KATMANDU, Nepal — Dozens of Sherpa guides left the Mount Everest base camp in protest Wednesday.

The walkout came a week after 16 Sherpas were killed in an avalanche on Everest.

Climbers rely on the Nepalese mountaineers to guide them to the top of Everest.

The deadly disaster, the worst in the Himalayan mountain's history, stirred up hidden anger among the Sherpas over their pay and treatment. Without the Sherpas as guides, it's not known whether there will be a climbing season this year.
After Wednesday's walkout, the government quickly announced that tourism officials will encourage the Sherpas to get back to work.

Nepal's government has been blamed for not doing enough for the Sherpas. But one top official blamed the walkout on troublemakers.

"But things are getting back to normal," said Sushil Ghimire. He is with Nepal's Tourism Ministry.

The government said it would pay about $415 to the families of each Sherpa who died in the avalanche. But the Sherpas said they want higher pay and more help for the victims' families. They also want new rules to keep them safe on the mountain.

**Climbing Trips Canceled**

It's not known how many of the 400 or so Sherpas on the mountain had left the base camp. But many expedition companies have already canceled their climbs. Most attempts to reach Everest's summit are made in mid-May. The weather is better then.

Sherpas said there are different reasons for the walkout. Some wish to honor their dead friends.

Thirteen bodies were found after Friday's avalanche. Three Sherpas were still missing and are assumed to be dead.

"It is just impossible for many of us to continue climbing while there are three of our friends buried in the snow," said Dorje Sherpa. He is an experienced Sherpa guide.

Ed Marzec is an American climber at base camp. He said that Sherpas were loading their equipment onto a helicopter.

"There are a lot of Sherpas leaving this morning, and in the next two days there will be a huge number that will follow," said Marzec. He decided to abandon his climb.

Tusli Gurung is a guide at base camp. He estimated that nearly half the Sherpas had left.
Families Angry And Worried

Family members of the dead Sherpas said they are angry at the government. They are also worried about their future.

Ang Kaji left behind three sons, three daughters and elderly parents.

"Our father was the only one who earned in our family. We live in a rented apartment. Our grandparents need regular medication. And all of us are still in school. We have no idea how we are going to support the family," said 17-year-old Phinjum, Kaji's second daughter.

Dali, 28, lost her husband Pen Tenji, 27, in the avalanche.

She has a 4-year-old son and 2-year-old daughter. They have no other source of income to support them.

Friday's avalanche happened when a huge piece of ice fell from the mountain. The avalanche occurred along a dangerous section known as the Khumbu Icefall. It is a field of shifting ice and deep cracks in the ground.

Tremendous Risks

The disaster has restarted a debate over the tremendous risks the Sherpas take on Everest. Most of the climbers have a lot of money. But they have little or no experience at high altitudes, where it is difficult to breathe. That means Sherpas are needed to place miles of rope and carve steps in the ice and snow.

Without the help of the Sherpas, it would be nearly impossible for climbers to get to the top of Everest. They also carry nearly all the climbers' equipment. At times, weak climbers are tied to Sherpas, who pull them up the mountain.

The Nepalese government said it would give 5 percent of the money it gets from Everest climbers to help Sherpas who are killed or injured. That comes to about $175,000 per year. However, the Sherpas want 30 percent of the money, which is about $1 million. Nepal earns about $3.5 million each year from Everest climbers. Sherpas, though, make just $3,000 to $5,000 per climbing season for the dangerous work.
The government will also give $15,620 to the families of killed Sherpas, the Ministry of Tourism said. Again, that is far less than the Sherpas' demand for $20,800.

Nearly 30 climbers have died on the Icefall since 1963.

More than 4,000 climbers have reached the top of the world's highest mountain since 1953. New Zealander Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay were the first to reach the top. Hundreds of people have died trying.