



**FESTIVAL OF DEITIES & DEMONS.** Dancers wearing masks of the god Kawancha pose for photographs in Kathmandu, Nepal. For centuries, Nepal has celebrated the Indra Jatra festival of masked dancers, which officially begins monthlong festivities in the Hindu-dominated Himalayan nation. The dancers, who come from a variety of backgrounds, say they pull off the performance every year despite minimal financial support from the government and other sources. (AP Photo/Niranjan Shrestha)

## Nepal's masked dancers mark the end of monsoon

KATHMANDU, Nepal (AP) — For centuries, Nepal has celebrated its masked dancers, who last month began monthlong festivities in the Hindu-dominated Himalayan nation.

Indra Jatra, an eight-day festival celebrated mostly by the Newar community, the native residents of Kathmandu, is also known as the festival of deities and demons. It especially honors Indra, the Hindu god of rain, to mark the end of the monsoon. The masks and dances can be fearsome, entertaining, and awe-inspiring, depending on the performers' movements.

A child revered as the Living Goddess Kumari is pulled around Kathmandu, Nepal's capital, in a wooden chariot; families gather for feasts and at shrines to light incense for the dead; and men and boys in colorful masks and gowns representing Hindu deities dance to the beat of traditional music and devotees' drums, drawing tens of thousands of spectators to the city's old streets.

The dancers, who come from varied backgrounds, pull off their performance every year despite minimal funding from the government and other sources, they say.

"It is not only about the dancers, we also need to do many rituals before and after the festivals, but the money and support we are provided by the government cannot be compared to what we spend," said Narendra Maharjan, a member of the Devi Mask dance crew. He added: "I remember many mask dances in my childhood, which have stopped now because of these reasons and we fear that one day our dance will also stop."

Some dancers, feeling they are not adequately supported, are debating whether to continue next year.

Rajan Maharjan, a former guardian of the Living Goddess Kumari, recalled a September 2008 riot that broke out after Nepal's then-Maoist government cut funding and subsidies for Indra Jatra and other festivals.

"The Nepalese government shows and sells our festivals and cultures to the world for tourism, but us being the preserver, what do we get?" Maharjan said.

Others, though, are determined to keep the tradition alive. Walking barefoot in heavy masks and jewelry in the oldest part of Kathmandu, the dancers say they hope to get financial support so they can pass on an ancient festival to the next generation.

## Explosion at Indian fireworks factory kills eight people

LUCKNOW, India (AP) — A powerful explosion at a fireworks factory in northern India killed at least eight people and injured three others, as Hindus prepared to celebrate the highly popular Diwali festival.

Police officer Ashok Kumar said the blast badly damaged the factory and some adjacent shops in Budaun district in Uttar Pradesh state. It killed six workers and two people who were passing by. Three people were hospitalized with serious injuries.

The area is about 175 miles southwest of Lucknow, the state capital.

India has a huge demand for firecrackers, which are used in religious festivals and weddings. Accidental explosions are common at fireworks factories, which often ignore safety.

In June last year, an explosion at a fireworks factory killed 23 workers in Madhya Pradesh state.

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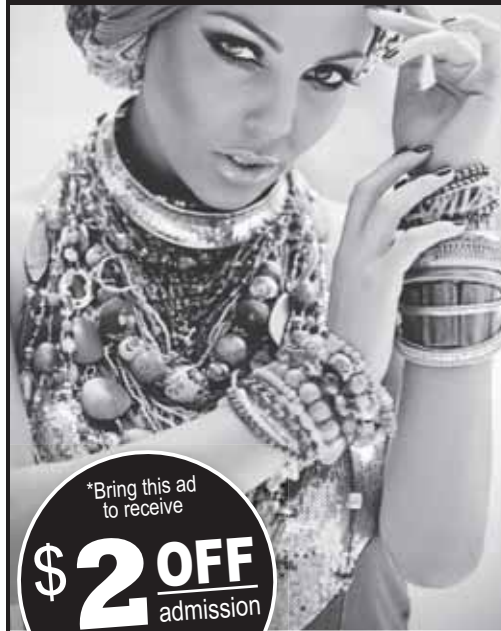
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Nov 28..... 9-11 a.m.

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Nov 6..... 9-11 a.m.  
Nov 27..... 9-11 a.m.

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