



■ The cross-country rally will be held from October 6-14.

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# Raid de Himalaya to have new route

## HT Correspondent

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**NEW DELHI:** The Raid de Himalaya will have a new route and will be without a title sponsor for the 20th edition of the country's premier cross-country rally, to be held from October 6-14. The off-road motorsports rally will start and end in Leh and will not hold any of its stages in Himachal Pradesh, as has been the tradition. Organisers said the decision was taken much before the torrential rain which resulted in floods in the hill state earlier this week.

"Our route this year starts and ends in Leh. This year's route was never designed for Himachal. All our stages are between Leh and Kargil districts. We will be approaching Leh through Srinagar where the effect of the storm was much less," Himalayan Motorsport Association (HMA) president Vijay Parmar said over the phone from Shimla.

The iconic rally will not have any title sponsor after HMA and Maruti Suzuki ended their almost 20-year association.

"We don't have sponsorship for this year. For the last so many years, they (Maruti) have con-

stantly been pressurising us to adjust results and finally we said we cannot. This year HMA is sponsoring its own Raid de Himalaya. We have had to go as far as to decline Maruti an entry into the event though they wanted to," said Parmar.

"We informed them initially that they should sign up. However, September 15 was the last day and there was no word from them that they want to come and suddenly on September 16 there was a barrage of phone calls asking 'why haven't you entered our team'. I said because you haven't applied. Rules are rules."

Maruti Suzuki were the title sponsors of the Raid since 2001 and for the first time they won't have a team in the rally. "They have been solidly behind us for 17 years," added Parmar.

This year there are 125 entries across all categories and a new Moto Adventure class (bikes) has been introduced. A total of 31 teams for Xtreme cars and trucks, 37 for Xtreme motorcycles and quads, 12 bikers in the Alpine two-wheeler category, and 31 teams in Adventure Trail, which follows the Time-Speed-Distance format, will take part.