

Edited by Sriram Narayanan

# Faces

Issue 53

ABOUT PETROLHEADS, AUTO ENTHUSIASTS AND ALL SUCH NICE FOLK



ONEHELLUVARIDE.COM

"We're going on a holiday. And some people would ask 'why don't you guys take a plane?' But this expedition is to raise a million dollars and, wherever possible, donate it"

# TO HELL AND BEYOND

**CHANDAN LAHIRI:** The 48-year-old holds two world records in endurance biking, and has ridden all across India and the Himalayas. On quitting the ad industry he has taken to travel writing, documentaries and is the founder of Out There Adventures.

**PETER STEWART:** It's been two decades since this Australian came to the Himalayas and stayed on for good. Now a resident of Kathmandu, Peter is an avid mountain biker, kayaker and mountaineer.

**SAROSH COOPER:** Might as well call him Sarosh Extreme Sports Cooper. High-altitude trekker, scuba diver, alpine and water skier, bungee jumper. If that wasn't sufficient, this Mumbaier is awaiting his solo license for skydiving.

**TJ ELLIOT:** By day, this Pennsylvanian is a manager with Home Depot (a kind of Wal-Mart). On other days he is a backpacker, photographer and a handyman with cars. So while Chandan mans the ATV and Peter and Sarosh man the bikes, Elliot will drive the support van with all essentials and hopes that any automotive problems on the trip fall within his ken.

**HIMANSHU SETH:** A professional photographer and avid traveller. Any questions as to why Himanshu's in this team?

**PLABAN BAGCHI:** A trained filmmaker and videographer. Plaban has been involved with a few international documentaries. His camera work aside, this youngster is also adept at the editing table and as director. Just entering his 20s, he would have been the youngest member of this crew, were it not for...

**SANJAY STEWART:** Peter and Bhabani Stewart's son. While Chandan would be celebrating his birthday the day the expedition begins, this boy will be celebrating his 14th birthday somewhere along the way. He first rode a bike when he was five and paraglided at eight. He is also a trained kayaker and a river guide.



Six men are all set to embark on a 20,000-mile journey hoping to make a difference. It's ironic, says **Sriram Narayanan**, that they will have to pass a town called Hell to get there

IT WAS THE TURN OF THE millennium. I was my usual 'Bah Humbug!' self. There was a big group booking hotels, dance floors and yachts. And Chandan Lahiri, an advertising professional, was sitting by the Ganges contemplating life and all that. Little did he guess that a decade later he and five of his friends would

be embarking on a 20,000-mile journey on two bikes and an ATV. Pretty apt then, that they are calling it OneHelluvaRide. They will set off from Colombo and end up along the Arctic Highway to Stockholm just short of the North Pole.

About that time by the Ganges? Well, that's when Chandan decided to call it quits after 20

years in advertising, and make a living out of adventure.

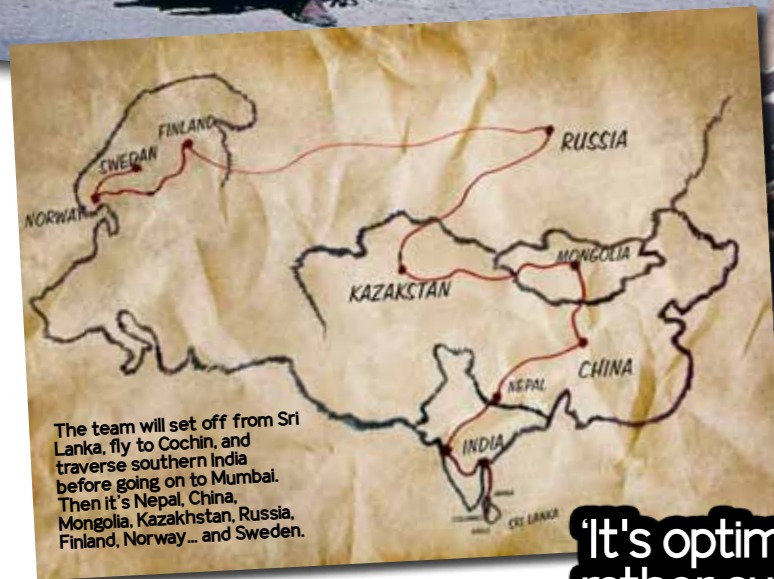
Er, but why an ATV? "I had a bad bike accident that ruined my knee. So my doc said I should either avoid this trip till I get a knee-replacement surgery done, or ensure that my chances of falling off is 0.0 per cent. Surely, that's impossible on a "



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The meek seem to have not only inherited the earth but also blocked the way to heaven



The team will set off from Sri Lanka, fly to Cochin, and traverse southern India before going on to Mumbai. Then it's Nepal, China, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Russia, Finland, Norway... and Sweden.

**'It's optimistic and rather surreal, but you've got to admit it beats candlelit vigils and charity balls hollow by several thousand miles'**



bike," says Chandan. I ask him how different this is from one of those road trips nearly everybody and their neighbour seem to be taking these days. He smiles. If he is offended, he isn't showing it. "We're going on a holiday. And some people would ask 'why don't you guys take a plane?' But this expedition is to raise a million dollars and, whenever possible, donate it to the needy – then and there. No charities or NGOs. No operative or administrative costs. We will have an independent auditor to keep track."

How does it work? The team will have with them 'wish flags' of children whom they would interact with through their journey. "If possible, those wishes can be fulfilled with the donations already collected. If not, these wish flags will be put up online with the names and addresses of the kids, ensuring that what they need will reach them whenever it can." The team will also be working with the War Wounded Foundation – which, instead of donating money to those wounded in war, will use it to train them for employment. And the donations? "There already are some coming in with the 'Sponsor a Mile, Sponsor a Smile' movement," says Chandan. This involves donors sponsoring a mile for \$10.

Hmm. Highly optimistic and rather surreal. But you've got to accept it beats candlelight vigils and charity balls by several thousand miles. The trip, which will begin on April 17 in Sri Lanka, is

still a work in progress. What's more – dare I say – interesting is the man himself. I'm aware that Chandan has some world records under him, but all he says is about them is, "Yeah, there are some." Which is when the plot thickens.

Quick, which is the highest road? What, you think I digress? That's not the answer. Khardung La? Well, that's not entirely true. After some aimless chat with Chandan I discovered this guy went on a crazy quest to find more on Marsimik La, which the Indian Army claims to be 5,582 metres above sea level; about 220 metres higher than Khardung La's 5,359 metres. "Actually there still are some arguments on whether it's as motorable as Khardung La," he says. But Marsimik La, 5kms away from the Indo-Chinese border, exists. And it is at a higher altitude. And what Chandan and his company Out There Adventures has been doing is organise expeditions rather than just trips.

"Indians have three issues: not enough resources to travel, not enough leave, and not enough information." What makes OTA different is that it works on the information part. "Today there is a Wiki on Marsimik La and about 3000 hits on the place in Google. Six months back, there were two." It took about six months for his company to get the requisite permissions to explore the place and open the destination to adventurers.

Chandan is also planning a jet ski expedition from Gangasagar, West Bengal (where the river empties into the Bay of Bengal) and Hardwar (near the river's origin) on the eve of the Gangasagar Mela in January. Now why would any sane man do that? "Actually, I am counting on the rubbish in the river to get stuck in the jet ski's propeller. That would make people on the banks sit up and take notice."

Somehow, that's how the man comes across. You might think him a bit naïve; a bit too idealistic for his own good. But it still beats beauty contestants who claim onstage to pray for world peace and elimination of poverty. 