

50+ Women's Trans Himalayan Expedition concludes, sets new benchmark

New Delhi, August 03, 2022

11-member team covers 35 passes, 4,841 km in 140 days

A unique Expedition with participants aged 50 years and above from across India

Fit@50 + Women's Trans Himalayan expedition, organised by Tata Steel Adventure Foundation (TSAF) in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports under the Fit India banner, and the Indian Army, has successfully completed its 140 days of the expedition. Union Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports, Anurag Singh Thakur, felicitated the Expedition team at the iconic Major Dhyan Chand Stadium in the national capital on August 2, 2022.

Mentioning the elephantine expedition undertaken by the team, Anurag Singh Thakur, Union Minister for Information & Broadcasting and Youth Affairs & Sports, Government of India, said: "This is a big slogan in itself, being fit at 50. The expedition has been inspirational for not just the 50-year-olds in the country but also for everyone in India. What you all have done is remarkable by all means. This is the true power of nari-shakti."

Reiterating the Prime Minister of India's vision regarding Fit India, Anurag Singh Thakur mentioned: "Shri Narendra Modi ji envisioned the mantra of 'Fitness ki dose, adha ghanta Roz'. Now, we have done everything possible to live up to that vision. The challenges were steep, and the Indian Army too lent their helping hands in every step. Bachendri Pal's leadership was exceptional."

The 11-member team comprising women in their 50s and 60s culminated their journey at the Kargil War Memorial on July 24 to commemorate Kargil Vijay Diwas. At the memorial, the team paid homage to the war heroes who achieved martyrdom in the 1999 Kargil War. The expedition celebrates India's 75th Independence Day and is dedicated to the Central Government's 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' initiative.

This Fit@50+ team was led by the legendary Mountaineer, Padma Shree, Padma Bhushan Ms. Bachendri Pal, the first Indian woman to summit Everest in 1984. The team consisted of women from various backgrounds such as retired corporate professionals, retired army persons, housewives, retired locomotive drivers, grandmothers, and working women too. While the youngest member is 54 years old, the eldest member is aged 68 years. According to the pioneering leader Ms. Bachendri Pal, the aim of this expedition

was to highlight the need to remain fit and show that age is no barrier to living a healthy lifestyle and that 50 or 60 years of age doesn't mean dreams should be over.

On the occasion, Ms. Bachendri Pal, Leader of the Expedition and Mentor, TSAF, said: "It was a commitment. I was retiring from TSAF in 2019, the year Fit India was launched. I was inspired and motivated by the fit India movement started by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It was at this moment that the idea of activity for women in their 50s and 60s who are generally considered weak and unfit came to my mind. So, I dreamt about it and contacted 11 members of this expedition and then we approached the government and Army Adventure Wing and they supported this Expedition."

Chanakya Chaudhary, Chairman, Tata Steel Adventure Foundation and Vice President, Corporate Services, Tata Steel, said: "First of all I would like to congratulate the team on successfully completing the expedition despite numerous challenges. I am in awe of their courage, strength, determination, and indomitable spirit. The objective of this expedition was to raise awareness about health & fitness among senior citizens and to set an example, especially for women that it is possible to stay fit & healthy and to dream big irrespective of the age. I hope the expedition will inspire and motivate women of all age groups to include fitness activities in their daily lives to stay healthy. As for TSAF, we will continue to promote adventure sports in the country and inspire generations, through our unique propositioning and sustained endeavours." The Expedition was flagged off in Delhi on March 8, 2022, International Women's Day by Smt. Sujata Chaturvedi, Secretary, Department of Sports, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India; Chanakya Chaudhary, Chairman, TSAF and Vice President Corporate Services, Tata Steel; and Bachendri Pal, Expedition Leader & Mentor TSAF.

The expedition started from Pangsau Pass (Indo-Myanmar border) and concluded at Dras sector, Kargil in Ladakh, covering a distance of over 4,841 km and traversing 35 high mountain passes in 140 days from East to West of the Himalayas in India and Nepal. The passes crossed include the toughest Lamkhaga Pass at 17,700 ft height; the most challenging and the highest of the passes, Parang La pass at an astounding 18,300 ft; the Bhabha Pass at 16,000 ft, and the Thorang La Pass at 17,800 ft. Over 50 guest trekkers including 3-4 from outside India joined the expedition for a short duration of 7-10 days at different locations. Among them included a 75-year-old woman who successfully crossed the Lamkhaga Pass.

