

Subject: [mf-asiapacific] Opinion: Slashing mountaineering charge for climbers
To: <mf-asiapacific@mtforum.org>
From: "Sarba Khadka, PhD" <jajarkot@gmail.com>

Dear friends of the Mountain,

I think the following news (please see pasted below taken from The Himalayan Times) on slashing mountaineering charge for climbers is an important decision by the interim government of Nepal. But I am not sure how the decision was taken. Is it just to attract people to the mountains and show them how rich Nepal is in having mountains! Or, to reduce the structural poverty of Nepal, if so, by what magnitude, or what else?

One aspect is very clear that such decisions if implemented without proper discussions will certainly increase the negative impact on mountain environment, including increased contributions to accelerating climate change phenomena and devastating biodiversity in the region. Therefore, some sort discussions need to be initiated by the Mountain Forum community on pros and cons of such decisions. Because we the people living in the mountains are the one to be victimised first, tourists or mountaineers will come, exploit our natural heritage and leave it with full of garbage scattered everywhere.

Thank you,
Sarba Raj Khadka

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Climbing permit charges slashed

Himalayan News Service
Kathmandu, April 30, 2008:

With a view to attracting more mountaineers to the country and to rendering mountaineering open for all seasons, the government has brought some changes in the current royalty structure for mountaineering to be effective from July 16.

A media release issued by the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation today stated that the government had decided to slash the royalty on climbing permit for autumn season by 50 per cent and by 75 per cent for winter and summer seasons. However, no change has been made in the royalty structure for the spring season. The government also decided to increase the number of mountaineers in a team to 15 from 12. Likewise, climbers will have to pay no royalty at all to climb mountains in mid-western and far-western development regions for the next five years.

The government also decided to implement Incremental Royalty Break-down System. Till the date, the government has been charging same amount of royalty for teams having different number of persons. But the royalty amount would be increased as per the increase in number of team members from July 16.

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Subject: Re: [mf-asiapacific] Opinion: Slashing mountaineering charge for climbers
To: <mf-asiapacific@mtnforum.org>
From: "Marianne" <m.heredge@mtnforum.org>

Moderator's Note:

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Following message is a rejoinder to the original message by Sarba Khadka,  
PhD <jajarkot@gmail.com> on Slashing mountaineering charge for climbers.

Thanks!

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Dear Sarba,

I think you raise a very important point. I wonder if anyone has an idea of the numbers of mountaineers and expeditions currently coming to Nepal and applying for licenses to climb the peaks?

It emphasises all the more, the need for a code of conduct that is aimed at minimising the negative impacts that increased numbers of expeditions might have on the fragile environment of the mountains. The message coming from the EcoEverest Expedition is very much calling out for a need for this.

Maybe more could be done to encourage, even insist on the use of more environmentally acceptable energy used by expeditions like solar energy. There should be greater control on checking rubbish brought down by expeditions to ensure they are bringing everything back with them. Use of trash cans for disposing of human waste could be made a condition for expeditions.

It is unlikely that government regulations will succeed, but such a movement needs to come from the expeditions and trekking companies, and also the mountaineers themselves. It helps when media-prominent expeditions like the EcoEverest Expedition set a good example by use of such environmentally viable ideas. Let's hope some of their good work is taken up by other trekking and mountaineering organisations.

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Subject: Re: [mf-asiapacific] Opinion: Slashing mountaineering charge for climbers
To: <mf-asiapacific@mtforum.org>
From: "Raj" <raj@socialtreks.com>

Moderator's Note:

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Following message is a rejoinder to the original message by Sarba Khadka,  
PhD <jajarkot@gmail.com> on Slashing mountaineering charge for climbers.

Thanks!

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Good Point! And definitely agree that this requires discussion.

Mountain royalties should not be the mechanism to control the negative effects of tourism. It does work to a certain extent in a country like Nepal... but then again, it really doesn't... check the garbage situation in the different tourism areas of Nepal. Also do a small study to see where these mountain royalties go anyways... not much comes back to the mountain communities. Agreed some part of it goes to environment protection, but not much.

So I personally do not mind the reduction of royalties, it will make the areas more accessible to tourists... and put money where it actually makes sense, in the hands of the communities. However, a practical code of conduct, awareness building and a mechanism of checks and balances have to be developed and practiced if we are serious in slowing the negative effects of tourism. A decentralised mechanism of environmental protection needs to also be in place. This exists to a certain degree, but is not effective enough. A complete stop to all negative effects is of course impossible.

There is a bigger fear and concern that we are not focussed enough... we have one side who is concerned about the negative effects, and the tourism ministry only concerned with increase in arrivals, without worrying too much about quality. While all talk can be directed towards quality control in tourism, not much action has been taken in this direction in Nepal. Agreed there have been some developments in environmental control in mountains and zero garbage policies, but garbage is just one of the negative effects of tourism. A much more comprehensive look at the situation has to be made in order to preserve these pristine locations for our future generations.

But then again, is Nepal really capable of achieving this? Are our policy makers really aware and possess the necessary skills and experience

required to move in this direction? I have serious doubts here.

The road is not that tough... we can just look and study policies and implementation procedures in countries like New Zealand, Austria, Switzerland to know which road we need to take... a good study of these practices and an adaptation to Nepalese conditions will do.... however, we Nepalese are too good at complicating matters... and I am afraid it will happen here too... and before long, we will be deep in a hole where we do not want to be...

