

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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# State

Magazine

## Kathmandu

Where the past  
is always present

# Contents

Department of State • United States of America



*The Garuda, a Hindu image, near Kathmandu.*

Photo by Joseph Furgal

## 8 Foreign Buildings Operations

As the Department's real estate has grown, so have the responsibilities of the team that manages that portfolio.

## 14 Post of the Month: Kathmandu

An assignment in legendary Nepal has its rewards and challenges.

## 22 Public Service Recognition Week

- Foreign Service Day
- Civil Service Day
- Department Awards

## 34 Welfare to Work

Two women determined to leave the welfare system find opportunities at State.

## 40 International Marriages

Even romance has its rules when the perspective bride or groom is a foreign national.

## 43 Counterintelligence Concerns

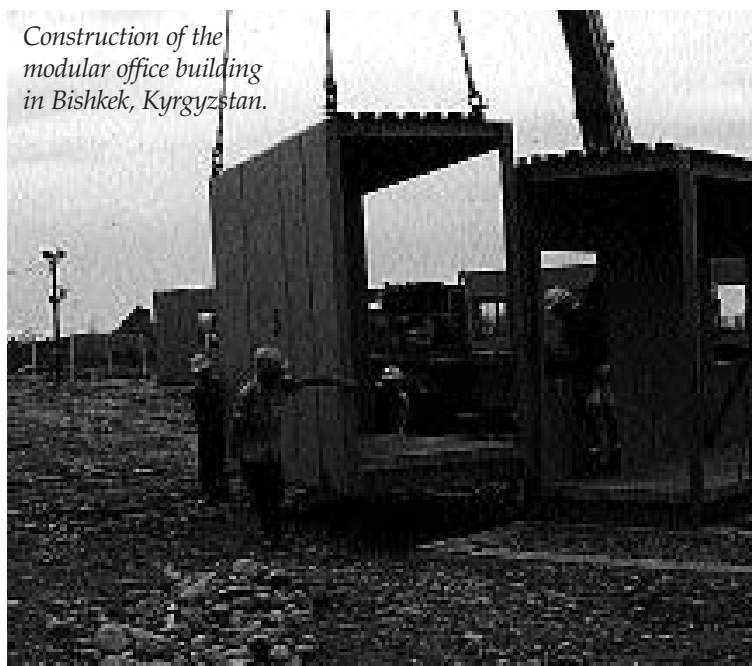
You may be recruited as a spy, too, so be alert to the signs.

## 44 Economics and the Foreign Service

A former economics officer offers some unique insights.

## 47 NATO Enlargement

As three former Warsaw Pact nations are considered for admission, the alliance examines its role in the 21st century.



*Construction of the modular office building in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.*

### C O L U M N S

2 From the Secretary

4 Direct From the D.G.

53 Ask Dr. Dumont

54 State of the Arts

60 Safety Scene

64 Library Report

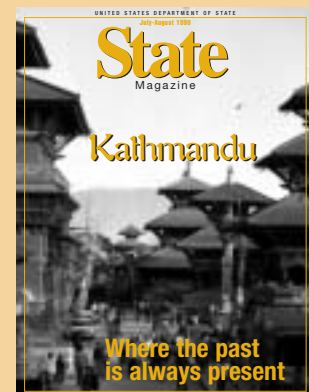
### D E P A R T M E N T S

3 Letters to the Editor

5 In the News

61 Obituaries

62 Personnel Actions



### On the Cover

*Kathmandu's Patan Durbār Square*

Photo  
by Joseph Furgal

# Kathmandu



*The "all-seeing eyes of Buddha" are painted on a tower in the center of Bodanath in Kathmandu.*

