

## **NEW TEMPLE AT MOD STAFFORD**

*By LCpl Chij Gurung*

Following the announcement of the move of 248 Gurkha Signal Squadron from 21 Signal Regiment Air Support in Colerne to 22 Signal Regiment MoD Stafford there was a clear and present need for a Gurkha temple worthy of its new arrivals. Before the main body of the Squadron had even arrived, the construction of the temple was already underway.

Many people made the above possible but a handful had more of an impact than the others. The support of Lt Col N D Fraser, Commanding Officer 22 Sig Regt and Maj T Smith, QM 22 Sig Regt, in particular, should not pass without praise. Their clear understanding of our ways of life specifically focusing on our own cultural and traditional values was much appreciated. The overall success of the Temple build was due to them providing the sufficient justifications to incorporate the construction of a temple within the budget allocated for the establishment of 22 Signal Regiment that made it all possible. The 'at-the-time' QM made all necessary arrangements to obtain the permission for constructing a temple building within the barrack's premises and to ensure the support from the civil engineers, gardeners, carpenters and the Defence Estate.

The entire Squadron's move in early 2007 accelerated the pace of the interior decorations. SSgt Somras Tamang and his team worked tirelessly to produce an actual physical form from the ideas that the Squadron Second-in-Command, Capt Ratnabhadur Pun, had envisaged. SSgt Somras worked in over-load the entire time making all the arrangements for the provisions of furniture, plinth, a miniature vault and all other decorations in order to transform the building into a Temple. After the completion of all decorations, the temple was made ready for the Opening Ceremony.

On 23 Apr 07, all Gurkha Officers and Senior NCOs, Ladies and Pundit Atmaram Dahal assembled in the Temple at 0800 hrs in order to conduct the initial prayer and to burn the first incense. Half an hour later, the remaining elements of the Squadron personnel joined the assembly. The Temple was then brought to life by the sacred psalms sung by all present. This was followed by a mesmerizing religious sermon by the Pundit, which kept the Squadron personnel and their families spellbound until 1100 hrs; dispersal time. Capt Ratnabhadur, in the meantime, prayed for the welfare of the Gurkha community in Stafford.

At 1845hrs, all Gurkha personnel and regimental key personnel re-assembled at the main gate of the Temple, waiting for the Col of the Regt QG Signals, Brig N A W Pope CBE for the official inauguration. It was a great privilege for all of us to have our Col of the Regt to conduct the opening ceremony of the Temple. At 1900 hrs, the Col of the Regt arrived and then the CO of 22 Sig Regt Lt Col N D Fraser delivered a short welcoming speech to the mass. The Col of the Regt flanked by Gurkha Major QG Signals, Maj Krisnabhadur Gurung and 2IC 248, marked the opening ceremony of the temple by cutting the ribbon. The Temple was then officially open and all proceeded to enter the temple.



Colonel of the Regt Brigadier N A W Pope CBE inaugurating the new temple

Following the ceremony, the Squadron personnel and their families and guests assembled in the regimental cookhouse for an evening function organized by Sgt Anil Gurung. Officer Commanding (OC) 248 GSS, Major K A Jeeves then took the opportunity to welcome Col of the Regt to the Stafford Gurkha Community. The remainder of the evening, as per convention, included Gurkha curry followed by cultural program, culminating in 'Khusiko Natch'.

The establishment of our new Temple at MoD Stafford is a significant event both in the history of 22 Signal Regiment and Queen's Gurkha Signals. It is significant not just because of the fact that it was established here for the first time but also because of what it symbolizes. It symbolizes the presence of the Gurkhas in Stafford and is emblematic of the permanent integration of 248 GSS into 22 Signal Regiment.