



The Quest sets for Bangladesh's first winter expedition

Although the concept of mountaineering is nothing new to Bangladesh, the ambit of it is relatively low. As counter intuitive as it may sound, despite being in close proximity to the Himalayan Mountain Range, there has not been any attempt to climb its summit during winter.

However, the good news is, a group of mountaineers from The Quest have gone for the maiden winter expedition in the Himalayan range this February. A team of four fearless adventurers including Salehin Arshady, Tahmid Hossain Rafid, Abdullah Al Mahmud Intiaz, and Samiur Rahman are taking the responsibility to hoist the national flag on top of the Himalayan peak in the winter of 2020.

The Quest is an adventure club which was inaugurated in 2014 to promote outdoor activities such as mountaineering among the youth of Bangladesh. They are providing a platform to the sport enthusiasts of Bangladesh to network, socialise, and facilitate such activities so that Bangladeshi outdoor activities are recognised internationally.

"In our time, we did not have any guidance or platform that could arrange or facilitate such activities for us. Being passionate mountaineers, we want to provide that platform to people and encourage the youth to engage in such endeavours," said Salehin Arshady.

Among the myriad of services and campaigns they host, the Campus Quest is a notable one. Through this program, The Quest reaches out to various universities in

Bangladesh. The goal is to cultivate team work, physical activities, and motivation among the youth.

Other programmes include Quest Talk, which focuses on organising seminars, photo exhibitions, and presentations to educate the public regarding mountaineering sports and other outdoor activities. Another facet of The Quest is known as the Centre of Gravity that provides formal training to participants regarding outdoor activities and mountain sports.

The mountain peak chosen for this expedition is the Chulu Far-East peak that has an altitude of 6059 meters. The purpose of choosing this peak is the availability of data. They possess good knowledge about the crevasses, ridges, snow deposit, and temperature on this route. Although nobody from Bangladesh has ever made it to its zenith, plethora of information can be gained from previous global expeditions.

While mountain climbing is already a highly challenging task as it is, winter expeditions are more difficult. The first challenge comes in the form of greater snow deposition. Whereas the level of snow in normal season is knee-deep, in winter this reaches to be thigh-high. Moreover, the increased deposition of snow creates avalanches on the mountain pass, making it difficult to maintain a straight route. Thus, mountaineers have to resort to climbing in a zigzag manner, which takes more time and effort.

Another hindrance is the wind-chill factor which multiplies in intensity

during winter that makes climbers more susceptible to hypothermia. As the Northern Wind and Siberian High flow in this direction during this time of the year, there exists the threat of falling prey to a blizzard. This makes winter expeditions riskier, and precarious. Additionally, as the ascend progresses, the atmospheric pressure drops, providing lower levels of oxygen and making it difficult to breathe.

The total duration of the expedition is forecast to last a month. Starting from the city of Kathmandu, they will be travelling to Besishahar, which is the doorway to their destination and then to a small village named Humde. They will stay there for a couple of days for acclimatisation, before starting the expedition.

Up until here, the mountaineers will have assistance and guidance. But being strong devotees of the mountaineering philosophy 'alpinism' from this point onwards, the quartet will be on their own.

Alpinism is the purest form of mountain climbing that centres around the belief that this sport should be done being totally dependent on your own capabilities, without any guide, or support. Mountaineers sustain with what they are able to carry themselves.

To suffice their accommodation needs, camps will be set at intervals in campsites. The first camp will be made at 4800 meters and a shelter will be formed in 5500 meters. A couple more intermediate camps may be required depending on the situation.

As for preparation, the four

mountaineers have attained the required physique. As the activity entails burning about 2000 calories a day, putting a halt to workout sessions and starting fat deposition is necessary. Mountaineers also have to take sufficient preparation to survive in sub-zero temperatures, which can range from -25°C to -35°C.

Being trained adequately in terms of physical and psychological adaptability is vital. Other than that, as mountain climbing has become part of their lifestyle, and being enthusiastic risk takers, this intrepid group of four is well-prepared to tackle this adventure.

What they hope to achieve after this expedition is to create a seismic impact among the mountaineers of Bangladesh, and be exemplary among the orophiles. As Samiur Rahman said, "We want to show people that it doesn't take being Bruce Wayne to climb a mountain, you can do it if you only try."

Mountain climbing and mountaineering sports are gaining momentum among the population, especially the youth of Bangladesh. While there are orophiles in abundance, dedicated platforms for facilitation and recognition are meagre. The Quest is nurturing a gateway for aspiring athletes so they can take this sport to new heights of sporting glory.

We wish them best of luck for their quest!

By Fariha Amber

Photo courtesy: The Quest Bangladesh

