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Hillary medal for Dehradun conservationist

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REPUBLICA

KATHMANDU, March 17: The sixth Sir Edmund Hillary Mountain Legacy Medal has been awarded to Dr Harshwanti Bisht, a Dehradun-based conservationist, for her environmental and community work in the Gangotri Himalayas.

The medal, which recognizes Sir Edmund Hillary's life-long commitment to welfare of mountain people in Nepal's Khumbu region and their environment while encouraging the continuing emulation of his examples, was presented to Dr Bisht at an event organized at the International Center for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), Kathmandu on Monday.

According to Dr Beau Beza, chairperson of the Hillary Medal Selection Committee (HMSC), the medal was awarded to Dr Bisht for her 'remarkable service in the conservation of culture and nature in mountainous regions'.

"She is a recognized leader and an inspiration to all, known as an accomplished mountaineer and among the first three women to summit the main peak of Nanda Devi," said Dr David Molden, Director General of the ICIMOD, speaking at the function. "Her valuable contributions toward the improvement of the Gangotri area of Uttarakhand are highly recognized,"

Dr Bisht, an accomplished mountaineer, was a member of an Indian expedition team to Mt Everest in 1984. However, the HMSC says the decision to confer the medal on Dr Bisht is not for her mountaineering feat but her contribution to the preservation of the Gangotri Himalayas.

After climbing Mt Everest, particularly after 1989, Dr Bisht has been relentlessly working to improve environmental condition of the Gangotri area of Uttarakhand. As part of her 'Save Gagotri' program, tens of thousands of saplings have been planted, eco-awareness campaigns have been organized, endangered medicinal herbs have been propagated and eco-tourism standards have been introduced. The program has also introduced eco-tourism standards to an area that had been ravaged by climate change and unregulated pilgrimage.

Dr. Bisht, like many other mountaineers, shifted her focus from recreation to conservation and sustainable high altitude tourism development as a direct result of the work of Sir Edmund Hillary, said Mountain Legacy, a non-governmental organization formed for cultural and natural conservations of mountainous regions.

"When I was in Khumbu in 1984, I saw the great effect of Sir Hillary's work to conserve the natural environment and to bring economic opportunities to the Sherpa communities," Dr Bisht said. "So, that inspired me to work in Gangotri."

In the past, the Hillary medal has been awarded to five people who have contributed to uplifting living standards of mountain people and preserving

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