

China tightens Everest Access

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(AFP) China has put in place tougher rules on access to the Tibetan side of Mount Everest next year as part of preparations to take the Olympic torch to the summit of the mountain. The new regulations, which include stricter background checks on foreign climbers, follow threats by Tibetan independence activists to step up protests against China's presence in the Himalayan region during the 2008 Summer Games. Chinese officials *"will not limit expeditions, but they will strictly vet the expedition teams"*, the head of the Nepal Mountaineering Association, Ang Tsering Sherpa, told AFP. *"The main purpose is to run the Olympic expedition smoothly without problems"*, said Sherpa, who was informed of the new rules during a recent meeting with Chinese representatives on planning for the 2008 Everest climbing season. The organisers of the Beijing Olympics plan to bring the Olympic torch to the top of the 8,848-metre (29,198-foot) peak as part of a relay that will also take in the Tibetan capital Lhasa.

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