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HARISH KAPADIA

## India 1998

One of the major topics dominating discussion in Indian mountaineering circles was the blunder about the ascent of **Nyegi Kangsang (6983m)**. In the *Himalayan Journal*, Volume 52 (1996) and in some other leading mountaineering journals, articles on the Nyegi Kangsang expedition were published which claimed the first ascent of this 6983m peak situated on the border of Arunachal Pradesh (India) and Tibet (China). It is now agreed upon and proven that the above ascent was wrongly claimed. The main peak was not climbed. The following correction must be noted.

The Nyegi Kangsang Expedition was organised by the Indian Mountaineering Foundation (IMF) in 1995. Col M P Yadav, VSM, FRGS, then Principal of the Nehru Institute of Mountaineering, Uttarkashi, was appointed leader of the expedition. The team claimed to have made the first ascent of the peak on 23 October 1995. This news, and articles with accompanying photographs and sketch maps, was published in good faith by many editors. However after studying the facts through maps and photos, it was found that the team had reached a point about 600m below the main peak and about 1.25km away from the main summit on the NE Ridge. Jagdish Nanavati, President of the Himalayan Club, submitted a detailed study to the President of the IMF, Dr M S Gill, who immediately appointed a Sub-Committee to examine it. Col M P Yadav and two of the summiters appeared before the Committee. Faced with the facts, the summiters admitted that they had not actually reached the highest point of their 'summit ridge' (see *HJ Vol 52, photo no 2, opposite page 13*). The Committee concluded that the expedition had failed to reach the main summit and had wrongly claimed a first ascent. The findings were accepted unanimously by the Governing Council of the IMF. The peak remains unclimbed. All claims of first ascents will henceforth be scrutinised before acceptance.

J C Nanavati was thanked for his painstaking report, which is available on website ([www.indmount.com](http://www.indmount.com)) and in the Alpine Club Library. The openness and firmness shown by Dr M S Gill, President of the IMF, in upholding the truth about the IMF's own expedition was also appreciated.

On the mountaineering front special mention must be made of Martin Moran's crossing of the watershed between Badrinath and Kedarnath temples. This route, first undertaken by Shipton and Tilman in 1934, had not been attempted since. Martin Moran, Mrs Brede Arkless, John Harvey, Ben Lovett and Sobat Singh Rana were successful in crossing this watershed.

They established an advance camp at 4650m just beyond Surajkunni at the head of the Satopanth Glacier on 28 May with the help of a support team, which included John Shipton (Eric Shipton's son). An attempt to climb the icefall directly to the col was made on 29 May and the climbers reached 5300m

where big crevasses and detached ice towers deterred further progress. They therefore used a safer route up the face to the left of the icefall, which was well covered with snow, and was Scottish grade II in difficulty. Leaving the support team, five members climbed this face with loads of 22-24kg early on 31 May. They reached the col, and climbed a small peak which they named **Shipton's Peak (5758m)**. On 2 June they descended the icefall above the Gandharpongi Gad. Proceeding downwards, they crossed several nalas and ridges to follow a high route to the Mandani temple. They went further ahead before descending to Kedarnath. This was an exploration in the fast disappearing traditional style and was one of the highlights of the Indian mountaineering season. Other important climbs, like Mukut Parbat, Changabang and Bhagirathi III were as described below.

## Major Expeditions in the Indian Himalaya 1998

### Garhwal and Kumaon

**Mukut Parbat East (7130m)** This was a fine ascent of a difficult peak by an 11-member Korean team. It was the last 7000m virgin peak in the Garhwal. They started from Badrinath and approached it from Purvi Kamet glacier, setting up two camps (5900m and 6400m) on the south face of the mountain. The pilot attempt by four members on 27 August failed due to strong winds. On the second attempt, from Camp 2 they followed the east ridge – a sustained, steep route on ice – to the summit at 5.15pm on 30 August. Two members, Park KiSung and Park Dong-shin, reached the summit. On the pinnacle summit they left a piton and karabiner. The entire route was covered by fresh snow over rotten ice. It was steep to the NE col and subsequently to the summit. The leader was Ok Syun Hong and his deputy Kim-Namil. They named this route *Running Again Korean*.

