

India

Overview. In 2009 there were 64 Indian and 37 foreign expeditions in the Indian Himalaya, the total of 101 being the largest in recent years. Many Indian expeditions visited peaks that have been climbed many times (Satopanth, Chhamser Kangri), and many foreign groups were commercially organized trips to well-known mountains, such as Nun and Kun. Stok Kangri retained its status as the most-climbed 6,000m peak in the world, with the added tag of harboring one of the dirtiest, most foul-smelling base camps anywhere.

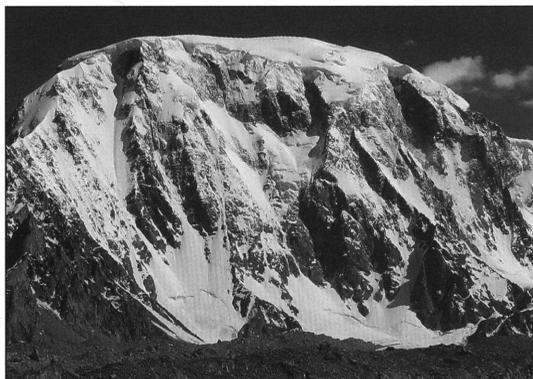
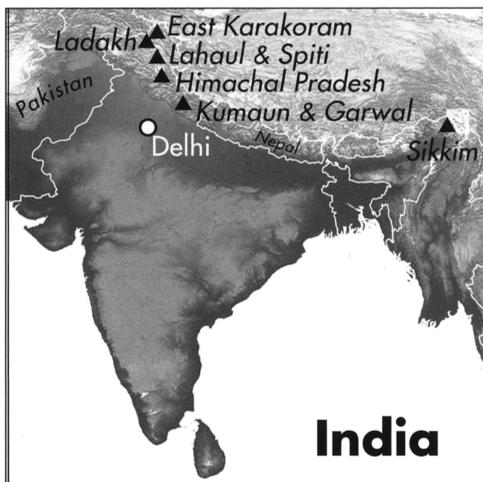
Both leading organizations in India had new Presidents. Ramkrishna Rao, former Director General of the Indo-Tibet Border Police (ITBP), was elected as President of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation, while a leading Indian mountaineer, Col. Ashok Abbey, took over the reins of the Himalayan Club.

Finally, the Indian Himalaya was severely affected by changes in the weather, and one can use the cliché that the only certainty about this year's weather was its uncertainty. The dry spells affected villagers' psyche too. The population of Langja, in Spiti, long suspected that the mountain rising above their village, with the romantic name Chau Chau Kang Nilda (Blue Moon in the Sky), affected their weather. This year they stopped three expeditions from proceeding to this peak, as they believed it would affect the crops: a curious effect of global warming.

HARISH KAPADIA, *Honorary Editor, The Himalayan Journal*

EAST KARAKORAM

Saser Muztagh, Plateau Peak (7,287m), attempt. The name "Plateau Peak" is something of a contradiction: the mountain is massive and wears a permanent ice cap. Despite several attempts, by 2009 the peak still remained unclimbed. Our five-member Indo-American team, consisting of Sudeep Barve, Rajesh Gadgil, Marling Geist, Bryce Green, and I, traveled to Leh on July 21. We trekked across the Lasermo La (5,400m) into the Nubra Valley and started our approach to the mountain from



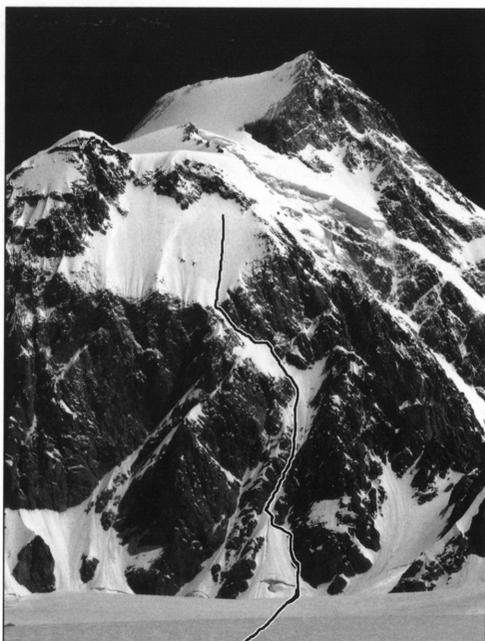
The south face of Plateau Peak (7,287m) rises above the Sakang Lungpa Glacier. The summit is toward the right. *Divyesh Muni*

Pinchmic. The terrain was rough—long traverses on scree-covered rock slabs, loose mud, and exposed paths. It took 10 hours to gain the 1,000m height rise to Phonglas Camp at 4,400m. The next day, we established base camp (4,800m) at the snout of the Sakang Glacier [this point is marked as Yangbar on some maps and the glacier also referred to as the Sakang Lungpa].

We established ABC at 5,400m on the Sakang Glacier moraine by August 3. From the upper eastern basin we had to find a line up a wall of ca 1,000m to gain access to the east ridge of Plateau Peak. This line would exit at the base of Saser Kangri III, where we planned to place a camp. It would be a long traverse from there to Plateau Peak, but more direct access to the east ridge was subject to risk from seracs and avalanches. Our route followed a narrow gully to a height of 6,200m, from where a steep climb led to a leftward traverse below a rock band. This traverse was frightening due to extreme exposure and loose snow, the latter collapsing with every passage. On completion of the traverse, we climbed straight up a snow and ice slope that we called the Butterfly.

For seven days we persisted. As the sun touched the slopes and loosened rocks, the gully became a bowling alley. A few rocks found their mark. Our start time got earlier each day, to a point where we aimed to start by midnight. We reached a height of ca. 6,600m, after fixing 1,350m of rope. On August 15, Barve, Gadgil, Geist, and I visited the Sakang col (6,100m). This lay close by on the ridge between Saser III and 6,943m Sakang, and overlooks the North Shukpa Kungchang Glacier. Next day, the weather turned bad with strong winds and snowfall, which continued for the next eight days, making the route unsafe. In continuing bad weather the team returned to base camp on August 22.

Rajesh and I were keen to attempt a peak of 6,010m (as marked on the Survey of India Map: N 34°41.755, E 77°41.055) at the junction of the Sakang and its subsidiary glaciers. On the 24th the weather showed positive signs, so we shifted to Phonglas Camp at 4,400m. On the 25th, with Sherpas Mingma and Samgyal, we climbed steep scree slopes and traversed some nerve-racking rock slabs to establish a camp at 5,200m below the northwest face of the peak. Next day, despite cloudy skies, we decided to make an attempt, hoping the weather would hold. We climbed the north ridge, which held a few sections of steep ice, to the upper west ridge. All four reached the summit by 10:00 a.m. and were back in Phonglas Camp that evening. We named our mountain Tsumzong Kangri (Junction Peak). The expedition returned to Leh on the 28th.



The line attempted by the Indo-American team on the far right side of the south face of Plateau Peak. The team almost reached the junction with the east ridge, which continues left off picture. The summit behind is Saser Kangri III (7,495m), first climbed in 1986 by the ITBP. Divyesh Muni