the world. It was simply a great experience for me. Like all the students who are here from other countries, I miss home, but my family's encouragement makes me feel stronger too.

For my Master's research, I worked in Dr. Michael H. Court's lab at in the Comparative and Molecular Pharmacogenetics Laboratory, Department of Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics, at Tufts University School of Medicine. I tested the hypothesis that species with a defective UDP-glucuronosyltransferase (UGT1A6), as indicated by the presence of multiple inactivating genetic mutations, are hypercarnivores. UDP-glucuronosyltransferase (UGT1A6) metabolizes acetaminophen and is important from pharmacological and toxicological points of view. I looked into the presence or absence of inactivating mutations in the UGT1A6 of different



Ms. Binu Shrestha



Binu with mentor Dr. Michael Court.

carnivore mammals and then correlated it with the diet to see if diet played any role in its functionality. The most important result of this thesis is that we found multiple inactivating mutations in the UGT1A6 exon 1 sequence of species studied in the Felidae family which shows that it is a pseudogene in these species.

As UGT1A6 is of toxicological importance due to its role in the metabolism of xenobiotics, its presence is very important in helping the body to get rid of toxic products from the environment. So if this gene becomes inactive, there is a high chance that the animal will have to face the effects of environmental toxicity. So the defective UGT1A6 also shows the increasing risk to the species from increasing environmental toxicology. This shows the importance of identifying species with dysfunctional UGT1A6 from the conservation point of view so as to identify the species at risk from increasing levels of man made environmental toxins.

The most exciting part of my research was to be able to work with the DNA samples of big cats like Snow leopard, Tiger, Lynx, Cheetah etc. and other animals belonging to the order Carnivora like Red panda, Hyena, etc.

I am writing my Master's thesis and am waiting to start my academic training opportunity in the same lab. I am looking forward to that as I will learn many more techniques and have more working resources. During that research time, apart from learning new laboratory techniques, I will also be working towards extending my master's research and writing a scientific paper to submit to a journal.

# Remembering Mr. Mingma Norbu Sherpa (1955-2006)

*by Ken Bauer, American Fulbright scholar  
in Nepal 1996-1997.*

**M**ingma was one of my heroes. I'm not sure if he ever knew that. In 1995, he gave me - an idealistic and quite ignorant young man - the chance of a lifetime, and it has continued to affect me to this day. Mingma hired me as a country consultant at the World Wildlife Fund's Nepal Program when it was a small office just on the cusp of initiating a number of large programs, including projects in Bardia, Shey Phoksumdo, Sagarmatha National Parks. Mingma gave me incredible latitude to become involved in these projects and included me in decisions large and small. I watched him grow this small organization into something quite marvelous, and he had a gift for recognizing people's talents and leveraging them for effective conservation work. Observing him work was a continual lesson.

Mingma seamlessly operated in a number of realms that were socially very complex and, in many ways, biased against people like him. On the one hand, he was a Sherpa maneuvering in a Nepal still governed according to caste and social stratification. But Mingma never let this phase him, and he treated everyone with respect, forthrightness, and consummate diplomacy. Mingma skillfully moved between the worlds of international NGOs, national bureaucracies, and local politics, and he brought people together, cutting through needless social distinctions. He was also one of the first of his generation to be educated abroad - something many Nepalis take for granted today, but was truly a leap of imagination and daring in his day.

Mingma would have excelled at anything he chose. Yet he chose conservation, and a very deep commitment to the kind of mountain communities from which he hailed. And Mingma was incredibly effective. I can only imagine how many people inspired, how much money he helped WWF raise for conservation, how many minds he turned to their better selves. The incredible legacy that Mingma leaves behind, of ecosystems conserved and communities empowered, speaks for itself. Mingma is irreplaceable, a man of the highest character and dignity. Let us hope that we can turn this irredeemable loss into some kind of good, a rededication of our own efforts to treat others and, indeed, our planet with greater dignity.

# I'M NOT BRAD PITT

*Dr. Mark L. Hildebrandt came to Nepal as a Senior Scholar in January 2006. He is an associate professor in the Department of Geography at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville.*

As a boy growing up in the United States of America, I knew very little about Nepal. I gained my first impressions of the country by watching “Raiders of the Lost Ark” (1981). The film is set in the 1930s and there is a brief scene in a saloon where the lead female character takes part in a drinking contest somewhere in the Himalaya. While Nepalis have no central role in the film, they seem to be peculiarly fascinated by this particular American’s tendency to be at the center of attention. I came to believe that all of Nepal was like Everest Base Camp, an exotic land full of exotic people, not privy to what the USA was really like.

I arrived in Nepal in January of this year, and was appointed to teach a course on Meteorology and Climatology to 3rd year undergraduates in Environmental Science at Kathmandu University.

My goal was to integrate teaching and research through hands-on learning as a means to address environmental concerns in Nepal and throughout the world.

On the first day of class, I asked the students to write prognostic essays, (a) “Is Global Warming happening? Support your views,” and (b)

“When you hear the word ‘America,’ what are your first thoughts?” All of the students were absolutely certain that Global Warming is happening. While this result surprised me, largely because it was so different from the opinion expressed by many of my American students, their answers to their first impressions of America surprised me even more. Their first thoughts of America tended to be “fast cars, good universities, rich people, and Brad Pitt,” though several of them said that their first impressions of the USA were “A government that should mind its own business.” As the semester progressed, it became very clear to me that their impression of the United States was mediated by television and/or the mass media, and that many of them did not like the USA even though most of them had never interacted with an actual American.

For most of them, I was their first ‘real’ impression of the United States (gulp!). I took this role to heart, and for the duration of the course I maintained a sense of humor and approachability that they had not encountered in the classroom. I wanted them to see that Americans are people too, and that while flawed, are generally kind and approachable. I wanted

to integrate these qualities into my teaching. To do so, I brought meteorological and climatological processes to life through hands-on learning and audio-visual enhancements, both pedagogical tools that they had rarely, if ever, encountered. I tried to have them understand the environmental problems facing both the world and Nepal, and encouraged them to feel empowered - that they could be a part of the solution to these global challenges. And while I am not Brad Pitt, I think that I served as a genuine ambassador of the USA. I hope my students enjoyed learning from me as much as I did from them.

For me, my Fulbright experience has been refreshing. I loved teaching here. I give credit to a mere change in location and to the effervescent undergraduates at Kathmandu University. They showed an appreciation and enthusiasm for knowledge that I had only experienced on rare and fleeting occasions in the USA. To my students I am most grateful. My research interests, which provide the fuel for my intellectual fire, have been renewed by my time in Nepal.

I plan to continue building on what this experience has started, both professionally and as a goodwill ambassador of the United States.

Dr. Hildebrandt and his students at Kathmandu University



Kathmandu University students working on a lab assignment