**Changabang (6864m)** This climb was another major achievement in the Indian Himalaya for 1998. A lightweight American team led by Carlos Buhler climbed the peak in the dangerous pre-monsoon season. All five members, Carlos Buhler, Victor Kolesnichenko, Pavel Shabalin, Andrej N Mariev and Alexander Dosaev reached the summit on 29 May via the N Face.

**Bhagirathi III (6454m)** A French team (Bruzy Alain) successfully climbed two routes here. Rene Thivel and Guillaume Aroavel reached the summit via the S Face on 18 May. Benoist Stephane and Jérôme Thinières climbed to the summit via the SW ridge on 19 May.

A Russian expedition climbed **Bhagirathi III** by a new route on the W Face. Alexander Odintsov, Igor Potankin, Yuri Koshelenko, Vladimir Kachkov, Andrey Lukin, Ivan Samoilenko, Lioudmila Krestina (doctor) arrived at base camp in Nandanvan on 25 August. It rained for the next three weeks, until 26 September. But from then until their summit day, 14 October, they had crisp cold days with only localised snowing. The first problem was the 'The Funnel', 230m of free climbing (most of it mixed) where small avalanches and rockfall from the wall was channelled. They set up three portaledges on 29 September under 'The Trunk', a 300m, overhanging bulge of rock at one-third height in

the middle of the amphitheatre wall. They climbed with aid and under a cold shadow cast by 'The Trunk'. At this point, the leader, Alexander Odintsov, could not stand the acute pain in his stomach and he rappelled down. Above 'The Trunk' they climbed 300m of vertical dihedrals and a huge roof that they called 'The White Poker', followed by 'The Black Tower' with very loose rocks. This was the shale band at the top of the amphitheatre wall. After 120m of vertical aided climbing and 180m of traversing on 55° slabs they reached the crest. The next day they reached the summit at 1pm.

Then began the descent, which followed the line of ascent. They rappelled the route. That was the beginning of the most dramatic part of the journey. Whilst they were going down, a continuous heavy snow storm engulfed them for three days. This storm destroyed 25km of the road and killed many people in the lower valleys. The expedition members were lucky to survive. Being accustomed to severe Russian winters they did not regard this experience as unusual!

**Thalay Sagar (6904m)** This peak near the Gangotri temple is a popular destination. Several teams took on its challenge by different routes. A Japanese team (Hiroshi Doke) reached 6300m on the NE Ridge before a freak storm ended its attempt. A Korean team (Hyung Jin Kim) from Seoul carved a bold new route on the N Face. They made several bivouacs on the face and were near the top when a cornice broke near the summit plateau on 28 September, killing all the three climbers including the leader.

**Kedar Dome (6830m)** This peak remains popular and is an easy objective. Italians, Indian and Swiss teams attempted the normal route.

**Trisul I (7120m)** Only attempts from the west are allowed on this peak due to the closure of the Nanda Devi Sanctuary. A Spanish (Eduardo Gomez Telletxea) team reached 6850m in September. Bad weather forced a retreat.

A Korean expedition (Yeon Soo Park) was successful. They approached Trisul from Ghat to base camp at 4200m. They then followed the *1976 Yugoslavian Route* from the W Face to the S Ridge. Four camps were established, the highest at 6500m. Two members, Hyung-Yul Kim and Jong-Young Park, reached the summit on 29 August.

**Shivling (6543m)** Five teams attempted this shapely peak above the Gangotri glacier.

1 Czech (Vojtech Ocelka) The expedition attempted the W Ridge and attained a maximum height of 5900m. Continuous rainfall and bad weather forced the team to restrict their movement. A huge ice wall on the way to the summit broke and the route became extremely difficult and dangerous, making further climbing almost impossible.

