

Boy who climbed Everest has a new peak to conquer



Prem Bisht

KEEPING TABS: Parents of Arjun Vajpai remain logged in to track his ascent

Aniruddha Ghosal | TNN

Noida: Seventeen-year-old Arjun Vajpai lives in Sector 51 Noida, loves eating Maggi, watching football and last year he became the youngest Indian to climb Mt Everest. Now, only a year later, the boy from Noida is on his way to climb Mt Lhotse, the fourth highest peak in the world.

Mt Lhotse is 8,516m high and the southern face of the mountain is the steepest of its size in the world. It is widely considered one of the hardest mountains to climb. Arjun, who was on his way to the Everest Base camp, said, "Most people assume if you have climbed Mount Everest, everything else will be a cake walk. But the climb to Mt Lhotse is technically much more challenging. The climb itself can be much more treacherous and there are some steep rock faces and dangerous gullies that I need to scale."

Arjun, who studies at Ryan International School, Noida, couldn't leave with the rest of his team as he was taking class XII board exams. "He works very hard. He was undergoing intensive strength training at a nearby gym at the Noida Golf Course. Even while his board examinations were on, he was training for at least four hours everyday," said his mother Priya Vajpai. He first got interested in mountaineering when he went to Pune to visit his maternal grandmother. "He had gone to visit his grandmother in Pune when he first started trekking in the Sahyadri Hills. It was during this time he got addicted to the feeling of being

on top of the world," she added.

Following this Arjun enrolled for a course in mountaineering at the Nehru Institute of Mountaineering. Trainers at the institute recognized his immense potential and encouraged him to aim for the Everest. "Scaling Everest wasn't a joke," reminisced Arjun's father Capt Sanjiv Vajpai. "It was the highest peak in the world and was extremely dangerous. You don't get any second chance up there. Also, it was an expensive affair, the entire thing costing almost Rs 33 lakh. It was very hard to convince sponsors that the sixteen-year-old could achieve this feat. But he was determined, and so were we. Ultimately, the entire expedition was funded by relatives, friends and well-wishers who pitched in. After his last success it's been comparatively easier this time around to get corporate sponsors," he said.

Even though Arjun is younger than everyone on this expedition, the desire that drives him to scale these peaks is easy to comprehend. "It's a totally different feeling. You are on top of the world. You can see the entire curvature of the earth stretching out in front of the world. You can see the sun rising from below your feet. That feeling can't be replicated. That is what keeps me going, not the records," he avers.

Arjun has been keeping in touch with friends and family with regular updates on Facebook and the occasional phone call whenever he gets signal. His parents, who are understandably tense, anxiously await his return.