

# Join the fight for Gurkhas

THE founder of the Gurkha Justice Campaign has started a new battle on behalf of the loyal brigade by urging people to fight against potential Government cuts, *writes Marijke Cox.*

Peter Carroll, who won equal settlement rights for retired Nepalese soldiers last year with help from actress Joanna Lumley, has launched the Save the Gurkha campaign.

It follows concerns the 3,500-strong brigade could be axed in a bid to save 10-20 per cent from the Ministry of Defence's £36.9bn budget.

Tory MP and former army officer Patrick Mercer said the Gurkhas would be the first to go, claiming they were "not so cheap" since winning the high-profile rights campaign.

The MoD, however, dismissed the claims. Shorncliffe Barracks in Folkestone is home

to the 2nd Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles, while almost half the soldiers from the Maidstone-based 36 Engineers Regiment are Queen's Gurkha Engineers.

Mr Carroll, a Lib Dem Shepway district councillor, has launched a petition.

He said: "Gurkhas are not second class citizens - they are special and loyal and have fought for this country for almost 200 years.

"It would be a devastating blow to the Gurkha community and to the economy in east Kent if the cuts did happen.

## Petition

"It's still early days and no decision has been made by Government, but I want thousands of people to get involved. The Gurkha Justice Campaign showed me that when people join together to fight for something, they can make a difference.

"Although it's still early days, I'm hoping I

can get enough support before a decision is made by Government so it can be deflected."

More than 200,000 Gurkhas - whose motto is 'better to die than be a coward' - fought in the two world wars for the British Army, with 43,000 losing their lives.

The victorious Gurkha Justice Campaign began in 2004 when Mr Carroll was approached by four veterans facing deportation. Back then no former Gurkha had a legal right to live in the UK after completing his military service, but within three years the Government had introduced a new policy that allowed those who retired after 1997 to settle in the country. Older veterans were left out until the victorious campaign in 2009.

Mr Carroll now wants the same public support the earlier campaign gathered.

"I want people to tell their friends and family to sign the petition and try to get as many people involved," he said.



**CUTS:** The Gurkhas face a new threat

Ex-Gurkha Dhan Gurung, from Folkestone, who fought in the British Army for nearly 20 years before retiring in 2004, said the Gurkha community in Kent had been strongly affected by news of the possible cuts.

"They are worried for their family and children and for those working on the frontline it has affected their morale," he said.

"Cutting the Gurkhas would mean losing the bravest and most loyal soldiers in the world for ever."

• **To sign the petition go to [www.savethegurkhas.whynotcampaign.co.uk](http://www.savethegurkhas.whynotcampaign.co.uk).**

# War of the writers at HG Wells festival

THE nominations are in for the awards at this year's HG Wells Festival in Folkestone.

There is £1,000 for the best contemporary story by writers under 26, and £250 for those older. The youngest in the running is Alexander Joshua Smith from Folkestone, who is just 12, who has written *Everyday Karma - The Old Lady and the Youth*.

Those in the older category include Alan Stockwell, 71, from Smarden,

the oldest nomination, for his work *A Day in the Life of Eve*.

There are other Kent entrants in the older category from Herne Bay, Ashford and Folkestone.

Reginald Turnill, a former BBC aerospace correspondent, donated the £1,000 prize.

The original rules, which stipulated entries had to be hand written, had to be relaxed after no-one entered.

He said: "After a slow start, the stories flooded in, and the judges

had a challenging time reading over 100 entries of up to 5,000 words for the two awards."

Alex Wells, 20, great great grandson of HG Wells - who lived in the area - will open the festival at 6pm on Friday, September 17, at The Grand on the Leas.

On Saturday, there will be a staging of Wells's famous *War Games* on the lawn outside The Grand, plus a dinner with former newsreader Peter Sissons and Sandra Howard,

novelist and wife of the former Folkestone MP Michael Howard.

Also on hand will be Alex's father and local novelist Prof Dominic Wells, great grandson of HG.

Mr Turnill said: "Instead of speeches which can put people off, the dinner will be followed by an open discussion led by myself about HG's stories. It should be a lively event."

The festival takes place at The Grand on the Leas, from Friday to Sunday, September 17-19.



**CELEBRATED:** Author HG Wells