Press Brief
Alpine Rescue Operation In Nepal

1. Introduction

We are pleased to inform you all that Fishtail Air is in the process of introducing advanced Alpine Rescue System in the Nepalese Himalaya. In this connection we have partnered with Air Zermatt, a helicopter company based in Zermatt, Switzerland. Since its inception in 1968, Air Zermatt has pioneered Mountain rescue and flight operations in the Swiss Alps. The Swiss company is now helping to develop and establish an Alpine Rescue System in Nepal through transfer of technology, in partnership with Fishtail Air.

In March this year, Air Zermatt organized a week long observation training programme on Alpine Rescue Operation in the Swiss Alps for a five member Nepalese team. The team included Fishtail Air’s CEO Mr. Suman Pandey, Capt. Sabin Basnyat - Chief Pilot, Mr. Pradip Gautam - Manager Operations, Mr. Purna Awale - senior technician and Mr. Binod Giri, Chief of Air Safety Department, Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal. The training was conducted by rescue experts from Air Zermatt. Capt Sabin Basnyat and Purna Awale received familiarization as well as practical training, while others received orientation on Alpine Rescue System’s operation.

During 2010 spring climbing season, Air Zermatt has based a set of specialist Pilot and rescue expert Mountain Guide in Nepal to support Fishtail Air’s team for carrying out special rescue missions in the Himalaya. Capt. Daniel Aufdenblatten and Lehner Richard were into assignment from 24th of April to 8th May whereas, Capt. Gerold Biner and Mr. Bruno Jelk, a celebrity name in the field of Alpine rescue is in duty from 5th of May, 2010. Together with the members of Fishtail Air, both the team have performed some of the unique and special missions in the History of Mountaineering world.

2. Rescue Missions Carried out by Fishtail Air & Air Zermatt’s Team

a. November 2009 - Body of Slovenian Climber Tomaz Humar air lifted from Mt Langtang Lirung (7234m.)

On 14th November 2009 an unusual rescue operation was carried out for the first time in the history of Nepalese mountaineering. The dead body of 40 year old Slovenian climber, Tomaz Humar who had been missing since November 10th at Mt. Langtang Lirung (7234m.) was air lifted by Fishtail Air’s AS 350 B3 helicopter through a special long line operation from 6200m. The team from Air Zermatt, Switzerland carried out this special mission under the leadership of Chief Rescue Officer - Bruno Jelk, Rescue Pilot - Robert Andenmatten and climber Simon Anthamatten. The chopper was flown by Capt. Sabin Basnyat of Fishtail Air, supported by Andenmatten.

b. April 2010 - Dead Body of Danish Mountaineer Air Lifted using ‘Sling Operation’ at Mt. Kyajo Ri (6186m)

On April 2010, Fishtail Air airlifted the dead body of a Danish mountaineer Philip Ulrich using sling operation at Mt. Kyajo Ri (6186m/20,290 feet) in the Khumbu Himal. Ulrich had fallen down (from 19,000m) to his death between Base Camp and summit. Late Philip Ulrich (52 years) was climbing Mt. Kyajo Ri with his son. Capt. Sabin Basnyat and Technician Purna Awale retrieved the dead body using ‘sling operation’, on Fishtail Air’s newly arrived Aircraft, AS 350 B3. While Sabin Basnyat controlled the chopper, Mr. Awale hung on to a 45m long rope and tied the dead body to a harness,
after which it was flown to safe ground. This was the first such operation carried out by Fishtail Air’s Capt. Sabin Basnyat and Technician Purna Awale after receiving training for the same at ‘Air Zermatt’ in Switzerland in March.

c. 26th April 2010- 4 Korean Climbers and 3 Nepalese Sherpas Rescued from 6,500m at Mt. Manaslu (8163m)

On 26th April, a rescue team comprising of pilot Capt. Sabin Basnyat, and rescue specialists from Air Zermatt, Richard Lehner and Pilot Daniel Aufdenblatten left Kathmandu at 6:30 AM for Manaslu Base Camp to rescue a group of Korean climbers and Sherpas who were stranded at 6500m. The rescue team took four rotations to rescue the very exhausted and frostbitten team. Four Korean Climbers and three Sherpas were rescued.

d. 29th April 2010 - Fishtail Air & Air Zermatt carries out the Highest Longline Rescue in the Nepal Himalayas

Fishtail Air & Air Zermatt’s team made a record breaking rescue on 29th April, 2010 using ‘human sling operation’, on Mt. Annapurna I (8091m/26,545ft). Three Spanish climbers were evacuated from 6900m by Fishtail Air’s AS 350 B3, using human sling operation. The climbers were stranded in the mountain due to bad weather for 36 hours.

