



Twenty-two Sherpas were trekking up toward Mount Everest's Camp 2 early on April 18. They were "full of joy and excitement," recalled one of their party, Kaji Sherpa.

TO THE SUMMIT, WITH HELP

Mt. Everest is part of the Himalayan mountain range in south-central Asia. It rises 8,848 metres between Nepal and the Chinese region of Tibet. Spring is climbing season, and as usual, hundreds of adventurers from all over the globe had arrived. Their goal: to try to reach the mountain's summit.

These visitors weren't planning to attempt the climb on their own, however. Residents supply them with food and shelter, while Sherpas lead the way and carry their heavy supplies over

dangerous **crevasses** and cliffs. The Sherpa people are well-known for their mountaineering skills.

A DANGEROUS 'POPCORN FIELD'

Yet Kaji Sherpa was nervous. That day, he knew the Sherpas would be hauling gear through the dangerous Khumbu icefall. They would have to cross an area known as the "popcorn field" because of its bulging chunks of frozen water. If a massive piece broke off, anything could happen.

Worse, the Sherpas had started later in the day than normal. That meant the weather was warming up. The ice and snow could be even softer than usual.

THE SHERPA PEOPLE

Sherpas, whose name means "east people," once lived in Tibet and Burma. They moved to Nepal about 400 years ago.

The Sherpas built their homes on the flattest farmland they could find. Their villages lie up to 4,600 metres above sea level.

Trade, animal herding and farming are the basis of the Sherpa culture. But since the cold climate allows the Sherpa people to grow just one harvest a year, they seek work as guides and **porters** on Himalayan climbing expeditions.

A TSUNAMI OF SNOW AND ICE

Kaji Sherpa's worst fears were realized at around 6:45 a.m. some 5,800 metres up the slope. A huge section of ice

DEFINITIONS

CREVASSES: deep cracks in glaciers or other bodies of ice

PORTERS: people who are employed to carry luggage or supplies



broke off a glacier and rolled down the mountain's south side. It triggered the first major avalanche of the climbing season. When it was over, 16 Sherpas had died. They had been buried under a terrifying white tsunami. It was the deadliest day ever on the mountain.

"A cliff of snow, like a house, came directly toward us, and many were killed at the same time," Kaji Sherpa said from a hospital where he was treated for broken ribs. "There was nowhere to escape. We were helpless."

A DANGEROUS PROFESSION

The accident was tragic but not entirely unexpected. Sherpas make up to 25 treks in the spring for their clients. Each one puts them at great risk. Yet they take pride in their work, and earn on average between \$3,000 to \$6,000 in a season – enough to support their families for a full year.

DID YOU KNOW?

Adventurers pay between \$40,000 and \$60,000 to companies that arrange a climb.

This amount, however, is tiny compared to the \$3.3 million the Nepalese government collects

A TRAFFIC JAM ON THE MOUNTAIN

Sir Edmund Hillary of New Zealand and his Sherpa, Tenzing Norgay, were the first men to reach the summit of Mount Everest. They accomplished the feat on May 29th, 1953.

Over the years, more than 250 people have died trying to climb the legendary mountain. However, climbers today are generally safer than ever. That's partly because they now often rely on whole teams of Sherpas rather than just one guide. As well, weather forecasts are far more precise, which helps climbers avoid poor conditions. Gear has improved over the years, too – and if mountaineers do get into trouble, helicopters and satellite phones make rescue more likely. Modern medications can also help climbers avoid getting sick from lack of oxygen near the summit.

The result? Scaling Mt. Everest is now a popular activity. It attracts hundreds every year – even some with relatively little climbing background. But there's a price to pay for the mountain's growing popularity. Environmentalists worry that all that traffic is harming the site. They're especially critical of all the garbage that is piling up. Meanwhile, experienced climbers say some amateurs make dangerous mistakes.

annually in climbing fees. So after the accident, when officials offered just \$400 to each of the victims' families to cover funeral costs, the 400 Sherpas stationed at base camps were outraged.

They said they're tired of taking all of the risks and doing all of the work while the government collects all of the money. They got together and organized a **boycott** that will likely halt the climbing season. The Sherpas say they won't return to work unless they get more money and better insurance coverage.

"This is something of a wake-up call for the government," said one Western expedition leader. "It is a crisis moment for Everest, and a crisis moment for Nepal." ★

DEFINITIONS

BOYCOTT: a group's refusal to do something as a means of protest



TRAGEDY ON MOUNT EVEREST

ORGANIZING INFORMATION FOR A PURPOSE: THE 5 W'S + HOW

To help you identify important information from *Tragedy on Mt. Everest*, complete the organizer below with specific details and facts from the article.

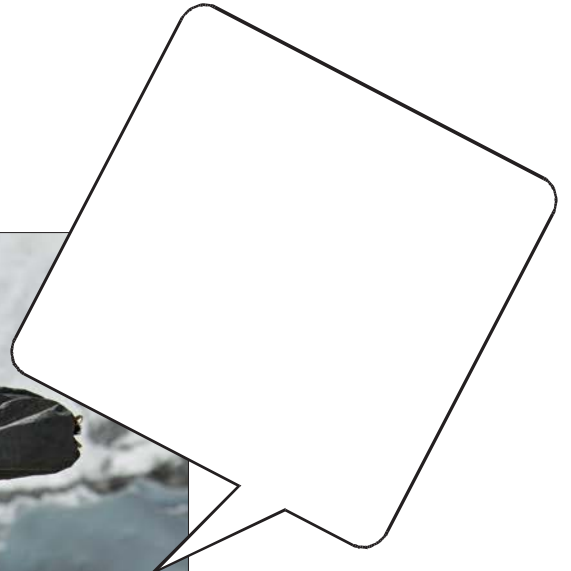
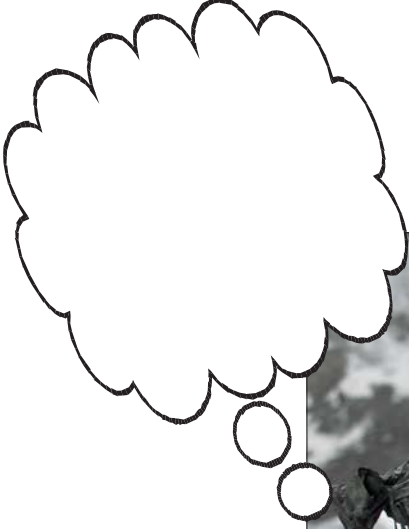
Who?	
What?	
Where?	
When?	
Why?	
How?	

After completing the organizer, consider: *As you see it, how should the Nepalese government handle the Sherpas' boycott that is bringing the climbing season to a halt? Give reasons to support your response.*



TRAGEDY ON MOUNT EVEREST

Write the inner and outer dialogue for the person in this scene. Show what the person is thinking/feeling (inner voice) and saying (outer voice). *A believable conversation conveys appropriate ideas, thoughts, feelings or reactions; is on topic; extends the details of the scene; and is convincing.*



A porter hauls gear in Everest's Base Camp on Mount Everest, Nepal. (Andrew Bardon/National Geographic/Getty Images)