

Now Everest to become king of showbiz

In 1953, when Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay Sherpa became the first men to summit the highest mountain in the world, Mt. Everest was considered the ultimate challenge in adventure and human endurance. But with increasing leaps in technology and human imagination, the king of mountains is now poised for a makeover - as the king of showbiz!

The transformation started Saturday when a group of gritty musicians began a journey to the 8,848-m mountain, which is to turn into their stadium in less than 10 days.

Under the aegis of Love Hope Strength Foundation, a British-American NGO, a team of 40 musicians, mountaineers, artistes and supporters began their journey from Kathmandu to the base camp of Mt. Everest where they will hold the world's highest gig at 18,000 ft.

Besides hoping to climb into the Guinness Book of World Records, the music makers have another aim - to raise money for the Bhaktapur Cancer Hospital, Nepal's only hospital dedicated to cancer treatment.

In addition to music and love for sports, cancer is the other common factor among the group members.

The Foundation was started by Welsh rock band The Alarm's frontman Mike Peters, who was diagnosed with leukaemia in 1995 and 2005, and entertainment insurance executive James Chippendale, who successfully staved off bone marrow cancer.

The team also includes Nick Harper, the singer/guitarist son of folk rock maestro Roy Harper, whose mother Monica died of breast cancer in 2000, and mountaineer Sean Swarner, who conquered both lung cancer and the Everest.

'Everest Rocks' aims to be the coolest show on record, fusing music with sports, technology and philanthropy.

The band aims to hike to the base camp during the day and at the end of the trek in the evening, make acoustic recordings that would be fed to iTunes.

After a full-fledged concert at the base camp on Oct 23 or 24, depending on the weather, they will return to Kathmandu for a grand finale at the Durbar Square Oct 29.

Though the shows were planned in August-September, when the peace process in Nepal seemed on track with a crucial election scheduled for November, the team's arrival in Kathmandu last week however saw a sea-change in the political landscape.

The election was put off indefinitely and the threat of fresh unrest hung over the kingdom with the Maoist guerrillas warning they would start a new street revolt.

However, Shannon Foley, director of the Foundation, says they are unperturbed.

'If you can survive cancer, you can survive any thing,' she told IANS.

'Everest Rocks' will act as a trailblazer for other showbiz happenings.

Next year, it's the Vietnamese who will take Everest dos to a new height. Vietnam plans to send the national flag fluttering on the summit - as part of a reality show.

The preparations started in the capital this month when over 1,000 people auditioned at the Military Zone 7 Stadium for the new reality show 'Everest Vietnam 2008'.

The reality show will ultimately choose four lucky survivors from the aspirants who will have to climb four peaks in four different countries during the trial run.

The weeding out will start with Mt Fan Si Pan in Vietnam, which stands at 3,144 m, followed by Malaysia's Mt. Gunung Kinabalu (4,101m), Tanzania's Mt. Kilimanjaro (5,895m) and finally, the Island Peak in Nepal (6,189m).

But there's still more to come.

In 2008, when China hosts the Olympic Games with a torch rally that will go all the way to the summit, the ascent will be covered live. For that, communications giant Huawei is building the world's highest GSM base station -- on Mount Everest at an elevation of 6,500 m.

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