

## Rush Hour on Mount Everest: RSTV – In Depth

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### Larger Background:

- They say it's lonely at the top, but perhaps not when the pinnacle you are talking about is Mount Everest-The World's tallest peak.
- The quest to reach the top of Mount Everest, brings hundreds of people to the Himalayas, but this year a dramatic picture focused the world's attention on the ever increasing crowds on the highest peak on Earth.
- Overcrowding on Mount Everest has resulted in at least 10 people dying or missing in the arduous climb this year (2019).
- The quest to conquer Mount Everest is dangerous and fatal. It all started in the nineteenth century when British surveyors found a Himalayan peak that towered above all others at almost 28,000 feet or nearly 9,000 metres above sea-level.
- Before 1865, it was called Peak XV, but in that year it was renamed Mt Everest, in honour of George Everest, the surveyor of much of the Indian subcontinent.
- In 1953, the world's highest peak was conquered by New Zealander Sir Edmund Hillary and the Nepalese Sherpa Tenzing Norgay.
- They became the first humans to reach the summit of Mount Everest on the Nepal-Tibet border.
- This edition of In-Depth looks at why there have been so many deaths on Mount Everest this year (2019).
- What is causing the overcrowding on the world's highest peak and how it can be checked?
- We also try and understand the human craze to conquer Mount Everest even at the cost of their lives.

### Analysis:

- The year 2019 has been the deadliest year for Mount Everest climbers. 10 people have already died in a little more than 2 weeks in a rush to conquer the world's highest summit.
- Although most are believed to have suffered from altitude sickness, which is caused by low amounts of oxygen. Others have blamed overcrowding for the increase in the number of deaths this season.
- Over 381 climbers were permitted to scale the summit from the Nepalese side this season, while over 130 others were tackling Everest from the mountains northern side, in Tibet.
- The reward for climbers who ascend Mt. Everest is a view like none other. It presents an expansive vista of the Himalayas, from the highest point on the planet.
- However, this season at the top, the climbers saw something else- hundreds of other climbers. The world's tallest mountain had a queue of over 250-300 climbers, making their way to the summit of Mount Everest.
- The flat part of the summit, which is about 18 feet or so, was packed with 15-20 people. According to a trekker, to get up there, people had to wait for hours together in a line on one of the most dangerous mountains. Climbers pushed and shoved to take selfies. In the past two decades, the average annual death rate of climbers on Mount Everest has remained at about 6.
- However, this season, at least 10 people have already been reported dead or missing on the world's highest peak.
- The dead included 4 climbers from India, and 1 each from the United States, Britain and Nepal. An Irish mountaineer is presumed dead after he slid and fell close to the summit.
- Another Austrian and an Irish climber died on the northern Tibet side.
- Most of the deaths on Everest this year (2019), were due to exhaustion and tiredness, aggravated because of the crowded route to and from the summit.
- Many climbers also ran out of oxygen.
- An Indian mountaineer who was forced to turn back before summiting Mount Everest, said that the

lack of trained guides, and delays on the crowded route up to the 29,000 feet summit were key factors in the spate of deaths on the mountain. While overcrowding was blamed for the increase in the number of deaths, other factors were also at play.

- This was also a season that saw a record of 381 climbing permits issued by the Nepalese government.
- This means, that around 600 people were preparing to embark on the climb, with permit holders accompanied by support staff up the mountain. At least 140 others were granted permits to climb from the northern flank in Tibet.
- Nepal's tourism authorities have denied accusations that the rise in Mount Everest deaths is solely due to overcrowding. It cited other factors, including adverse weather conditions, which also played a factor. Besides this, mountaineering experts say that other factors which led to these deaths were:
  1. A missed weather window
  2. Bad crowd management
  3. Inexperienced climbers and
  4. Competition between operators
- The death toll for the Everest 2019 climbing season is not unusual for the mountain. In 2018, 5 climbers died, while 6 died in both 2017 and 2016.
- However, this year's Everest toll is the highest since 2014 and 2015 when huge earthquakes triggered devastating avalanches.
- About 5000 people have scaled the Everest summit so far. And more than 200 mountaineers have died on the peak since 1922, when the first climbers death on the peak were recorded.
- The majority of bodies are believed to lie buried under snow. Amid all the stories of overcrowding, tragedy and heart break, Mount Everest continues to be the biggest draw for mountaineers as well as ordinary people.
- Hundreds of people from dozens of countries, visit the base camp, planning to make a bid for the summit of the world's tallest peak.

### **Why does Everest continue to be so alluring?**

- Everest continues to be alluring despite the costs, the crowds as well as the risks.
- Despite all the stories of overcrowding, tragedy and heartbreak, Mount Everest continues to be the biggest draw for mountaineers. It is the highest peak a human being can hope to scale on earth. Hundreds of people from dozens of countries, visit the base camp, planning to make a bid for the summit of the world's tallest peak. Many do it for adventure, while some love the risk.
- The idea of conquering the world's tallest peak, is the biggest draw for hundreds of adventurers across the world.
- Climbers describe it as a magical mountain with magnetic qualities. The modern urge to climb Everest began 150 years ago, when British surveyors called the 8,848 metres peak, the tallest in the world. Mount Everest soon became a third pole, as explorers raced to become the first to stand on top of it.
- Calling it the highest mountain, made it an object of fascination, and for everyone it became a trophy. Perhaps the biggest that people could hope to have achieved.

### **Damage Caused due to overcrowding on Mount Everest:**

- Everest tourism is causing a mountain of problems. As mountaineers explore the sacred mountain, and benefit the local economy, they also play a major role in tipping the eco-balance of the Everest region. As of today, the Himalayan peak is at the cusp of commercial mountaineering and a trail of discarded waste.
- For a few weeks each summer, the weather improves just enough to scale Mount Everest. As increasing numbers flock to Everest, the Nepalese Government passed new laws to regulate the

hundreds who came to take on the challenge. However, it looks like the officials in Kathmandu completely failed to grasp what is going on in the Himalayan peaks.

- They have also failed in saving the mountain side from human footprints. Over the years, increasing numbers of big-spending climbers have turned Mount Everest into the world's highest rubbish dump. Discarded climbing equipment and rubbish is scattered around various camps of Mount Everest.
- Till 2018, 4000 mountaineers had successfully reached the summit of Mount Everest ever since Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay's great accomplishment in 1953. In 2014, 180 climbers attempted to summit Mount Everest from the north-east ridge in Tibet and only 120 succeeded.
  
- **During the peak season, the human waste, abandoned mountaineering gears such as empty oxygen cylinders, food wrappers, broken tents, batteries, and other trash became the hazardous bio-products of relentless, commercial Everest expeditions.**
  
- However, nowadays, people have come to realize the seriousness of environmental issues on and around Mount Everest. The Nepalese government also works with some non-governmental organizations (NGO's), to ease the situation.
- In 2011, the **Everest Summiters Association** organized by Sherpas teamed up with the Nepalese government and collected 1.5 tonnes of garbage. It included oxygen cylinders, etc. and had them shifted to Kathmandu.
- The **Nepal Mountaineering Association** also cooperates with other trekking companies to voluntarily collect tonnes of trash out of Mount Everest.
- Trash and bodies left on Mount Everest, will take a long time to degrade given the freezing temperature. Thus, it may not be an imminent environmental disaster, but nevertheless, the contamination of the region would have catastrophic consequences.
- To better protect the environment in the Everest region, Tibet keeps exchanging experiences with Nepal and works out solutions.

