

Challenges await rallyists in Ladakh, Zanskar

SHIMLA, OCTOBER 7

The 20th edition of the Raid De Himalaya will see a fair number of competitors travelling from different parts of the world to battle with the best in India.

Sri Lanka's Shafraz Junaid, Britain's Suzanne Bull, Nepal's Deepak Sah and our own London-based Amitrajit Ghosh will lead the charge of the foreigners this year.

The Raid will begin in Leh from Monday, traversing through some of the highest motorable roads in Ladakh, Zanskar and Kargil, before finishing on October 14. Sri Lanka's Shafraz Junaid, along with Akhry Ameer, has transported his Nissan pick-up truck and is eagerly looking forward to make his presence felt in the Raid.

Interestingly, Shafraz and Ameer are fulfilling the dream of Shafraz's father Faizal Junaid, who used to be the navigator for Sri Lanka's celebrated rallyist Cassim Wahab. For years, Junaid Senior and Cassim

RAID DE HAMALAYA BEGINS TODAY

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had dreamt of competing in the Himalayan rally, which ran from 1981 to 1990. Junaid Junior is now out to achieve his dad's dream.

Shafraz and Ameer have been in Leh for more than a week now, getting used to high-altitude rallying.

"I started rallying more than two decades ago, and Ameer has been my navigator for long. My dad's dream of rallying in the Himalayas always stayed with me. Last year too, we tried hard to come for Raid De Himalaya but could not make it. We are elated to be here this year," Shafraz said.

Last year, the duo were placed 2nd runners-up in

the Coffee Day Rally of Chikmagalur, which was part of the Asia Pacific Rally Championship.

"Coming for the Raid has been a challenge for individual entrants. We have stretched our budgets to just get here. Our target is simply one thing - finish the Raid," Ameer declared.

In another first for the Raid, an Indian with international rallying honours will be racing here. Amitrajit Ghosh, an established name in Indian rallying circles, moved to England five years ago to pursue motorsport internationally.

Ghosh is the only Indian with a podium in a British Rally Championship round and a win in a European Rally Championship Round (Greece). He was also among the top five at the Latvian Rally Championship. Ghosh is driving for Team Mahindra at the Raid.

Raid De Himalaya is the flagship event of the country's premier motorsport club, Shimla-based Himalayan Motorsport. — PTI

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