



Words &amp; Pics | Basil Sylvester Pinto

## Force Gurkha RFC India 2014 kick-starts with aplomb

The excitement was palpable and the adrenalin was pumping among off-roaders and motor race enthusiasts alike, who came to witness the opening day of Force Gurkha RFC India 2014. Rainforest Challenge (RFC), which is among the World's top ten toughest and the most internationally represented motor races, began its India Chapter with a press conference on August 8 at the International Centre Goa, Dona Paula. The event which took place in the State from 8-14 August was arguably the biggest congregation of off-road enthusiasts in India.

Following the press-conference, this writer went around the venue to embrace the spirit of off-road motor

sport adventure. He was witness to a dazzling display of 4x4 modified vehicles as participants were getting ready for the first international off-road motorsport event of India.

*This roving adventurer brings to you two exclusive chats with the brains behind the recently concluded first edition of Force Gurkha RFC India 2014 held in the State. Read on to know more....*

Mr. Ashish Gupta, Founder and Director, Cougar Motorsport Pvt. Ltd., who had been a part of the Malaysia edition of RFC last year, and after his interaction with the brainchild of the event, realized the event recently in the country in our own beautiful State.

Held across six-days, the other side of Goa was explored by enthusiastic off-roaders, both experienced and new hitting the toughest off-road motorsport event of the country like a landslide.

In a free-wheeling interaction with our writer, Mr. Gupta had this to say.

The mother event of Rain Forest Challenge in Malaysia started 17 years ago and since it has been held in different provinces of the country. There is a lot of international participation frequenting the event, known among the top 10 of motor-cross events of the world. An iconic event for off-roaders, Rain Forest Challenge attracts participants from countries like Russia, China, Belgium and South Korea.

There are additional modifications done to the vehicles to improve the vehicles to ensure more competitiveness. It is not only about the vehicles and obstacles, but the toughness comes from overall endurance. In the course of the whole week, the participants not only have to overcome the obstacles but also be prepared for eventualities of repairing their own vehicles and also ready to cook their own meals and camp out.

Talking further, on what the off-roaders could expect, he had to say that given the terrain and weather, there would be mud, slush, water-crossings, climbing through rocky areas and descending steep hills for the exception of driving over sand.

With 25 registered teams, there were 32 others in the touring adventurers category (not in competition). Initially targeting three foreign entries with their vehicles, he says due to logistics they were unable to participate. But on the brighter side, he revealed that they were fortunate to have celebrity participants with them. "Two of the drivers driving for Force Gurkha are past global champions at RFC and as such, in terms of experience and expertise we have the best with us," proudly stated Gupta.

With a buzz of activity at the venue with the off-riders gearing up to the sterner challenges ahead, the Founder and Director, Cougar Motorsport Pvt. Ltd., talking about his expectations says he wants the 4x4 community in India to endorse the event. "I wish the level of completion in India, in time goes up to that in Malaysia in terms of car preparation and skills. I want our countrymen to show the world we



Mr. Ashish Gupta



are as good as the drivers hailing from countries like Russia, Belgium and China," he stated.

**Mr. Luis J A Wee, Founder and Creator of the Rainforest Challenge,**

I found busy interacting a while later with the media and thereon giving the feel-good vibes to a couple of adrenalin-pumped adventurers who had come all the way from Mumbai to be a slice of the historic event. Taking my opportunity to talk to him, I sat him down at a shaded area to get to know what makes the event a much-anticipated event for off-roaders the world over.

On bringing RFC to India, he thanks Ashish of Cougar Motorsport Pvt. Ltd., who he says that after having

been at the Malaysia edition last year and liking the event so very much that he got talking to him to bring it to India. And to this effect, Mr. Wee was brought to Delhi earlier this year, in February, and the RFC – India Chapter was launched to learn and prepare techniques of 4x4.

To a question put forth, he enthusiastically responds that the response has been tremendous, but it could have been better. He divulges that some have come to see the event from as far as Mumbai but their cars were not prepared to take on the challenge.

On the intensity of the completion, he revealed that as it is a new concept in India, they would go step-



by-step. "We cannot impose the full force. The tracks would be challenging with the monsoons on and the participants will learn what they can do and what they cannot in course of the competition. The

priority is to compete in the event," he pointed out.

To the off-roaders, he says that they should first come and see for themselves as the event will uplift their character and passion for 4x4 & for those already here, congratulations to them for being first group in India to rise with 4x4.

To the readers, he appeals with them that they try and understand that 4x4 off-roading is good for the mind, body and soul. "It is a challenge against the odds. One learns to appreciate things that they have and not take anything for granted anymore," he concludes.

## Malaysia's Tang Eng Joo lifts the Force Gurkha RFC India 2014 trophy



Words | Goenkar News Desk

The Rain Gods were kind, the challenge was completed and the trophy was lifted. The first edition of the Force Gurkha RFC India has come to an end and Malaysia's Tang Eng Joo, with co-driver Tan Choon Hong, has been announced as the first ever Force Gurkha RFC India champion. They were closely followed by another Malaysian Mervyn Lim (co-driver Hamizan Bin Abdul Hamid). Both teams represented Force Motors and have consistently performed well throughout the event, leading from the beginning.

The six-day event culminated in a glitzy awards night held at the International Centre Goa (ICG), Dona Paula. The dignitaries present on the occasion included Mr. Luis J A Wee (Founder & Creator, the Rainforest Challenge), Mr. Baharudin Jali (General Manager, Negeri Sembilan Tourism Board, Malaysia), Mr. Ashish Gupta (Founder & Director, Cougar Motorsport Pvt. Ltd.) and Mr. Prasan Firodia (Managing Director, Force Motors Ltd.).

The Indian teams put up a tough fight too. There was a commendable

performance by Kabir Waraich and Gagan Sachdeva of Gerrari Offroaders Chandigarh who came in third place after fighting their way to the top. The team escalated to the third rank in the Predator Stage and managed to hold their ground then on after not figuring in the top rankings at all initially. Staying true to the motto of their club that 'I am going to do it', sheer determination and will power helped the duo secure the rank. Being the topmost Indian team at the event, these young offroaders will get an automatic free entry into the Rainforest Challenge Malaysia 2014 that will be held in November.

The event was divided into four stages – the Prologue, the Predator, the Terminator and the Twilight Zone. The course was designed in such a manner that the level of difficulty increased as the challenge progressed with each Special Stage testing the driving and recovery skills

of the participants under extreme offroad conditions

Some other key awards were also announced at the awards night including the Lifetime Achievement Award which was given to veteran off-roader from Kolkata, Mr. Uday Bhan Singh. The award for Most Unique 4X4 went to Hydross Niaz and Savant Satyanarayanan from Kerala for their Willys FC 170 while the Team Spirit Award was given to Delhi's Bijender Singh and Jitender Singh. Uday Mahatme and Rohit KR from Goa and Bangalore respectively were felicitated with the Jungleman Award while the brave ladies from Bangalore, Smitha Prasad and Sapna Gurukar, who were the only women competitors in the event, were given the Ladies Team Award. The Environment Award went to Guhan Shetty and Ayub Khan from Tamil Nadu for making the maximum possible effort to preserve the beautiful flora and fauna of Goa.