



Hemlal Timsina

Helping newcomers feel at home

Nick Kuhl
LETHBRIDGE HERALD

Hemlal Timsina has now been in Lethbridge for more than three years.

He is semi-retired from his job as a mechanic at Lethbridge Iron Works and his two grown children have become an engineer and a nurse.

But the journey from his birthplace in the Kingdom of Bhutan, nestled in the eastern Himalayas and surrounded by India on three sides, to southern Alberta was not an average immigration transfer.

In the early 1990s, he was forced out of the country as the Bhutanese government exiled one-fifth of its population, about 100,000 people, in the name of preserving its Tibetan Mahayana Buddhist culture and identity.

Bhutanese of Nepali origin,

mainly Hindu, fled their homeland and were subject to harassment, arrests, the burning of ethnic Nepali homes and were stripped of their citizenship.

"We had lost our citizenship for about 20 years," Timsina said.

"Now we are getting it back. That is a big thing for us. We are very lucky to be here and have this opportunity to move on with our lives. We are proud to call Canada our home. It's one of the best countries in the world."

He applied for migration when Western countries, including Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand and the Scandinavian nations, decided to resettle these refugees. Canada agreed to take in 5,000 and Timsina moved his family to Winnipeg 13 years ago.

Knowing other relatives and friends would also soon be coming to Canada, and not wanting to expose them to the


harsh Manitoba conditions, he moved his family to Lethbridge in late 2008.

Last September, he and his wife officially registered the Canadian Bhutanese Society of Lethbridge to work with other organizations and the City of Lethbridge in an effort to help other refugees settle in the community.

Now, the nearly 500 Bhutanese refugees, varied in age from a few months to 88 years old, who have arrived in Lethbridge since March 2009, look at his success story and to him as a leader.


"They are very lucky to be here and get this opportunity where they can restart their life after losing their status. They lost this feeling for 20 years. Now they have full-time jobs and some people have already bought houses and good cars," Timsina explained.

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