The team had to overcome extreme weather conditions, treacherous climbs,

and constrained resources every step of the way. Some of the routes in Eastern and Western Nepal were extremely remote and many times the team trekked for days on end between an altitude of 10,000-14,000 ft. While the longest day trekked was 13.5 hours at an altitude above 10,000 ft, the longest distance covered in a day at a high altitude of 12000 ft was 29 kms. The team also shared some memorable and unique experiences including staying at a graveyard, a Chicken farm, abandoned buildings, and old school verandas.

However, as the expedition progressed, each team member slowly started pushing their limits and began adjusting and adapting to the surroundings. Leader, Ms. Bachendri Pal's inspiring pep talks, vigilant eyes, and constant reminder of the final goal kept them charged.

Talking about the 5-month-long journey, Ms. Pal added: "Initially the team had their own share of physical, psychological, and mental limitations and apprehensions. But as the journey progressed the focus and goal of the expedition took the front seat. I strongly believe that the biggest risk in life is not taking risks. I am very happy that despite many uncertain conditions, challenging routes, and inclement weather conditions, the team managed to stretch the limits, and joined hands with me to realise and fulfil not only my dream but also their own potential".

The FIT@50+ Women's Trans Himalayan Expedition this year was supported by Tata Sports Club as the fitness partner, TraQ by Titan as the time partner, Vistara as the airline partner, and Tata AIG as the insurance partner. Adventure Worx is the Gear partner, Abaran Jewellers, Suprajit Foundation Atul Foundation, Patanjali & Adukale the ready-to-eat food partner.

The Team

The 11-member team comprises three women Everest Summiteers including **Bachendri Pal**, Leader (67-Jamshedpur-Jharkhand), **Chetna Sahoo** (54-Kolkata-West Bengal), **Savita Dhapwal** (52-Bhilai-Chhattisgarh), **Gangorti Soneji** (62-Baroda-Gujarat), **L Annapurna** (53-Jamshedpur-Jharkhand), **Payo Murmu** (53-Jamshedpur-Jharkhand), **Dr. Sushma Bissa** (55-Bikaner - Rajasthan), **Major Krishna Dubey** (59-Lucknow-UP), **Bimla Deoskar** (55-Nagpur-Maharashtra), **Vasumathi Srinivasan** (68-Bangalore -Karnataka) and **Shamala Padmanabhan** (64-Mysuru-Karnataka).

The support team includes Mohan Rawat (41) and Randev Singh (30) from Uttarakhand.

The Journey

The trek commenced on March 12, 2022, from Pangsu Pass at the Indo-Myanmar border. The team then passed through Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Sikkim, and West Bengal covering some important locations such as Hasimara, the silk route- Zuluk, Kupup, Nathang, and reached Nathulla pass. The team started again from Mani Bhangeyan to Tumling, Kalipokhri, and reached Sandakphu at 11, 998 ft.

From here the expedition moved to Nepal where the team travelled for 55 days. Starting from Eastern Nepal they covered Phalut, Chayangthapu, Mewakha, and Taplejung. The lesser explored Eastern part was an interesting and challenging one. The team trekked in areas such as Singri, Banjankharka, Khandbari, Jaubari and crossed Kulupodkho pass at 11,200 ft and moved to Junbesi in the Solukhumbu area.

Later the team embarked upon the Annapurna circuit in Central Nepal from Besisahar and moved to Manag district. The team after covering Chame, Upper Pisang, Manang, and Yak Kharka moved to Thorang Phedi. On May 16, 2022, from Thorang Phedi they reached Thorang la pass at 17, 769 ft successfully despite an inclement weather condition. They then descended to Muktinath in rain and snow.

After the completion of East and Central Nepal, the expedition moved to Western Nepal covering Beni, Darbang - Muna, Jaljala pass(11220ft) - Lower Jaljala pass, Chhyan Tung and entered the Dhorpatan area. Later, after completing Phaguni pass (12,900ft), the team continued the trek to Thakur Pelma, Dulhe, Phuphal, and Dunai. In the remote Western Nepal, they covered Tripura Kot, Balangchaur, Kaigaon, Chauri Kot, Chotra and a few passes between 10,000 -12,000 ft. The team reached India after traveling from Jumla to Mahindra Nagar via Surkhet by road. They were received by the Indian Army at Mahindra Nagar, India's border side. From here the team continued their journey in the Kumaon Garhwal area and covered Dhakuri pass, Badiyakot, Martoli, Himani, Kugina pass (9500 ft) and, Kauri Pass (12500 ft).

