



**CENTURIES-OLD TRADITION.** A Hindu holy man smokes marijuana during Mahashivratri festival celebrations in the courtyard of Pashupatinath Temple in Katmandu, Nepal, on February 20, 2012. Hindus across the world celebrate Mahashivratri, or Shiva's night festival, which is believed to be the day when Shiva got married. (AP Photo/Niranjan Shrestha)

## Thousands light up joints during Hindu festival in Nepal

By Binaj Gurubacharya  
The Associated Press

**K**ATHMANDU, Nepal — Hindu holy men were joined by devotees and the public at a revered temple in Kathmandu where they lit up marijuana cigarettes during an annual festival, despite prohibition and warnings by authorities.

Hundreds of police officers patrolled the forested area around the Pashupati temple, which was crowded with cannabis smokers celebrating the Shivaratri festival.

A group of ruling party lawmakers has recently filed a petition to legalize the farming and use of marijuana.

“There is a ban on smoking marijuana but at the same time it is a centuries-old tradition, which we have to respect,” said police officer Suman Khadka, adding that no arrests were made.

During the festival, devotees visit temples of Hindu god Shiva.

Currently, the use of marijuana is punishable by prison sentences of up to a month for users and 10 years for traffickers.

“There is really no harm in smoking marijuana, it has been proven to have medical use too,” said Bimal Giri, a factory worker who bought joints for 50 rupees (44 U.S. cents) each from a Hindu holy man.

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