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# Mount Everest — 73rd Anniversary of the First Ascent (May 29, 1953)

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GEOGRAPHY

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GS1

CURATED &amp; WRITTEN BY

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# Mount Everest — 73rd Anniversary of the First Ascent (May 29, 1953)

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## WHY IN NEWS:

**May 29, 2026** marks the **73rd anniversary** of the **first successful summit of Mount Everest (8,848.86 m)** by New Zealand mountaineer **Edmund Hillary** and Sherpa **Tenzing Norgay** at **11:30 AM IST on May 29, 1953**, as part of the **British Mount Everest Expedition** led by **Col. John Hunt**. The route taken was via the **South Col on the Nepal side**. The day is observed informally as **“Everest Day”** in Nepal.

## THE 1953 SUMMIT

PARAMETER	DETAIL
<b>Date</b>	<b>May 29, 1953</b>
<b>Time of summit</b>	<b>11:30 AM (IST)</b>
<b>Climbers</b>	<b>Edmund Hillary (NZ) + Tenzing Norgay (Indian-born Sherpa, later Indian citizen)</b>
<b>Expedition leader</b>	<b>Col. John Hunt (British Army)</b>
<b>Sponsor</b>	<b>Joint Himalayan Committee</b> of the Royal Geographical Society and Alpine Club
<b>Route</b>	<b>South Col (Khumbu Icefall → Western Cwm → Lhotse Face → South Col → Southeast Ridge → Summit)</b>
<b>Approach side</b>	<b>Nepal</b>
<b>Equipment</b>	Bottled oxygen (closed-circuit), ice axes, crampons, Sherpas
<b>Total expedition members</b>	~400 (including porters); summit team of 2
<b>Camps established</b>	9
<b>Failed attempt by same expedition</b>	May 26, 1953 (Tom Bourdillon + Charles Evans turned back short of summit)

## MOUNT EVEREST — GEOGRAPHIC PROFILE

PARAMETER	DETAIL
<b>Official height</b>	<b>8,848.86 m</b> (29,031.69 ft)
<b>Height revision</b>	Jointly revised by <b>Nepal &amp; China</b> on <b>December 8, 2020</b> (from previously accepted 8,848 m)
<b>Mountain straddles</b>	<b>Nepal–China (Tibet Autonomous Region)</b> border
<b>Nepali name</b>	<b>Sagarmatha</b> (“Forehead of the Sky”)
<b>Tibetan name</b>	<b>Chomolungma</b> (“Goddess Mother of the World”)
<b>Range</b>	<b>Mahalangur Himal</b> sub-range of the Greater Himalayas
<b>Continental plates</b>	<b>Indian Plate</b> (under-thrusting) + <b>Eurasian Plate</b> — continued uplift ~4 mm/year
<b>First measured (height)</b>	<b>1856</b> by <b>Andrew Waugh, Surveyor General of India</b> , in the <b>Great Trigonometrical Survey of India</b>
<b>Renamed “Mount Everest”</b>	<b>1865</b> in honour of <b>Sir George Everest</b> , predecessor of Waugh as Surveyor General
<b>First recorded human visit</b>	British Reconnaissance Expedition, 1921
<b>Climbers reaching summit (as of Dec 2025)</b>	~ <b>7,563</b> persons
<b>Deaths on the mountain</b>	~330 (cumulative since 1922)
<b>Park (Nepal side)</b>	<b>Sagarmatha National Park</b> — UNESCO World Heritage Site since <b>1979</b>
<b>Park (Tibet side)</b>	<b>Qomolangma National Nature Preserve</b>

## THE CLIMBERS — QUICK BACKGROUND

### Edmund Hillary (1919-2008)

- New Zealand-born; trained as a beekeeper.
- Served in **Royal New Zealand Air Force** during WWII (Pacific theatre).
- Joined British expedition based on his Himalayan experience.
- Knighted on the day Queen Elizabeth II was crowned (June 2, 1953).

- Later climbed many other peaks; co-led the 1958 **Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition** reaching the South Pole.
- Founded the **Himalayan Trust** for Sherpa welfare (1960).
- New Zealand's High Commissioner to India, Nepal, Bangladesh (1985-1988).

## Tenzing Norgay (1914-1986)

- Born **Namgyal Wangdi** in Tengboche, Nepal (some accounts say Tibet); later took Sherpa name Tenzing Norgay.
- Resided in Darjeeling, **British India; Indian citizen** post-1947.
- Veteran of multiple prior Everest attempts (Swiss expeditions of 1952 came within 240 m of summit).
- Received **Padma Bhushan** (1959) from Govt of India.
- Founding director of the **Himalayan Mountaineering Institute (HMI), Darjeeling** (1954-1976).
- Refused British knighthood; accepted **George Medal**.
- Tenzing-Hillary “who summited first” question: by mutual agreement they always said they reached the top together.

