

'Democratic Everest Expedition' to remove king's photo from summit

He lost his role as head of government and power as chief of the army after a public revolt against his authoritarian rule. And now Nepal's King Gyanendra is set to lose the highest position he alone of all government heads has been enjoying so far - from the summit of Mt. Everest, the highest peak in the world.

After the ouster of the king's government last year and the restoration of democracy in Nepal, now freedom is to reach unprecedented heights in the Himalayan kingdom.

When the mountaineering expeditions start in April, six climbers are going to climb Mt. Everest as part of the 'Democratic Everest Expedition'.

Heading the team is Everest legend Ang Rita Sherpa, called the Snow Leopard in admiration for his unparalleled feat of summiting the 8848m high peak 10 times without using bottled oxygen.

Sherpa, 60, is coming out of retirement to eye the peak once again to be part of a documentary.

The expedition aims to raise money to create a fund for the welfare of the families of nearly a dozen people who were killed in the anti-government protests during King Gyanendra's reign.

What affects the growingly unpopular king directly is that, an official of Nepal Mountaineering Association (NMA), the body entrusted with promoting mountaineering in Nepal, says the expedition will be asked to remove the photograph of King Gyanendra that was placed on the summit by an earlier team.

'The photograph of an anti-democracy person lies on the summit and I would request the expedition to remove it,' 'Ang Kaji Sherpa, NMA treasurer, was reported as saying by the local media.

This is a far cry from 2003 when the NMA celebrated the golden jubilee of the first ascent of Mt. Everest by New Zealander Edmund Hillary and Indian Tenzing Norgay Sherpa.

Crown Prince Paras chaired a special meet during the celebrations while King Gyanendra met the Everesters who had gathered in Kathmandu to celebrate the event.

This is the second time that Mt. Everest, Nepal's best loved icon, has bested the monarch.

This year, Nepal's new government decided to replace the king's photograph in currency notes with other images.

On Monday, the cabinet of ministers gave the go-ahead to the apex bank to replace the royal face in NRs 500 and 1,000 notes with images of the majestic mountain. The image of the crown will also be replaced with the national flower, the rhododendron.

Sudeshna Sarkar (© IANS / India eNews)