Photo by Joseph Furgal

# A Mecca in a Land of Legends

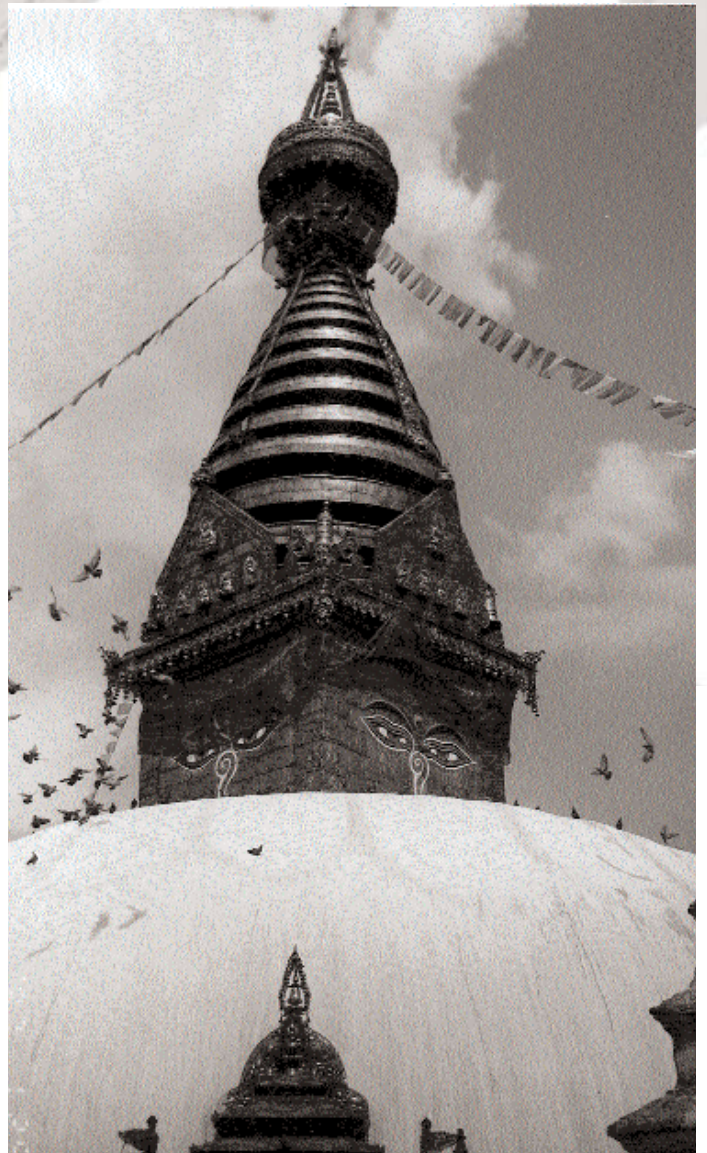
By Micaela Schweizer

Legend has it that the Kathmandu Valley was once filled by a massive lake. In the center sat an island where a giant blue lotus flower containing the flame of Buddha grew. When Manjushri, a manifestation of Buddha, crested the hills surrounding the lake, the beauty of the place captivated him. To gain access to the island and its sacred flower, Manjushri created a passage through the southern hills to drain the waters of the lake. Upon reaching the spot where the blue lotus sat, Manjushri cut off his hair, with each strand becoming a tree and each louse a monkey. Today, that site is graced by one of the most important Buddhist temples, Swayambunath, known colloquially as the Monkey Temple.