The expedition also covered Panwali Kanta pass, Guttu, Belak, and entered Harsil via Uttarkashi. The Expedition successfully completed the Lamkhaga pass (17,70ft), a technical and challenging one for the trekkers. In the Himachal area, they successfully crossed the Bhabha pass, moved to Kaza, Kibber, and successfully completed Parang la pass (18,300 ft), the highest pass of the expedition. They then traversed to Spiti Valley, entered Leh Ladakh, and moved to Kargil where the expedition concluded.

About TSAF

Founded by legendary mountaineer Ms Bachendri Pal, first Indian woman to climb Mt Everest on May 23, 1984, Tata Steel Adventure Foundation is an outbound leadership institute which through its wide range of activities aims at

developing able leaders for the future through identification of their limits of mental and physical endurance. It allows people from all walks of life and all ages to choose their own metaphor for self-discovery. TSAF programs combine learning from outdoors with organizational development to create an environment that helps teams undergo transformation. These training programs help individuals improve their potential, both professionally and personally. True to its philosophy of experimental learning, TSAF believes that no classroom is better than nature and no teacher is better than your own will. Apart from team building, learning & development programs, TSAF is helping develop Sport Climbing, a recent Olympic inductee, in India through training centres, residential academy and grassroots development centres. TSAF also does recreational activities in mountaineering & water sports which are open for all. Environment conservation, community development, health and fitness are other areas of focus in which TSAF is active.

About the Award

Tata Business Excellence Model (TBEM), adopted in Tata Group in 1995, is an assessment model in line with Malcolm Baldrige Model of USA. This is used to assess the Tata Group Companies. The process is managed by Tata Business Excellence Group. TBEM Assessment intends to improve the business performance of the Group Companies. Assessment is done on multiple dimensions of business requirements such as Leadership, Strategy, Customers, Measurement Analysis and Knowledge Management, Workforce, Operations, Safety and Business Results. A team of TBEM assessors constituting members from different Tata Group Companies assess in detail the above requirements and study the company's existing systems and processes. The companies are assessed against a score of 1000 and organisations exceeding 650 are recommended for JRDQV award.

About Tata Steel

Tata Steel group is among the top global steel companies with an annual crude steel capacity of 34 million tonnes per annum. It is one of the world's most geographically diversified steel producers, with operations and commercial presence across the world. The group recorded a consolidated turnover of US \$ 32.83 billion in the financial year ending March 31, 2022.

A Great Place to Work-Certified™ organisation, Tata Steel Limited, together with its subsidiaries, associates, and joint ventures, is spread across five continents with an employee base of over 65,000. Tata Steel has been a part of the DJSI Emerging Markets Index since 2012 and has been consistently ranked amongst top 10 steel

companies in the DJSI Corporate Sustainability Assessment since 2016. Besides being a member of ResponsibleSteel™, worldsteel's Climate Action Programme and World Economic Forum's Global Parity Alliance, Tata Steel has won several awards and recognitions including the World Economic Forum's Global Lighthouse recognition for its Jamshedpur, Kalinganagar and IJmuiden Plants, and Prime Minister's Trophy for the best performing integrated steel plant for 2016-17. The Company, ranked as India's most valuable Metals & Mining brand by Brand Finance, featured amongst CII Top 25 innovative Indian Companies in 2021 and top 10 sustainable organisations of India Hurun Research Institute in the 2021 Capri Global Capital Hurun India Impact 50, received Steel Sustainability Champion recognition from worldsteel for five years in a row, 'Most Ethical Company' award 2021 from Ethisphere Institute, RIMS India ERM Award of Distinction 2021, Masters of Risk - Metals & Mining Sector recognition at The India Risk Management Awards for the sixth consecutive year, and Award for Excellence in Financial Reporting FY20 from ICAI, among several others.

Link: <https://www.tatasteel.com/newsroom/press-releases/india/2022/fit-50plus-women-s-trans-himalayan-expedition-concludes-sets-new-benchmark/>