

# Christmas added as public holiday in Hindu-majority Nepal

KATMANDU, Nepal – Christmas is among nine religious and ethnic feasts the Nepalese government has added to the country's list of public holidays after pressure from minority ethnic and religious groups.

The Hindu-majority country's Home Affairs Ministry announced Dec. 29 that Christmas and Eid al-Fitr, the Muslim feast that follows the fasting month of Ramadan, were among the new public holidays.

"That is something to rejoice at," Bishop Anthony Sharma of Nepal told the Asian church news agency UCA News Dec. 31. "The government has finally recognized Christians' and the Catholic Church's contribution to the country."

He added that he hopes the government will make Good Friday and Easter public holidays, too. Sunday is a working day in Nepal, while Saturday is the weekly holiday.

With the additional holidays, the number of public holidays in the country is about 35, the bulk being Hindu festivals, including a nine-day break for Dashain, which commemorates a great victory of gods over demons.

Although the parliament committed to making the festivals of minority groups public holidays when it declared the country secular in May 2006, it did not implement its resolution immediately.

Christians' demand for Christmas to be a national holiday peaked around Christmas this year, in the form of public functions organized to mark the day and memorandums submitted by Protestant groups all over the country. Christians, mostly Protestants, comprise an estimated 1 million of Nepal's 26 million people.

Umesh Kanta Mainali, Home Affairs secretary, told UCA News Dec. 31 the government recently formed a five-member committee to review the public holidays.

Asked if Good Friday and Easter would also figure in the new list the committee is preparing, he said it was “too early to come to a conclusion.”

“The committee will discuss the matter and submit a report to the government within two months,” he added.