## Kathmandu



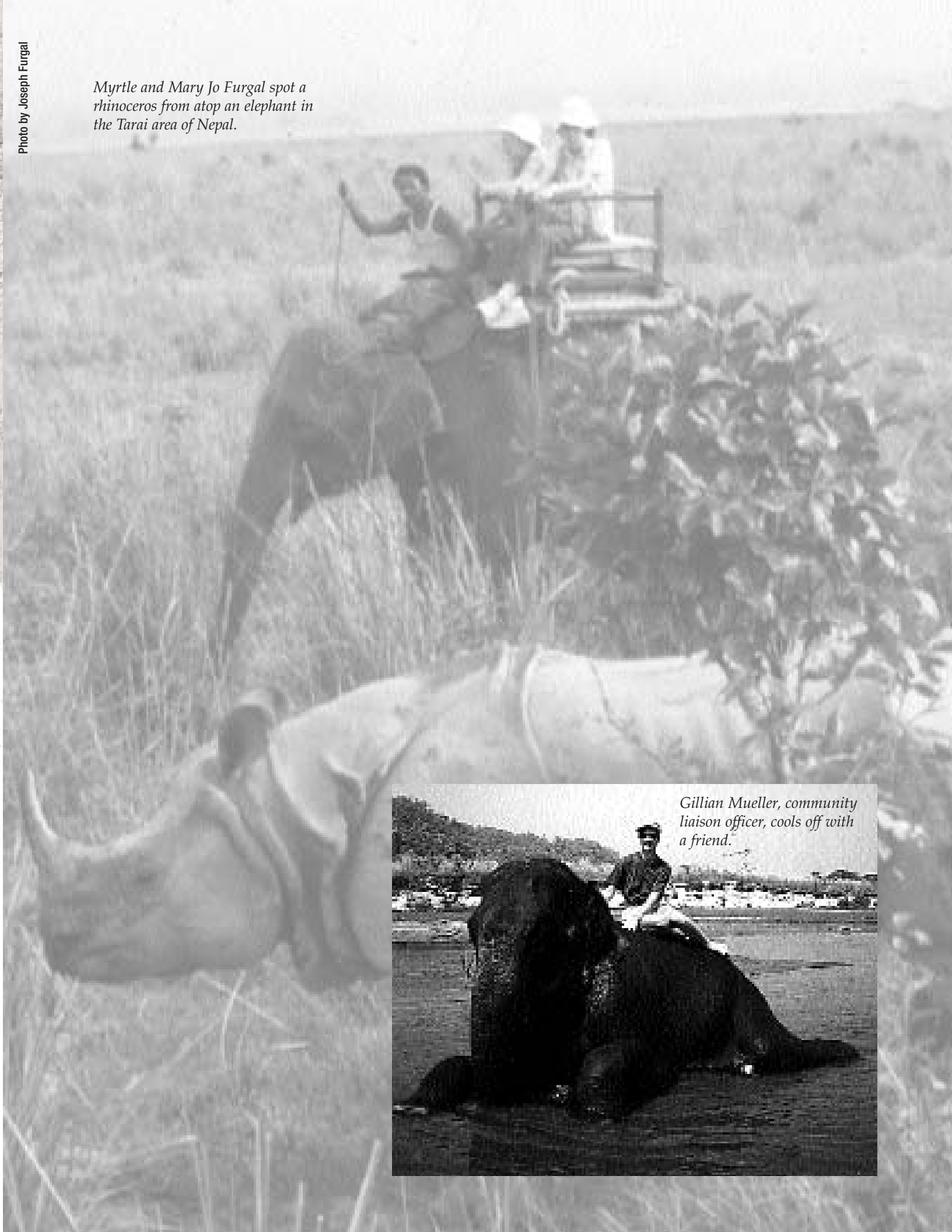
*Swayambhu Stupa in the Kathmandu Valley is a holy shrine to both Hindus and Buddhists.*



While the metamorphosis of the hair and lice may be questionable, that the Kathmandu Valley was once a lake and that the valley has a beauty capable of captivating a god are certainly fact. Though pollution clouds the air of the valley now, when the skies are clear and the Himalayas tower over the northern hills, one can imagine the splendor that evoked such devotion from Manjushri. Over the years, Kathmandu's beauty and magic have entranced many visitors. Many have been so captivated they're unable to leave. Approximately 3,000 American expatriates, for example, live full time in Kathmandu, and others return year after year. In all, more than 25,000 Americans tour Nepal annually.

Closed to all outsiders until 1951, Nepal has heartily embraced its role as a tourist hot spot and manages to offer something for everyone. For outdoorsmen, trekking in the Himalayas

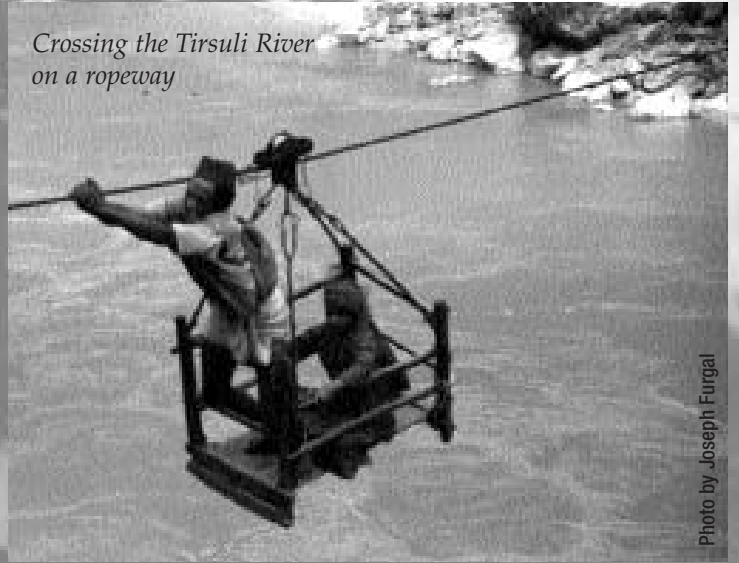
*Myrtle and Mary Jo Furgal spot a rhinoceros from atop an elephant in the Tarai area of Nepal.*