I hope someone wakes up and makes the right moves! We wont have much left otherwise!

See you in the mountains!

Raj

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Subject: RE: [mf-asiapacific] Opinion: Slashing mountaineering charge for climbers
To: <mf-asiapacific@mtnforum.org>
From: "Gehendra Gurung" <gehegur@practicalaction.org.np>

Moderator's Note:

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Following message is a rejoinder to the original message by Sarba Khadka,  
PhD <jajarkot@gmail.com> on Slashing mountaineering charge for climbers.

Thanks!

~~~~~

Dear friends,

Khardka ji has raised a good point. What are the objectives of of the government of Nepal to reducing the royalty for mountaineering? Is it economic? If it is economic, by how much the country is going to benefit in total a year - gross as well as net? Who is going to benefit - government, private or communities?

Secondly, have the negative impacts of this decision on environment, economy (through unequal income distribution) and social aspects been thought of? What measures have been proposed by the government of Nepal to address the likely negative impacts?

These are some of the queries I can think of that will emerge in the minds of the citizens and the government of Nepal should respond.

Gehendra Gurung

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Subject: RE: [mf-asiapacific] Opinion: Slashing mountaineering charge for climbers
To: <mf-asiapacific@mtnforum.org>
From: "Roger Payne" <roger@rogerpayne.info>

Moderator's Note:

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Following message is a rejoinder to the original message by Sarba Khadka,  
PhD <jajarkot@gmail.com> on Slashing mountaineering charge for climbers.

Thanks!

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Thank you for opening this discussion.

As a resident of the Alps and a regular visitor to the high mountains of Asia, my view is that the Government of Nepal is moving in the right direction.

Costly permits and licenses can limit numbers and reduce problems. They can also reduce benefits and be a source of unequal distribution or benefits and corruption.

One of the primary reasons for recreation and tourism is to enjoy the freedom of pursuing one's own interests without unnecessary or unreasonable restrictions. Recreationists and tourists like to be able to travel to enjoy their activities and experience new cultures and environments. Hence, those destinations that allow individuals and groups to exercise these freedoms will be attractive for mountain recreation and tourism, and therefore can benefit from this.

Of course, giving people more freedom to enjoy outdoor recreation comes with the responsibility to protect the environment and respect the wishes and needs of local communities. Visitors need to be informed and educated so they can be responsible and help promote sustainable development. Also, local and national governments need a framework of legislation that gives meaningful protection to:

- The long-term conservation value of the environment.
- Local cultural values. And,
- Employment rights and standards.

A lot can be learnt from:

- The economic development of the Alps (while giving better protection to the environment). And,

- The protection of wilderness in North America (while not displacing native people).

All best wishes to the authorities in Nepal to minimise any negative impacts and increase the benefits from mountain recreation and tourism.

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Subject: RE: [mf-asiapacific] Opinion: Slashing mountaineering charge for climbers
To: <mf-asiapacific@mtnforum.org>
From: "Brian Mac Call" <brian.maccall@fgc.ch>

Moderator's Note:

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Following message is a rejoinder to the original message by Sarba Khadka,  
PhD <jajarkot@gmail.com> on Slashing mountaineering charge for climbers.

Thanks!

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Gosh, this looks like a very rapidly taken short term decision and I think that Mountain Forum should take a lead in opening a dialogue with the new Nepali government on a code of conduct for the control of tourism and on how to ensure that the priority is given to a policy that puts the interests and rights of farming people and mountain people out in front. "Slashing charges" could be A PART of a policy for sustainable mountaineering and tourism promotion. Let's think a step ahead of the exploiters - Sarba Raj Khadka is right in calling for caution.

Bhutan is one good example of limiting tourism to a flow of outsiders that can that can be managed locally. There are other good and BAD examples.

Let's encourage our Nepali friends to be a bit tougher.

Brian Mac Call in Choulex (Switzerland).

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Subject: Re: [mf-asiapacific] Opinion: Slashing mountaineering charge for climbers
To: <mf-asiapacific@mtnforum.org>
From: "Marianne Heredge" <m_heredge@yahoo.co.uk>

Moderator's Note:

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PhD <jajarkot@gmail.com> on Slashing mountaineering charge for climbers.

Thanks!

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If the community benefits from the money made from the royalty, this can be good. But like in the case of Upper Mustang, where tourists going there have to pay 700USD for a 10-day visit, 1-2% is only going to the local communities.

Often the foreign visitors are not the ones so much responsible directly for causing pollution and rubbish in that they are usually much more environmentally conscious than local people. However just by being there, the things they need are provided by locals who do not have this understanding. For example, it might be an idea to ban plastic bags and bottles from above Lukla in the Everest area, above Besihahar in the Annapurna area. If it is possible in Sikkim, why not in Nepal?

Marianne

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Subject: Re: [mf-asiapacific] Opinion: Slashing mountaineering charge for climbers
To: <mf-asiapacific@mtnforum.org>
From: "John Mock" <jmock@ucsc.edu>

Moderator's Note:

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PhD <jajarkot@gmail.com> on Slashing mountaineering charge for climbers.

Thanks!

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Not to mention that Pakistan has had a similar system in place for several
years, thanks to Nazir Sabir.

Climbers, like all tourists, choose their destination. Destinations
compete. Comparative advantage is a concept that finds actualization in
permits, fees, revenue earned. Nepal should strive to sustain that.

John

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