2 British (Simon Yates) The summit was reached by Miles Bright and Graham Frost on 20 September by the W Ridge.

3 German (Walter Hadersdorfer) Too much fresh and loose snow forced the team to abandon their attempt. They reached a maximum height of 5700m.

4 German (Christian Richard Tremier) Five members reached the summit via the W Ridge on 27 and 28 September.

5 American (Peter M Takeda) A bad storm did not allow them to scale the main objective **Meru Central (6450m)**. The team therefore concentrated on

their alternative objective, Shivering. The leader and David Sheldon reached the summit on 30 September via the W Ridge.

**Satopanth (7075m)** Though a 7000m peak, this is not too difficult to climb by the normal ridge. Austrian (Dr Lengaver Peter), Spanish (Txetxu Lete Bernardo) and Italian (Giancarlo Cimmino) teams attempted it. Surprisingly none was successful.

**Swachand (6721m)** John Frank Yearsley led a British team which attempted the W Face. They reached 6100m when stonefall stopped further climbing.

**Chandra Pravat (6728m)** An Austrian team made the first ascent of this peak back in 1938. Dr Karl Pallasman led a team this year to repeat that ascent after 60 years. They walked in from Kinnaur, over Lamkhaga Pass and climbed the peak. The summit was reached by five members via the SW Ridge on 10 September.

**Jaonli (6632m)** In September/October, Martin Moran led a British team to this peak. The expedition failed due to heavy snowfall which made the mountain dangerous and the effort strenuous. **Three unnamed peaks, 5447m, 5349m and 5450m**, were climbed and a crossing made from Jaonli Bamak to the Din Gad Valley over a 5100m pass.

**Bhagirathi I (6856m)** The highest peak of the Bhagirathi group was climbed by an Austrian team (Jochler Josef). The summit was reached via the W Ridge by Jochler Josef and Zenz Christian on 7 October.

**Meru North-east (6660m)** Julie-Ann Clyma and Roger Payne returned again to the Indian Himalaya. Originally they had applied to climb the N Face of the stupendous rock monolith Reo Pargial (Purgyl), the highest peak of Himachal Pradesh. However after the nuclear tests were conducted by India all permits to the border areas were cancelled for a while and they had to settle for the above peak. Heavy snowfall and avalanches forced the two-member team to abandon their attempt at 6350m on 3 June.

**Sudarshan Parvat (6507m)** An Indian team from Calcutta climbed this peak. Arun Roychowdhury and HAS (High Altitude Supporter) Raju reached the summit on 28 May.

**Bandarpunch West (6302m)** An Indian team from West Bengal (Sudipta Mitra) reached the summit on 4 September. Taruneshwar Sinha, Sri Ranjit Das and HAS Himalaya The and Gopi Chand Rawat were summiters.

**Sri Kailash (6932m)** Base camp was occupied on 17 May at 4500m, a little below the snout of the Thelu Nala, by an Indian team (Iknus Ahmed). They established five camps. Alope Das and HAS Sarwan reached the summit on 31 May.

**Gorur Dome (6268m)** An Indian team from Calcutta (Prasanta Roy) made the first ascent of an unnamed peak, locally known as Gorur Dome (6268m), on 9 June. It was climbed by Arnab Banerje, Arka Ghosh, Avijit Das and HAS Surinder Singh Rawat.

**Unnamed Peak (6166m) and Unnamed Peak (6035m)** An Indian team from Calcutta (Amitabha Roy) climbed both these peaks above the Chaturangi Glacier. Base camp was established at 5030m on 25 June and two more camps were in place by the end of July. Both peaks were climbed by Mainak Das, Raghubir Singh and HAS Balbir Singh and Lachman Singh on 29 July.

## Himachal Pradesh

**Gya (6794m) and Gyasumpa (6480m)** A team from the Indian Mountaineering Foundation (Squadron Leader A K Singh) attempted this enigmatic peak in September. They approached it from the north via Chumar. First they made an ascent of Gyasumpa, which lies to the north of the main peak. They carried out a recce of the E Ridge and established a high camp. However a prolonged spell of bad weather forced them to retreat. Gya remains unclimbed.

