

# MERA PEAK

## Journey to the world's highest trekking summit



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After a long silence, the Himalayas called me back – an irresistible summons that only mountains possess. And I had to respond. My last journey there had been the Everest Three Passes Trek, a test that left its mark on both my body and mind. This time, the objective was Mera Peak – 6,476 metres of ice and sky, the highest trekking peak in the world. I knew it would not be forgiving. The Himalayas never are.

My companion on this journey was Imtiaz Elahi – an Ironman and Norseman athlete whose discipline once pushed me toward the starting line of an Ironman 70.3 in Malaysia. Walking beside him in the mountains felt natural. We shared a rhythm shaped by endurance, silence, and mutual respect. Long before the first step on the trail, preparation had already begun – financial, mental, physical. At the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, we once spent an entire day learning how to pack a rucksack properly. Still, on departure day, I found myself repacking. It never goes right.

At first, the plan was simple – just the two of us. Then Shahnaz, a dental surgeon with quiet resolve, joined the expedition. She, our guide Pasang, and I travelled by jeep from Kathmandu to Salleri, while Imtiaz bhai was to fly directly to Lukla. We left before dawn and reached Salleri by dusk. At 2,360 metres, the village felt familiar. Six years earlier, I had begun my Everest Three Passes trek from this very place. The mountains remember you, even when you think you've moved on.

That evening, we went for a short acclimatisation walk near a local school. I have watched countless Himalayan sunsets, yet each one feels like the first. The mountains blushed crimson, as if lit from within. Leaving comfort behind often feels like loss, but moments like this make it feel like privilege.

We had a tea session. Tea – chiya, as the Nepalis call it – is always refreshing, and momos taste inexplicably better in the mountains. Dinner was simple and filling. We turned in early, aware that the road ahead would demand much more.

The drive from Salleri to Surke the next day was pure chaos. For nearly ten hours, the jeep rattled and bounced, dust filling the air, time

water bottles to electronics must be kept inside sleeping bags to prevent freezing. Despite exhaustion, sleep comes in fragments.

The next day, we would cross the Zatrwa La Pass.

The climb to the 4,610-metre pass after breakfast was hard. Ice demanded microspikes. Breath shortened. After lunch at a small lodge, we descended steeply to Thuli Kharka. The following

the slope in agony while many trekkers passed without stopping. Eventually, a European woman helped partially realign the joint. At a tea house, someone claiming to be a paramedic



spinal cord injury. Somehow, he kept walking, even moving ahead of us.

Less than an hour later, we reached Khare. After dropping our backpacks at the lodge, we headed to the hospital. Against all odds, an MBBS doctor

was there. He examined Imtiaz bhai, administered pain relief, and successfully relocated the shoulder. The doctor advised five days of rest. But Imtiaz bhai, ever calm, said, "Two days will be enough. I'll go slowly."

On the rest day, Shahnaz and I climbed to 5,125 metres for acclimatisation. From above, Khare looked like a toy village. Helicopters buzzed below. The next day we were scheduled for High Camp, then a night summit attempt.

We reached High Camp after hours of relentless ascent. At 2:30am, we began the summit push.

Within minutes, my body betrayed me. Symptoms of hypothermia and high-altitude sickness forced me to stop. After assessing the situation, I made the hard call to turn back. In the mountains, survival depends on the right choice.

On November 19, at 6:15 a.m., Imtiaz bhai and Pasang stood on the summit of Mera Peak, followed closely by Tashi and Shahnaz.

Though I couldn't summit myself, as a team we did. By 9:30am, the team had descended. After a meal and rest, we began our return journey toward Khare.

Later, we flew by helicopter to Lukla – seven minutes replacing four days of trekking, a small miracle after so much effort.

The mountains taught us again what they always do – humility, judgment, and the courage to choose life over ego. That lesson, more than any summit, is what I carried home.

I extend my deepest gratitude to ESAD (Ex Shaheens Association Dhaka) for their support of this expedition, to my friends and well-wishers, and to our guides, Tashi and Pasang, who stood by us through every challenge.

losing its meaning. We were peanuts inside a tin. At twilight, during a brief stop, I looked up and froze. The sky had turned unreal – layers of colour spilling into one another, impossible to describe, impossible to forget.

From Surke, we walked to Lukla in two hours along stone stairways that had once been dirt trails. Lukla Airport lay below us – infamous, short, unforgiving. We watched planes take off and land against a backdrop of crystal clear Himalayan peaks. The following morning, we welcomed Imtiaz bhai. After breakfast, we set off again.

I carried with me two trekking poles from Bangladesh's first Mera Peak expedition in 2005, belonging to Shagor and Rifat bhai. Their attempt had failed. I carried the poles not as tools, but as memory.

The walk to Chutanga was gentle, though we moved slowly for acclimatisation. Forests thinned, trees gave way to alpine openness, and the mountains began revealing themselves layer by layer. At 3,020 metres, the sky felt closer. Reaching Chutanga, we took an evening walk, watched glacial streams rush downward, clouds brushing distant peaks. As darkness fell, the cold drove us inside.

Nights in the mountains are brutal – cold, restless, unforgiving. Everything from

day, the trail became both more beautiful and more challenging, winding past glacial streams, massive boulders, and narrow rocky paths where falling rocks demanded constant vigilance.

By the time we reached Thangnang at 4,350 metres, Kathmandu felt like a distant world. It had taken nine days to reach this point. Garlic soup, ginger-honey-lemon tea, and silence sustained us.

At sunset, the peaks outside the lodge turned crimson, and for a while nothing else seemed to matter. Under a sky thick with stars, we slept.

The following day, the rest day, passed gently. Friendship deepened in the thin air over slow walks, coffee, photographs, and stories shared. The summit matters but the journey more.

From Thangnang to Khare, snowfields replaced rock. Climbers returning from the summit passed us in bright jackets. Shahnaz moved swiftly ahead, a Bangladeshi flag fluttering from her pack. I walked easily, absorbed by the vast whiteness. Then something felt wrong. Imtiaz bhai, walking with the porter and guide, was behind us. After a wait, we saw the three.

He had slipped on ice and dislocated his shoulder. He had lain on

pressed it further out, causing excruciating pain.

At this altitude, rescue feels theoretical, and evacuation by helicopter would be costly. Dr Shahnaz examined him. We tried to reposition the joint but failed. Time slipped away. Pasang said there was a hospital in Khare, still at least an hour away. With Imtiaz bhai in severe pain, the walk on that difficult trail felt impossible.

Somehow, Imtiaz bhai placed his injured arm over my shoulder. He couldn't lower it. Step by step, we climbed. His mental strength stunned me. After all, this was a man who had completed Ironman races after a



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