## INDIAN CONNECTIONS — BEYOND TENZING

CONNECTION	DETAIL
<b>Tenzing Norgay</b>	Indian citizen at time of summit; Padma Bhushan 1959
<b>Avtar Singh Cheema</b>	First Indian to summit Everest, <b>May 20, 1965</b> (with Indian Army expedition led by Lt Col Mohan Singh Kohli)
<b>Bachendri Pal</b>	First Indian woman to summit Everest, <b>May 23, 1984</b> ; Padma Shri 1984, Padma Bhushan 2019
<b>Arunima Sinha</b>	First Indian female amputee to summit, <b>May 21, 2013</b>
<b>Anshu Jamsenpa</b>	Indian woman with most ascents — 5 times by 2017
<b>Indian Army Mountaineering Institute (IMA)</b>	Multiple expeditions
<b>Himalayan Mountaineering Institute (HMI), Darjeeling</b>	Founded <b>1954</b> ; trained generations of Indian mountaineers

## THREATS TO THE MOUNTAIN IN 2026

### Climate Change

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- **Khumbu Glacier retreating** — base camp moved ~50 m in 5 years.
- **Western Cwm temperature warming** — ice-fall instability.
- **Snowfall decreasing** at high altitude; ice exposed.
- **Climbing windows narrowing** — May “good weather” period more variable.

### Crowd and Commercial Pressures

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- ~600 climbers/year reach summit during May season (Nepal side).
- **“Traffic jams”** at Hillary Step and at the summit ridge.
- 2019 image of ~300-person queue near summit became symbolic.
- Many climbers under-prepared; reliance on Sherpas, fixed ropes, supplemental oxygen.
- **Royalty fee (Nepal)** = USD 11,000/permit (peak season).

### Environmental Degradation

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- **Estimated 50+ tons of garbage** on the mountain.
- Nepal Army-led **“Mountain Cleanup Campaign”** since 2019.
- **Mandatory waste-return policy** — climbers must bring back 8 kg of garbage.
- **Human waste** disposal issues at base camp.

### Geopolitical

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- Border between Nepal and China runs along summit ridge.
- China’s Tibet (Northeast Ridge) route opens/closes based on political climate.

## THE HINDU KUSH–HIMALAYA (HKH) CRYOSPHERE CONTEXT

PARAMETER	DETAIL
<b>HKH region covers</b>	8 countries — Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bhutan, China, Myanmar, Bangladesh
<b>Glaciers</b>	~54,000 — third-largest ice store outside polar regions
<b>People dependent on HKH river systems</b>	~ <b>1.6 billion</b> (Indus, Ganga, Brahmaputra, Yangtze, Yellow, Mekong systems)
<b>HKH glacier mass loss (2010-19)</b>	~65% faster than 2000-09 (per <b>ICIMOD HKH Report 2023</b> )
<b>Projected loss by 2100</b>	<b>30-50%</b> under 1.5°C scenario; <b>80%</b> under higher warming
<b>Implications</b>	Initial increase in runoff (peak around 2050) followed by sharp decline; water security risk for 1+ billion people

## WIDER SIGNIFICANCE

- **Cultural milestone** — Everest summit is a global symbol of human aspiration and limit.
- **India-Nepal-China linkage** — three civilisations meet at the summit ridge.
- **Soft power** — mountaineering as people-to-people diplomacy.
- **Climate adaptation** — Himalayan ecosystem services to a quarter of humanity.
- **Tourism economy** — Nepal’s foreign exchange depends substantially on Everest tourism.

## WAY FORWARD

- **Strict permit caps** — Nepal’s recent talk of capping climbers.
- **Mandatory experience requirement** — must have summited a 7,000+ m peak before attempting Everest (Nepal MoU 2024).
- **Carbon-neutral climbing** — eco-base camps, solar-powered shelters.
- **Cryosphere monitoring** — ICIMOD + India MoES + China cooperation needed.
- **South Asian Mountain Initiative** — pan-regional mountain ecology framework.

## UPSC RELEVANCE

**GS Paper 1 — Indian Geography / World Geography:**

- Distribution of key natural resources across the world (including South Asia).
- Important Geophysical phenomena — climate, mountains, glaciers.
- Cyclone-related and topographic phenomena.

### GS Paper 3 — Environment:

- Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation.
- Climate change impacts.

### Analytical hooks for Mains:

- The HKH cryosphere and South Asian water security.
- Commercial mountaineering — environmental and ethical considerations.
- Tenzing Norgay's legacy — South-North recognition asymmetry.

#### FACTS CORNER

First successful Everest summit: May 29, 1953, 11:30 AM IST.

Climbers: Edmund Hillary (NZ) + Tenzing Norgay (Indian-born Sherpa, Indian citizen).

Expedition leader: Col. John Hunt (UK).

Route: South Col, Nepal side.

Official height: 8,848.86 m (jointly revised by Nepal & China, December 8, 2020).

Nepali name: Sagarmatha; Tibetan name: Chomolungma.

First measured: 1856, Great Trigonometrical Survey of India under Andrew Waugh.

Named after: Sir George Everest, Surveyor General of India (1830-43); naming in 1865.

First Indian to summit: Avtar Singh Cheema, May 20, 1965.

First Indian woman to summit: Bachendri Pal, May 23, 1984.

Total summiteers (Dec 2025): ~7,563 persons.

Sagarmatha National Park: UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1979.

HMI Darjeeling founded: 1954 (Tenzing Norgay was founding Director of Field Training).

HKH region: 8 countries; glaciers third-largest ice store outside polar regions; 1.6 billion people downstream-dependent.

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Sources: *Britannica, Royal Geographical Society, ICIMOD HKH Report*

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