Earlier an army team based in Ladakh made an attempt on Gya. They claimed an ascent which is not yet substantiated. They followed the same route to base camp.

**Leo Pargial (6791m)** This peak on the Tibetan border, first climbed by Marco Pallis in 1933, was climbed by two teams. The first, from West Bengal (Milan Nag), reached the summit by the route from Nako. They followed the NW Face to the W Ridge. Shyamal Sarkar and Shaymal Bannerjee along with two Sherpas climbed to the summit on 20 July and enjoyed excellent views. They also established a medical camp in the area and several doctors from Bengal devoted some of their time to the villagers. These camps, organised annually, are generally coupled with climbing and trekking. The participants have covered several areas over the years.

Another Indian team, from Bombay (A P Samant), climbed this peak by a new approach. A base camp was set up at 5150m after crossing the Chango Glacier on 9 July. Camp 1 was occupied on 13 July. First they climbed other peaks in the area. **Unnamed Peak (6484m)** : A first ascent of this peak was made by ascending a snow-shelf, then climbing up the SW Face and the steep, rocky S Ridge. **Leo Pargial (6791m)** was climbed via Kuru Topko Col (5920m) and West Col (6040m). From there they followed the N Face having joined the normal route at the West Col. The team climbed another **Unnamed Peak (6228m)** on 1 August. They also climbed **Ninjeri Col (6120m)** and attempted **Ningmari (6173m)**.

**South Parvati (6128m)** Rob Collister has always enjoyed the S Parvati area in Kullu. He returned to attempt the above peak this year. Due to heavy snowfall at Camp I the team could not climb the peak. They retreated from Camp I (5400m) on 16 September.

**Dharamsura (White Sail) (6445m)** A Spanish team climbed this peak in July. The leader, Roman Bascunana Diaz, and Josema Urrestarazu San Roman reached the summit on 18 July via the NE Ridge.

**KR 5 (6258m)** A Japanese team reached the summit via the Koa Rong nala. The leader Minoru Yanagi and a guide Alam Chand Thakur reached the summit via the NE Ridge on 15 August.

**Gepang Goh (5870m)** A small British team (Ian Ford) attempted this peak in Lahul. They reached a height of 5500m. Progress was very slow due to difficult/dangerous crevasses.

**Unnamed Peak (6130m)** Andrez Zboinski led a Polish team which climbed this peak in August. Two members, Richard Wrona and Kristofer Gardyna, reached the summit on 21 August via the NW Ridge. This peak is located between KR 2 and KR 3.

## Ladakh

Zanskar and Ladakh are rather popular with commercial teams. Eleven teams climbed/attempted **Nun**, **Kun** and **Kang Yissay** between them. All attempts were made by normal routes.

**Dzo Zongo (6096m)** A German team (Herrmann Wilhelm) climbed a new peak in Ladakh. All members, except the leader and Wiechert, reached the summit on 28 August via the E Ridge. Earlier another team (Geraldine Westrupp) had also climbed this peak. All members including the LO and a local guide reached the summit on 19 August via the NE Ridge.

**Mentok I (6340m)** The Mentok group consists of several smaller peaks located to the west of Karzog village in Rupshu, Ladakh. A Japanese team (Susumu Sasaki) climbed this peak. S Sasaki, M Kimura, W Ueno, and Sherpa Palden reached the summit via the E Ridge on 12 August.

**Thugje (6148m)** In the Rupshu area across Pologongka La rise several peaks overlooking the Tso Kar lake. The highest amongst them is **Thugje**, which was climbed by a Japanese team (Masato Oki) this year. A group consisting of M Oki, M Muto, A Ito, T Nomura, K Hishida, N Namada, Sorab Gandhi (LO) and climbing guide C G Chowdhury reached the summit on 14 August via the S Face and the E Ridge. The other group of six members: G Ozaki, S Taieda, Soji Harada, Arun Roy Chowdhury and Lakpa Sange Sherpa reached the summit on 15 August.

