

BRITISH ROYALS HIKE TO BHUTAN MONASTERY

PARO VALLEY, Bhutan: Britain's Duke and Duchess of Cambridge trekked yesterday to a Buddhist monastery on a mountainside in Bhutan, going one better than the duke's father, Prince Charles, who on a 1998 trip broke off his hike to paint a watercolor. Prince William and wife Kate dressed down for the three-hour expedition to the so-called Tiger's Nest that is perched on a mountainside at 3,000 m.

Kate's outfit featured knee-length boots, olive trousers and a leather waistcoat, while William wore an open-necked shirt and beige slacks. The couple stopped along the way to smile for the cameras before the backdrop of the 17th century Taktsang Palphug Monastery across the Paro valley. "It was amazing," William said after the climb. "Beautiful scenery as you saw and with the mountains like this, the temples at the top - it was just stunning to walk up there," he added in a sentiment echoed by Kate.

William admitted that after an easy start "it was a little bit cheeky on the second part, definitely." Reminded of Prince Charles' visit, he said: "Well, my father did-

n't make it to the top. That's something I'll be reminding him of when I see him."

Air Apparent

Porters were on hand, including one with an oxygen cylinder, but the couple - William is 33, Kate a year older - managed without difficulty as they walked earlier hand-in-hand through sunlit wooded uplands. The royal couple finally got some time to themselves on the sixth day of their hectic tour of India and Bhutan, where they were welcomed on Thursday by the young - and equally glamorous - king and queen of the tiny Himalayan nation.

Today, they return to India to visit the Taj Mahal, which was built in 1632 by Moghul Emperor Shah Jahan in memory of his favorite wife. William's mother, the late Princess Diana, visited in 1992 and was memorably photographed sitting alone on a bench on front of the marble mausoleum, in an image that came to symbolize her unhappy marriage.

Indian newspapers have reported that the British High Commission had asked for scaffolding, erected for repair work, to



BHUTAN: Britain's Prince William, Duke of Cambridge, and Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge, pose for a photograph halfway up the trail leading to a Buddhist monastery referred to as the "Tiger's Nest" on their two-day visit to Bhutan yesterday. — AFP

be removed from the onion-domed Taj Mahal. The Archaeological Survey of India turned down the request. There are also concerns that the site may be overrun by tourists when William and Kate are there, as it only closes for visits by heads of state or government. The British High

Commission in New Delhi did not reply to a request for comment. There has been fierce competition among news organizations trying to secure the best spot on a viewing platform for the most sought after shot of William, second in line to the throne, and Kate. — Reuters



BRASILIA: Lower house members who support the impeachment demonstrate during the lower house session of the Congress yesterday. — AFP

LAWMAKERS OPEN DEBATE ON ROUSSEFF IMPEACHMENT

PRESIDENT SLAMS 'COUP' ATTEMPT

BRASILIA: Brazil's lower house of Congress opened debate yesterday on impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff ahead of a vote this weekend that could seal her fate. Hours earlier, the Supreme Court rejected an 11th hour bid by the increasingly isolated leftist president to have impeachment proceedings suspended. The lower house has power to throw out the impeachment when it votes tomorrow, but if it votes in favor, as seems increasingly likely, Rousseff will be sent to trial in the Senate.

The struggle has transfixed Latin America's biggest country, where the crisis, deep recession and a giant corruption scandal, have overshadowed preparations for the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro this August. House Speaker Eduardo Cunha - who despite facing serious corruption charges has positioned

himself as the architect of the push to remove Rousseff - predicted an intense debate. "It's calm but I don't think it will continue that way until Sunday," he told reporters. "It will go on till Sunday night and probably beyond for people who signed up (to speak). This is a historic process, there's no doubt."

Rousseff, accused of illegal government accounting tricks, is unpopular across the country and reviled by the opposition. A former Marxist guerrilla, Rousseff was imprisoned and tortured under the military dictatorship that ruled Brazil for two decades until 1985. Recalling that bitter experience, she has branded the attempt to remove her from office a coup.

Latest counts of voting intentions in the lower house by major Brazilian newspapers show the pro-impeachment camp

either at, or on the verge of, the necessary two-thirds majority. Folha de Sao Paulo daily put the pro-impeachment count at 338, just under the required 342 votes out of a total 513. Rousseff says she will not go quietly. "The government will fight until the last minute of the second half... to foil this coup attempt," she said Thursday.

She hoped the Supreme Court would be sympathetic to her lawyer's claims that the impeachment proceedings had been turned into an open-ended attack that disregarded legal norms. But in an emergency session that went through the night into Friday morning, justices voted overwhelmingly to turn down the petition for injunction, several pointing out that the Senate trial was the moment where the substance of the case could be argued. — AFP

MEXICAN SOLDIERS DETAINED AS TORTURE VIDEO SURFACES

MEXICO CITY: Authorities have arrested a Mexican army captain and a soldier as a video emerged showing a woman being tortured by troops and a federal police officer, officials said Thursday. The attorney general's office has launched a torture investigation while military authorities have charged the captain and a female soldier with disobeying orders. The jarring clip circulating online shows a female soldier placing the tip of her assault rifle on the woman's head as she sits barefoot on a dirt floor.

A federal police officer then tightly wraps a plastic bag around the woman's head while one of the officials asks her, "Are you going to talk?" The woman, who is sobbing throughout the ordeal, answers: "Who's Maria? I don't know her." It is the latest allegation of abuse committed by the authorities in Mexico.

The defense ministry said the incident took place in Feb 2015 in the town of Ajuchitlan del Progreso, in the southern state of Guerrero, but that it only learned about it in December. The ministry said in a statement that the captain and the female soldier, who is part of the military police, were detained in January on charges of disobeying orders. The attorney general's office issued a separate statement saying that its special torture investigations unit began its inquiry on Jan 7.

The unit is investigating the "probable responsibility of Mexican army members as well as a federal police officer who presumably participated" in the incident, the statement said. The attorney general's office said that "in this, like in every case, it will act with all the rigor that the law permits to prevent impunity in any illegal conduct." The federal police said its internal affairs department launched an investigation and it urged citizens to report any abuse by officers.

History of Abuses

Amnesty International said the video shows that torture remains a technique for authorities to obtain coerced confessions. "Ending the role of the armed forces in police work is urgent," said Perseo Quiroz Rendon, Amnesty's Mexico director, adding that troops lack the training to conduct investigations and interrogations. Police and troops have faced a slew of accusations of torture and other abuses since soldiers were deployed in the streets of Mexico to combat drug trafficking in 2006.

A soldier has been detained in connection with the February disappearance and murder of a civilian in the eastern state of Veracruz. In a separate case in the same region, eight state police officers were charged over the January disappearance of four young men and a 16-year-old girl. And in another high-profile case, a military court in October acquitted seven soldiers who were detained following the killing of 22 alleged drug gang members in the central state of Mexico in June 2014. Authorities had initially reported the deaths as resulting from a shootout, but allegations of extrajudicial killings emerged later. — AFP