*Gillian Mueller, community liaison officer, cools off with a friend.*

*Pashupatinath, holy site of  
Nepal's Hindus*

*Crossing the Tirsuli River  
on a ropeway*



*Casting off on the Seti River in central Nepal  
are, from left, Marcus Morsa, river guide;  
Alexandra Mueller, daughter of Political-  
Military Officer Albert Mueller; Phillip  
Hoffmann, USIS public affairs officer, and  
his son, Paul, and his wife Cheryl.*

provides spectacular views, breathtaking climbs and charming encounters with yaks and Sherpas, while trips down the sacred rivers from Tibet offer exciting white-water rafting and glimpses of unspoiled terrain. Those interested in less strenuous entertainment visit Nepal's grassland nature preserves in search of rhinos, tigers and bears or shop for precious gems, handwoven carpets and unique Nepalese crafts.

Nepal is certainly a place of contrasts. Its geography ranges from hot, steamy plains to glacial mountains. Although its people are friendly and welcoming, their culture and religion remain a mystery to most. Closed to the outside world for centuries, Nepal has since embraced the residence of many foreigners, including large populations of Tibetan and Bhutanese refugees. While Nepal has attracted investment from some of the biggest American firms, it remains one of the world's poorest countries.

*Right: Sandra Schensted, daughter of Consul David Schensted, gets a basket ride across a suspension bridge.*

*Below: Maintenance Specialist Dale Kerksiek and his supervisor Ram Nepal give a lift during Take Your Sons and Daughters to Work Day to, from left, Lina Nandy, Hester Kerksiek, Elizabeth Daley, Omar Cole, Michael Daley, Hanna Kerksiek, Raju Ladley and Madeleine Kerksiek.*







Photo by Joseph Furgal

*Above: Carrying wood in Chitwan, a national park in the Terai area of Nepal*

*Below: Joyce Cobb, office management specialist, encounters calf and children on a village street.*



Nepal's variety is reflected in the U.S. mission's work. The consular section, for example, has gained worldwide attention for assisting American mountain climbers, most recently in May 1996's dramatic helicopter rescue on Mount Everest. Other mission efforts, though less dramatic, include supporting Nepal's young democracy (the country was an absolute monarchy until 1990); promoting U.S. business, especially in developing Nepal's hydropower; and assisting more than 110,000 refugees.

Global issues, too, have taken on particular importance in this region. Kathmandu is the Department's regional environmental hub for South Asia. U.S. officials are conducting research to find a vaccine for hepatitis E. Nepal's famous soldiers, the "Gurkhas," find their modern-day counterparts in the Royal Nepalese Army, which staunchly supports U.N. peacekeeping. The U.S. Agency for International Development has a \$26 million annual program focused on agriculture, health and women's empowerment. The oldest and largest Peace Corps program in Asia is in Nepal, with about 150 volunteers doing everything from providing basic health education to creating wildlife data bases. (At least two Nepal Peace Corps alumni, Peter Burleigh and Peter Tomsen, became U.S. ambassadors.) The U.S. Information Service maintains active programs for a very receptive audience (*see USIS sidebar*).

Both at work and at play, Kathmandu, a mysterious city hidden among the world's highest mountains, offers a fascinating experience that makes it a popular post and that causes many mission members to seek repeat tours. ■

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*The author is a junior political/consular officer in Kathmandu.*

By Phillip Hoffmann

For centuries, Nepal was a hermetic kingdom closed to all foreigners. With the fall of the Rana regime in 1951, the Himalayan state began to open to the outside world. By 1953, the first road connecting the capital to the outside world snaked down from the middle hills to the lowland jungles at Nepal's southern border. Mountain climbers came, followed by tourists. As Nepal's commerce and conversation with the West increased, so did the pressure for representative government. With the success of the People's Movement to Restore Democracy and the institution of parliamentary government in 1991, Nepal's engagement with the rest of the world accelerated.

