

Record Indian presence on Mt Everest: 20 reach the top

Overcoming the slur that Indians remain preoccupied with cricket to the detriment of all other sports, 20 Indian climbers have summited Mt Everest this week, marking a record Indian presence on the world's highest peak.

The number could rise further with more climbers from the Indian Army likely to make a push for the summit.

Kathmandu-based Himalayan Expeditions handled the logistics for three Indian expeditions, two of them from the Indian Army. The army expeditions this year were the Sama Mt Everest 1 headed by Atul Karwal and Sama Mt Everest 2 led by Sridhar Pokheriyal.

Karwal himself was among the 10 army men who scaled the 8,848m peak Thursday. Five more soldiers could try to scale the peak after them.

A third Indian expedition - Snow Lion Everest Expedition - also put nine Indians atop the peak Thursday. The summitters included a woman, Dechen Lhamo.

Lhamo is the second Indian woman to summit the peak this season. On Wednesday, feisty lawyer Kalpana Das from Orissa's Dhenkanal district made the ascent.

Besides Mt Everest, a team of Indian climbers is also headed for Mt Kanchenjanga. A Border Security Force team is attempting to summit the peak, the third highest in the world at 8,586m.

Phu Dorjee was the first Indian to climb Mt Everest in May, 1965, 12 years after Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay beat the untrodden path to the summit of the world's highest peak.

In 1965, a 21-man Indian expedition, led by Lieutenant Commander M.S. Kohli, saw nine Indians summit Mt Everest. India thus became the fourth country to scale the world's highest mountain.

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