## East Karakoram

**Indira Col (5840m)**, **India Saddle (6000m)**, **Turkestan La (5810m)** and **Bhujang (6560m)** on Teram Shehr plateau (Siachen Glacier)

The Siachen Glacier is one of the longest glaciers in the Himalaya and Karakoram. It contains several high peaks. It was first visited in 1821. Since 1984 the glacier has always been in the news because of an ongoing conflict between the Indian and Pakistani armies on its heights. This 'Glacier War' has changed many concepts of high-altitude mountaineering. Since the beginning of the war only a few expeditions have been permitted to visit the glacier.

In 1998 an Indian team from Bombay (Harish Kapadia), was one of the few teams permitted in decades to trek and climb on the glacier. Four members of the team traversed the entire 76km glacier. Passing through the war-zone, the expedition reached Indira Col and India Saddle at the head of the glacier. They are the northernmost points of India at present. The four stood on the Indira Ridge and on the great divide between South and Central Asia overlooking the Karakoram in the S and Chinese Turkestan in the north. Two of the team, with Sherpas, made the first ascent of a virgin peak **Bhujang (6560m)** on the Teram Shehr plateau. (*See article 'Mountaineering and War on the Siachen Glacier' in this volume.*)

## Deaths

**Hukam Singh**, who passed away during the year, was one of the leading mountaineers in India. He had climbed Shivling (first ascent) and many other

peaks. Later he led many expeditions, including one each to Everest and Kangchenjunga, and organised several joint expeditions with the Japanese. His story makes interesting reading. He hailed from the village of Milam and lost his father when he was four. He studied in a small village school. All the villagers, along with the 'school', migrated during the winter and summer months through the valleys. He faced extreme hardships, both economic and physical. He joined the army and later moved to the newly-created Indo-Tibet Border Police in 1962. He rose to be its Deputy Inspector General. He was a father figure to many young mountaineers in the force and received several national awards. His untimely death was mourned by many mountaineers.

If this was a rags to riches story, at the other extreme was **Navneet Parekh**, who died at a ripe age. He was of a different genre. Born into a wealthy family, the call of the Himalaya came to him early. He entrusted the family business to his brothers and roamed the range for several years. He finally settled in the sprawling Khali Estate near Almora and married a simple village girl. He was a pioneer in Indian mountaineering having organised the first ever Indian expedition to Pumori and Cho Oyu in the 1950s. Later his interests turned to the lower ranges and the spiritual aspects of the Himalaya. His estate is now converted to a resort overlooking the Nanda Devi range, and stands as a testimony to his knowledge and interests. Every visitor to the estate or to his flat in Bombay was regaled with stories of his travels, meetings with spiritual personalities in the Himalaya and his personal contact with present day mountaineers. This baba (uncle), as he was called by many, was a link between the past and present of the Indian mountaineering scene. He introduced trekking and spiritual aspects of the Himalaya to many city-folk.

**Malipa Tragedy** Indian pilgrims visit the Manasarovar lake in Tibet in large numbers. Groups and visits are organised by the government. In August this year, one such group of 60 pilgrims was camping at Malipa village en route to the Lipu Lekh pass. Amidst heavy rain a huge landslide occurred above their valley which discharged a mud-slide with boulders in the middle of the night. It swept away everything in its path. All the pilgrims and the entire village of Malipa were gone. More than 200 persons died that night.

Around the same time heavy rains caused another slide in the Garhwal which blocked Madhyamaheshwar Ganga, a river valley visited by pilgrims, where Shipton and Tilman had descended in 1934. There were several casualties here, too, and roads were blocked for the next few months. Both these tragedies have focused attention on the effects of the cutting of trees, the degradation of the environment in the hills and the fragile nature of the Himalayan foothills.