The rescue operation was carried out by Capt. Daniel Aufdenblatten from Air Zermatt, Switzerland, while Swiss Mountain Guide, Richard Lehner hung on the sling and lifted the stranded climbers. The three Spanish climbers were evacuated with the longline, one by one and flown to base camp at 4000 meter. This was the highest longline rescue in the history of Mountaineering as well as highest sling operation of aviation Industry.

e. 16th May 2010 - Chinese Climbers Rescued from Dhaulagiri (8167m)

A joint team of Air Zermatt and Fishtail Air rescued members of a Chinese expedition team from Dhaulagiri on 16th May. A team of 8 Chinese climbers and 6 Sherpas were stranded at 7,500m. and needed to be air lifted. The rescue team tried to reach the stranded climbers on May 15th but had to abort their mission owing to bad weather.

On 16th May at 7:00AM the rescue team flew to Dhaulagiri base camp with 4 Sherpas on two Fishtail Air helicopters. A Chinese climber had already perished in Camp 3. It was intended to bring his dead body down by Sherpas to Camp 2 and from there to be airlifted. The rest of the climbers were rescued and brought to Base Camp from different heights between 6100 to 6800m. Swiss Mountain Guide Bruno Jelk and Fishtail Air's technician Purna Awale helped the exhausted climbers to be airlifted, while Capt. Sabin Basnyat and Capt Gerold Biner of Air Zermatt flew in succession, all the climbers and rescuers were back from North East- Col of the mountain in four flights to the base camp. Altogether five members of the Chinese expedition team were flown to Pokhara and then to Kathmandu, where they are undergoing medical treatment.
f. **17th May 2010 - Dead Bodies of Russian & Swiss climbers recovered from Mt. Everest**

Following the rescue at Dhaulagiri V, the rescue team of Fishtail Air and Air Zermatt retrieved the dead bodies of Russian and Swiss climbers from Mt. Everest (8848m) on 17th May. The team of Sherpas from Extreme Everest Expedition who are up on a clean–up drive in the mountain helped to bring down the dead bodies from the Hillary Step to Camp 2 (6500m). While the Russian climber had died recently, the body of the Swiss climber had been lying at the South col since spring, 2008.

3. **Fishatail Air’s Air Ambulance**

To make our rescue missions more effective, Fishtail Air has introduced the ambulance facilities in its Helicopters. The air ambulance has medical facilities and equipments supplied by Air Zermatt which can be fitted or detached in minutes. Both Fishtail Air and Air Zermatt hope to carry out difficult rescue and evacuations in future with in flight medical services, thus saving precious lives in the high mountains.

4. **Fishtail Air & Air Zermatt’s Partnership**

Fishtail Air is grateful to the team of Air Zermatt for sharing their technical knowledge and expertise. We have learnt a lot from our partner, Air Zermatt, represented by Mr. Gerold Biner, Director Operations and Rescue Specialist Bruno Jelk at the moment. We believe this is just the beginning of a lasting chapter of friendship and cooperation between Air Zermatt and Fishtail Air. We are pleased to inform you that a pilot and a rescue specialist from Fishtail Air will be leaving for Switzerland shortly to receive additional training in alpine rescue. For the coming climbing season, Air Zermatt has kindly consented to base some of its experts - pilots and engineers, in Nepal. They will be guiding and helping the rescue team from Fishtail Air till they are fully trained. Once its rescue team is trained fully, Fishtail Air will be the only unit in Asia having advanced expertise in Alpine Rescue System. In future, Fishtail Air plans to extend its Alpine Rescue operations not only in Nepal but throughout the Himalayas - in India, Bhutan, and Tibet too. In the days to come, we hope, mountaineers and adventurers will be able to climb and traverse the high mountains with an easy mind, without fearing for their lives, as Fishtail Air’s alpine rescue team will always be there to respond to distress calls.

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