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3 Climbers Die on Mount Everest, 2 Still Missing

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

KATMANDU, Nepal (AP) — Three climbers who were among scores who scaled Mount Everest over the weekend died on their descent and two more are missing, a Nepalese official said Monday.

The first clear weather conditions of the spring climbing season were Friday and Saturday, but a windstorm swept the higher altitudes of the mountain by Saturday afternoon, said Gyanendra Shrestha of Nepal's Mountaineering Department.

An estimated 150 climbers reached the summit on either day, most of them on Saturday.

"There was a traffic jam on the mountain on Saturday. Climbers were still heading to the summit as late as 2:30 p.m. which is quite dangerous," Shrestha told The Associated Press by telephone from Everest's base camp.

Climbers are advised to not attempt to reach the summit after 11 a.m. The area above the last camp at South Col is nicknamed the "death zone" because of the steep icy slope, treacherous conditions and low oxygen level.

"With the traffic jam, climbers had a longer wait for their chance to go up the trail and spent too much time at higher altitude. Many of them are believed to be carrying limited amount of oxygen not anticipating the extra time spent," Shrestha said.

The three climbers who died Saturday were believed to have suffered exhaustion and altitude sickness.

They were identified as 61-year-old German doctor Eberhard Schaaf, Nepal-born Canadian Shriya Shah, and South Korean mountaineer Song Won-bin. The missing climbers are a Chinese national and his Nepalese Sherpa guide.

Weather conditions are clear enough to permit climbing to Everest's 8,850-meter (29,035-foot) peak for only a short time in May.

On May 10, 1996, eight people died on what is believed to be the worst day on Everest. The main reason was said to be that climbers who started their ascents late in the day were caught in a snow storm that swept the mountain in the afternoon.