








Govt in dark on sensitive reports

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KATHMANDU, OCT 31 -

Almost two decades after a hi-tech scientific observatory was installed

near the Everest base camp under its collaboration, the government has sought — from its foreign operators — access to the data the lab sends to some European research centres every few seconds.

Officials say they don't have any access to the data as yet.

The government move comes after the European research centres

— based on analysis of the lab's data — released some of their alarming findings on the possible transport of pollution from India

and China to the Himalayas. Government officials say Nepal's

ignorance on this issue could unnecessarily push it into controversy

vis-à-vis the ongoing battle among China, India and the USA

over climate change issues. "We should be in the know

of everything that happens inside Nepal's territory regarding

scientific activities," said Prof. Purna Chandra Adhikari,

Secretary of the Nepal Academy of Science and Technology (NAST),

which is the collaborating agency in the lab form Nepal. "We

have taken up the issue with the concerned European scientists

that they should involve NAST in anything concerning Nepal and

NAST — being a focal point of the lab in Nepal — should get access to

the data." The Italy-based National Research Council (CNR) in collaboration with NAST and other NGOs, including ICIMOD had

installed the pyramid observatory, known as EV-K2-CNR, in the

Everest region in 1990. Since then, the CNR has issued over 1,000

reports, many of them concerning dynamics of pollution in whole

South Asia. In March this year, the European scientists declared

in a report that the level of pollution in Everest has reached an all

time high.

The Nepali scientists at NAST came to know about it only after the media reported about the March report. Subsequently, NAST called a meeting of its scientists and decided to ask the European scientists why they were keeping NAST in the dark.

NAST officials said during a meeting with European scientists in the last week of October, CNR assured of providing NAST full access to the observatory's data. "We can neither verify nor refute the foreigners' statements about our climate conditions unless we get access to the data that the lab sends," said a meteorologist.

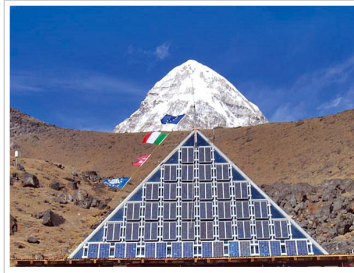
"Though the lab's finding about high concentration of pollutants in the Everest region could be true, it cannot be said whether it was because of the coal burnt by industrial India and China until we are given access to the data."

NAST Academician Prof. Madan Lal Shrestha, however, said NAST is also responsible. "Though it is a focal point for the project here, NAST does not have a separate unit to look after the EVK2CNR. Even if it gets access to the data, it won't have space to keep that safely," said Prof. Shrestha.

Officials at the Science Ministry said this is just the tip of the iceberg and that many activities happen in Nepali territory without the government's knowledge.

"There is a longstanding climate related fight among the US, China and India, and it is better that Nepal keep itself away from such politics," said a scientist who has been closely observing some key climate related projects in Nepal.

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