



DEMON DETERRENT. A Nepalese army soldier (top photo) bonds with a horse and cavalry soldiers (bottom photo) rehearse for the Ghode Jatra festival at the Nepal cavalry stable in Kathmandu, Nepal. The annual horse festival celebrated on the Nepal Cavalry grounds in Kathmandu marks the defeat of a Hindu demon. The president of Nepal, diplomats, top officials, and civilians all gathered to watch 106 horses and more than 200 soldiers display warfare techniques which are believed to keep the demon away. Preparations for the event started three months prior, when a dedicated team of soldiers spent days bonding with the animals, by feeding and grooming them. (AP Photos/Niranjan Shrestha)

Horses race in Nepal capital to keep devils away

By **Niranjan Shrestha**
The Associated Press

KATHMANDU, Nepal — Nepal's president, top officials, and diplomats gathered recently at army grounds in central Kathmandu for an annual horse festival marking the slaying of the Hindu Gurumapa demon.

Soldiers raced the horses and showed off warfare techniques believed to keep devil spirits away through the pounding of the horses' hooves.

A dedicated team of soldiers spent three months preparing the animals for the Ghode Jatra festival.

According to a centuries-old tradition, people raced horses before worshipping gods with offerings of food and flowers under a tree. It has been 169 years since a Nepalese king designated the army to perform the festival rituals.

At the Nepal Cavalry grounds on the former site of the royal palace in Nepal's

Japan's emperor and empress celebrate 60 years of marriage

TOKYO (AP) — Japan's Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary just a few weeks before he abdicates his throne.

The couple met at a 1957 tennis tournament remembered as a "love match." Akihito and Michiko Shoda married in 1959, making him Japan's first future emperor to wed a commoner and someone who was Catholic educated. Both are among many changes he brought to Japan's 1,500-year-old monarchy.

The couple also broke with tradition in choosing to raise their own children and in speaking more often to the public.

The celebration was their last in Akihito's 30-year reign. The 85-year-old emperor is abdicating on April 30 and

capital, riders spent months bonding with the horses.

There are 106 horses at the cavalry and more than 200 soldiers took care of them.

Every day, the soldiers bathed, groomed, and fed the horses, which raced and were tested to check their skills and ability.

Capt. Ram Shrestha of the Nepal Cavalry likened horses to children: "If you love them, they will love you back, but if you abuse them, they will hit back like a bad child."

On the day of the festival, the uniformed riders raced the horses on tracks, and showed off skills like picking up objects with spears while riding at high speeds. Meanwhile, the most powerful members of Nepal's government and foreign diplomats cheered for them.

Away from the cavalry grounds, the Newar community — an indigenous group from Kathmandu — worshipped the gods and feasted with friends, families, and community.

handing the Chrysanthemum throne to his elder son, Crown Prince Naruhito, the next day.

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