

Rediscovering the abode of snow

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Inspiring words, unique photographs, and docu-films capturing the challenging life style and adventure of people living in the high mountains marked the opening of a two-day series of events at National Art Gallery.

Celebrating one hundred years of scientific research and adventure under the shadows of K2, the two-day series of events titled 'The Italian Science and Cooperation at the Shadow of K2' was organised by the Ev-K2-CNR Committee, the SEED Project and the Karakoram International University (KIU), with the patronage of the Italian Embassy.

In his keynote speech at the inaugural ceremony, the president of the Ev-K2-CNR Agostino da Polenza said that it was one hundred years that the Italians are working in the Karakorum, having inherited Professor Desio's dreams and scientific planning the Ev-K2-CNR on its way to explore, research and mainstream the issues of the Karakorum. He said that for the last five years, they are focused on the consolidation of the great Central Karakorum National Park (CKNP) in the K2 region under the framework of the SEED project.

Agostino further said that Karakorum mountain range including the Baltoro have all the superlative features that 'make us love the giant mountains with unique features of size, strength, verticality, harmony, shape, colour, and light, to the unique majesty of K2.

Federico Bianchi, Head of the Cultural Affairs at the Italian Embassy said that Karakorum range and the K2 have been familiar names in Italy for very long time. He said that it was 1909, when the Duke of Abruzzi, the son of our then King, crossed the Karakoram, creating an ideal bridge between our two countries. Since then, many other Italian scientists, explorers and mountaineers came to the region including Ardito Desio, who visited the area in 1929 for the first time, together with his companions Lacedelli and Compagnoni, was the first climber ever to reach the top of the K2 in 1954, and he continued his expeditions until few years before his death in 2001. He also informed about the Italian Museum inaugurated to commemorate such achievements in Skardu in 2004. Bianchi further said that Italy and Pakistan enjoy excellent bilateral relations and the Italian Government, within its portfolio of development programmes worth over 226 million euro, has decided to fund different activities in the mountainous areas of Pakistan. The main one is the Social Economic Environmental Development Project (SEED), in the framework of the Pakistani Italian Debt-for-Development Swap Programme that amounts to about 8 million euros and is implemented by the 'Everest K2 CNR Committee' in collaboration with the Karakorum International University and several prestigious Italian, Pakistani and international partner institutions.

KIU Vice Chancellor Dr Najma Najam said the SEED project initiatives would translate sustainability for the future generations in the Gilgit-Baltistan.

KIU in partnership with the Ev-K2-CNR is setting up new tradition of working relationship based on the scientific research to protect the natural resource base. She said that women empowerment and mainstreaming is the key component of the community capacity building programme and many young women have been enrolled in the unconventional disciplines of education in the Karakorum International University (KIU).

Speaking on the occasion, Sameena Baig, the first Pakistani woman to scale Mount Everest said that more efforts should be made to make life and living of mountain people better by providing water and ecological services. She said that the mountain people fascinate and challenge our courage, but there are no opportunities for the young to explore the snow covered natural habitats on the mighty glaciers and on the peaks of sky-touching mountains. She stressed the need for provision of outbound educational and adventure activities to the youth for mountaineering.

The Filippo de Filippi photo exhibition titled 'Rediscovering the abode of snow' displayed photographs and posters showcasing heavy scientific equipments used during the research and adventure expeditions on and around K2, along with scenic and rugged views of people and places adorning the high lands of Pakistan. Dedicated to Italian researcher and explorer Filippo de Filippi, the photographs takes one back to 1913, capturing the unique footprints of Filippo's adventure journey to the K-2 and Central Asia from 1913-1914. The expedition is remembered as a great step in rediscovering Karakorum range based on great scientific research. About 300 high resolution reproductions of the original photographic heritage displayed at the exhibition depicts the natural and cultural landscape of that time, and the pioneering scientific works carried out by Filippo. The original pieces are conserved in the archives of the Society for Geographic Studies of Florence, Italy.

The international mountain film festival was inaugurated by Sameena Baig, Pakistan's first woman mountaineer to summit Mount Everest just a few months back. The festival opened with the screening of 'In the Heart of Asia', directed by Stefano Ardito, a 20-minute adventure film shot in Italy and Pakistan.

The docu-film portrays highlights of the Filippo De Filippi scientific expedition of 1913 in Central Asia. He departed from India, and reached Skardu, Leh, the Rimu glacier, the Dapsang Plains, the highest Karakorum passes, and arrived to Kashgar, in the Chinese Xinjiang. The documentary based on his diaries and photographs retracing Filippo's life and work, capturing moments of his great adventures in a true reflection of historical and scientific value.

Another film 'Next Time Inshallah', filmed in Spain by Alex G. de Bikufia in 2011 portrays the human experiences of Basque Alex Txikon, the Austrian Gerfried Göschl and the Canadian Louis Rousseau, in reaching the summit of the Gasherbrum I during the winter of 2011. The 35-minute adventure film is based on the day to day affairs and challenges from Base camp to the adventure journey on the mighty mountain.

A day-long scientific conference was held during the 2nd day (Tuesday). Scientists from different parts of the country deliberated on issues confronting glaciers, water and ecosystems in the Karakoram Range.

The film festival also continued on the second day with screening of four films based on mountain adventure.

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