Though still one of the poorest countries in the world, Nepal has a growing middle class and an elite, concentrated in Kathmandu Valley, who are thoroughly digital denizens of the world, connected by cable TV, CNN and globe-surfing Internet access.

The U.S. Information Service Kathmandu has been in Nepal almost from the start of the country's opening in the 1950s, and hopes to continue its small but diverse array of exchange and information programs well into the next millennium.

USIS Kathmandu focuses its daily efforts on four goals: the consolidation of Nepal's eight-year-old democracy, the evolution of free and responsible media to support democratic processes, improved understanding of American policy and society, and persuading Nepalis of the benefits of an open market economy. Of the tools USIS Kathmandu uses to pursue these goals, exchange programs like the Fulbright, Humphrey and International Visitor programs have proved particularly effective. Six members of Nepal's current Cabinet are alumni of these programs, as are five secretaries, the highest-ranking civil servants in each ministry; the speaker of the House; the secretary of the House of Representatives; and the personal assistant or chief of staff to the prime minister.

Most exchange participants return from their trips to the United States with a deep appreciation for the mechanisms and responsibilities of American democracy. Some return with new ideas of how to change Nepal for the better.

One International Visitor alumnus returned to Nepal convinced that America

had effective methods to check corruption. As a member of Nepal's Parliament, he subsequently championed the passage of Nepal's first financial disclosure law for politicians.

The tools USIS Kathmandu uses to publicize U.S. activities and policies are a mixture of the old and the new. Using its excellent relations with the local media, many of which have benefited from USIS materials and training on the role of the press, USIS distributes press releases and TV and radio programs. U.S. Agency for International Development Nepal has a large and active program on the cutting edge of development work, and more Peace Corps volunteers are based in Nepal than in any other Asian country. Keeping Nepal informed of what the U.S. mission is doing is a steady job all by itself.

To distribute U.S. government policy statements, USIS Kathmandu turns to the same new resource that allows it to provide rapid answers to questions about America posed by its Nepali audience: a new USIS Information Resource Center. With online access to data bases and the Internet, USIS' IRC staff is now able to provide rapid, thorough, authoritative information to key embassy officials and contacts. When the phone lines are working, USIS Kathmandu can even spare its motorcycle messenger another dangerous ride through the twisted, crowded lanes of Kathmandu and deliver the information by e-mail. ■

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*The author is public affairs officer at USIS Kathmandu.*

*A road winds through the terraced paddy fields common throughout Nepal.*



Photo by Joseph Furgal

# President Clinton's Foreign Service Day Message

*On this 33rd annual celebration of Foreign Service Day, I am delighted to extend warm greetings to the men and women of the United States Foreign Service. We set aside this day each year to recognize the enormous contributions made by our diplomatic workforce, both domestic and overseas.*

*The importance of representing our nation and its interests throughout the world continues to grow with each passing decade. As I have traveled the globe, I have become increasingly convinced that the qualities of life we cherish—peace, freedom and individual prosperity—must be our goal for all the peoples of the world if we are to ensure our continued well-being. An effective Foreign Service remains vital to meeting this challenge, and I thank each of you for your hard work, loyalty and commitment to excellence in your demanding profession.*

*It is a mark of the intense dedication of our foreign affairs personnel that, on Foreign Service Day each year, hundreds of retirees devote the day to reacquainting themselves with current foreign policy issues through a series of seminars and plenary sessions conducted at the State Department. They also gather at the AFSA memorial plaque to pay tribute to those heroes of the Foreign Service who died while serving our country abroad. This year we honor Leslianne Shedd, who perished in the crash of Ethiopian Airlines Flight 961 on Nov. 23, 1996, after the aircraft had been hijacked. From the survivors' accounts, we know of her calmness and courage and of her compassion toward the other passengers during the flight's final descent. Leslianne leaves a legacy of dedication to her country that has always been the hallmark of the Foreign Service, and I join you in expressing sincere condolences to her family and friends.*

*I also extend my deepest appreciation to all Foreign Service professionals and their families who support America's values worldwide, whether through diplomacy, economic or military aid programs, public affairs or any of the other myriad activities so important to the continued success of our foreign policy. On behalf of a grateful nation, I commend and thank you, the Foreign Service of the United States of America.*