

### Foursome on two wheels

*Indrajeet Sen, a 17-year-old student of Calcutta International School, set off for the All India Ride for Peace and Unity with Chandan Lahiri, Joy Raja and Solomon Jacob, bike enthusiasts from across the country. The under-age Indrajeet — also the youngest in the recently-held expedition — was the official photographer. Here are a few snapshots from the journey:*

Three 'Bullets', 12,000 km, 30 days. That was the task taken up by four adventurers, who had come together from across the country. The ride — an effort to raise funds for the victims of communal riots in Gujarat — started from Delhi. Leaving Chandan's Chittaranjan Park flat, we loaded up and the four of us set out on three bikes, for the flag-off. The two-lane highway was smooth, and we reached Chandigarh, our first stop, with no trouble. In Solan, we stopped to pick up a stock of meat pickle — enough to last a few days. Then, the Ghats were upon us and Solomon, our most experienced rider, was full of tips on how to manage the slopes. But a shortage of fuel forced us to head back for Solan and halt for the night. The next morning, we decided to head straight for Dehra Dun, skipping Simla. The roads were smooth, the scenery breath-taking. There were just a handful of towns on the way, where people would wave us through. The lunch stop meant stuffed *parathas* and *anda-bhujia*, hot *chai* and photographs. Soon we also had to stop as the brakes on one of the bikes were giving trouble. We were riding non-stop on the twists and turns of the Ghats, but at sundown, we were still quite far from Dehra Dun. Then, my synthetic muffler got stuck in the back wheel, melting partially in the heat and getting jammed. We had to park and painstakingly remove the bits in the dark. By the time we reached our night halt, it was 2 am. We took our vehicles to the Royal Enfield workshop at Dehra Dun, where we were told that it would take the rest of the day to complete repairs. By 7 pm, the bikes were ready for the road. We set out, deciding to cover as much ground as possible. By midnight, having travelled around 150 km, we spotted a *dhaba* where we had dinner, and stayed the night at the *dharamshala* next door. At daybreak, we set out for Lucknow. It proved to be an easy and safe route, and we reached our next stop by 7 pm. We touched base at the Action Aid office, supporters for the trip. The next day was to be our first day of fund-raising. Though some were hostile to our cause, most at the Hazrat Ganj market were curious and some even contributed. The next day, we were back on the highway, headed for Patna. This stretch had some off-road riding in store for us. We were behind schedule, due to the repair stops, so we just stayed the night at Patna, leaving for Ranchi the next morning. A splash of cold water woke me up the next morning, with Solomon deciding to take the last resort in the difficult task of getting me out of bed. The road was bad, as was the light, but we got some work in when we had to stop at a railway crossing. We gave out pamphlets, generating some excitement. We were warned not to ride at night, so we found hot food and *khatiyas* at a *dhaba*. The safety factor while

travelling through Bihar was something we had been warned about. So we slept in shifts, though as the youngest of the group, I was instructed to get as much shut-eye as possible. At 5 am, there was still a fair amount of fog, but we had a deadline to meet. Joy's bike was giving trouble again, so he and Solomon had to stay back to get it fixed, while Chandan and I rode ahead to make it in time for a press conference at Ranchi. The others finally joined us in the evening, and we decided to get some rest and leave for Calcutta at 2 am. But a flat tyre held us up on the road again. By the time we hit BT Road, it was afternoon. We were cruising along, till the road suddenly narrowed to a single lane, where other drivers were merrily taking the wrong side! With my 'A' Level exams coming up, I could not continue with the group beyond this. So I headed back to Salt Lake, as the rest of the gang headed for Bhubaneswar, an official photographer short. But it had been quite a ride, under the shelter of the sky.