### Literature and Honours

Indian publishers continue to print several reprints from old classics. This has developed into a huge reference market with several excellently printed titles now available. *Exploring Pangi Himalaya* (Minakshi Chaudry) is a new publication about a small district in Lahul. The author is the wife of a district administrator and has known the area well having lived there for years. There are several peaks and passes in this little-known district and the book should kindle an interest in the area. The other noteworthy book to be published during

the year was *Meeting The Mountains* (Harish Kapadia). I have covered treks and travels between 1960 and 1969 and then from 1992 to 1998 (the years in between are covered in the earlier book *High Himalaya: Unknown Valleys*). This gives readers a glimpse of the climbing and trekking scene in India then and now. The latter half of the book covers meetings with several mountaineers and the experience of working for the Himalayan Club.

The Alpine Club, London, made Nawang Gombu an Honorary Member. In its history only three Indians have been bestowed with this honour.\* Gombu started as a High Altitude Supporter and carried maximum loads to the South Col. He was the first to climb Everest twice, with the Americans in 1963 and with the Indians in 1965. He had a long tenure as instructor at the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute Darjeeling and retired as its Director recently. The membership was a fitting tribute to this elderly Sherpa statesman.

### **Anniversaries and Conferences**

The Himalayan Club celebrated its 70th year of existence in February 1998. Talks, slide-shows and exhibitions of photographs were held in Bombay and Delhi. Swami Sunderanand, a sadhu living in Gangotri, was the chief guest. He showed slides of his travels.

The Indian Mountaineering Foundation completed 40 years and celebrations were held in New Delhi in November. The National Wall Rock Climbing competition was held to coincide with the event. A two-day Climbers Meet was organised where Indian climbers from all over India participated. Their suggestions, criticisms and plans were noted for the future. At a special dinner to celebrate the event Bob Pettigrew from the UK was chief guest.

A conference to consider environmental issues relating to the Himalaya was held in Bangalore. It was organised jointly with the British Mountaineering Council. The meeting suggested various means to save the damage.

### **Meeting of the Himalayan Countries**

On the invitation of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation, a meeting of the IMF, the Chinese Mountaineering Association, Nepal Mountaineering Association, and the Alpine Club of Pakistan, was held at the IMF Headquarters in New Delhi on 4-5 December 1998. Dr M S Gill, President of the IMF, chaired the meeting. It was felt that the mountaineering organisations from the four Himalayan countries that were present had common interests, as this region had the world's highest mountains and the largest climbing areas. These countries host a large number of climbing expeditions, both foreign and domestic, annually. They therefore all face similar problems of granting permissions, visas, of environmental destruction and pollution, of security for the local Sherpas/porters/guides, of fees and charges etc. All the Associations try to deal with these issues in their own way. It would be beneficial to all to have an annual meeting of these host countries, to know each others' policies,

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\* The late Mr H C Sarin, President of the IMF for 23 years, was the first Indian to become an Honorary Member of the AC, followed by Harish Kapadia in 1996 (see *AJ* 102, 367, 1997). *Ed.*

in order to achieve improvement and co-ordination. This was the rationale on which the IMF had taken the initiative.

The points discussed included common linking of web sites, exchange of information and documentation, the possibility of joint expeditions and training, and any other issues that might emerge in the years to come. It was agreed that for the facility of expeditions wanting to climb in this region, the climbing regulations of each of the four countries should be produced in a single booklet. It was also agreed that if action is taken by any one of them against any expedition/individual mountaineer for unethical conduct, the other three members will take due note. It was hoped that this beginning would lead to more and more effective co-operation in the interest of their respective mountains and mountaineers.

### **And finally**

The year was rounded-off by a visit from the Editor of the *Alpine Journal*, Ed Douglas, to India. He addressed the Himalayan Club in Bombay and read from his book. What he said was perhaps rather relevant: 'It is the trekkers and tourists that have changed and not so much the local people. The present day trekkers and climbers are in a hurry and have no time to get to know the history of an area, understand its culture or interact with the locals.' It reminded many of us of the title of the book by Galen Rowell *Many People Come Looking Looking, Nobody See*.