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raid de himalaya

Saikia moves closer to title on Day 3

AGE CORRESPONDENT

Arindam Saikia of Team Polaris was within striking distance of the 20th Raid de Himalaya crown, building up a substantial 15-minute lead by the end of Day 3 here on Friday.

Captain A.V.S. Gill, driving a Grand Vitara, was valiantly chasing the leader but he literally has a mountain to climb as the Raid veered towards an exciting finish. Himashu Arora of Harjee Rallying was right on Gill's tail though, just 53 seconds behind him.

The third day of the iconic rally featured its longest stage, sailing past snow-covered tracks. The competitors started from Sankoo in Kargil valley and raced towards Umba La, a mountain pass at an elevation of 4,496 meters.

"Over the last 20 years, we have cancelled many competitive stages due to heavy snowfall. In fact, a couple of times the entire Raid was called off," Vijay



Parmar, president of Himalayan Motorsports, the organisers, said.

"Today too, it snowed heavily. But we discovered that we could still run the stage. We couldn't complete it but we managed 30 out of the 54 kilometres that were scheduled. The rallyists had to contend with -11 degrees temperatures," Parmar added.

Giving first-hand account of the day, Parmar said that Arindam Saikia was in his elements.

"His Polaris ran flawlessly over the snow, allowing him to dominate the day," Parmar said. "He has a huge lead now and if his car holds on and he can hang on to the lead he is sure win the 2018 Raid," he added.

Team Mahindra had another bad day though, with both Amitrajit Ghosh and Phillipos Matthai losing valuable time due to punctures. The duo were in the lead after Day 1 but since then luck has not been on their side, all but pushing them out of contention.

In the Xtreme Moto category, R Nataraj of Team TVS continues to lead, ahead by 13.05 minutes over team mate Imran Pasha. SD Vishwas too held on to his overnight third position, another 9.15 minutes behind.

"Nataraj has been a class apart in this Raid. His control over the bike on ice, snow and dirt tracks has been impeccable," Parmar explained.

Meanwhile, Abrar bin Ayub of Kashmir has won the Alpine category, finishing the competition with a slender lead of 4.49 minutes over his closest competitor. Ayub was riding a Hero Impulse. Syed Asif Ali of Team TVS, driving an N-Torq scooter, took the second place.