

braveheart

Journey to hell & back

 While Mt. Everest is known for its fierce weather conditions, Cape Horn is the dreaded destination among sailors. But not for Lt. Commander Abhilash Tony. He created history by taking an unassisted circumnavigating across the globe in 150 days Abhilash hoisted the flag at Cape Horn with the country's Republic Day this year, "My parents got married on this day. This gave me enough reasons to hoist the flag on this day."

Cape Horn, situated at the southern-most tip of South America is known for its gusty winds, violent currents and rocky shores. Abhilash elaborates, "The temperature average temperature is around 4 degree Celsius. If you stay out for too long, your hands would be frozen. It was an extremely proud moment for me. The sight of watching the flag flying high amidst the dull, grey skies...that surely made me proud. I was rendered speechless."

The journey, which began on November 1, 2012 was planned for eight months, but the voyage was completed in five months.

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Twenty-year-old Saket Mani is trying to bring about a change in society by getting the youth involved and raising a voice

JULIE SAM

THE ASIAN AGE

 At a first glance, Saket Mani may come across as a nonchalant 20-year-old. But what sets him apart from his peers is his drive to bring about a change in society. A student at the Sinhgad Institute of Technology, Lonavala, Saket is the youth ambassador for the U.N.'s Millennium Campaign and youth representative to the U.N. and its agencies.

It was from the age of 14 that Saket imbibed the curiosity to learn about global issues. mind to learn about new things. The Internet helped him understand pressing global issues and aspects that shape the world as it is today. His first attempt turned successful when he began to promote his views through the United Nations Millennium Campaign. He decided to participate on a platform to raise the issues of women empowerment, education and youth sustainability. "The youth have a voice and they want to be heard. They know how they want to shape up their future, their world," he says.

The year 2009 was an important year for Saket. Soon he found himself blogging for Unicef about youth empowerment. Taking It Global, an online forum that lets the youth connect on matters that affect them, was another platform where he discussed his concerns. "Contrary to what people assume, the youth is bothered about bringing about a change. It may be a minuscule figure, but we definitely are concerned. The bodies support independent voices of the youth and that's what makes them different."

The organisation recognized Saket's input and work for the youth and proposed him to participate at the special session of United Nations General Assembly. In January 2013, Saket became the youngest Indian ever to have addressed the special session of United

'Silent heroes work hard'



(top) Saket Mani giving a speech at the United Nations General Assembly; (left) Saket with Malala Yousafzai

spoke at a U.N. conference. He participated at the United Nations Biodiversity Conference in October last year.

If all this wasn't enough, Saket has been working at the grassroot level through NGOs and has visiting villages to educate them about education, AIDS and against child abuse. "One can be apolitical and do good for the society. I find it funny that celebrities and sportspersons are taken as youth icons, whereas the real youth icons are the silent heroes who work hard to create a change without making a noise." Saket feels that the government does little to enthuse the youth, and a little help from them goes a long way. Neither do corporate houses help him since in his words, "they think I'm going abroad for a fun trip, which it definitely isn't." For a guy of his age, he surely has come a long way.

Nations General Assembly. Here, he spoke about the status of migration for children and youth and submitted recommendations on the same. "Children who are separated from their parents due to illegal immigration face a lot of mental trauma. It would help if this was focused on as one of the major issues." This wasn't the first time that Saket

in focus

Winds of change that are making a way



Arti Verma receiving the award; (far right) Sapna Chauhan with villagers during a campaign

SANA YASEEN

THE ASIAN AGE

 Fifteen girls from across the country, who were recently awarded the DLF Pramerica Spirit of Community Awards, a school-level recognition programme for volunteer community service, have not just conquered their fear but won the battle for others also.

One of the award recipients, Rekha Meena, 14 years old, who won the bronze medal, fought against eve-teasing, which was one of the most deep-rooted reasons for girls from her community to drop out of school. "There were instances when I thought of discontinuing my education but then my teachers at Satya Bharti School encouraged me and convinced my parents to fight against eve-teasing," says Rekha,



pray inside the temple. It started with a festival when Arti saw her childhood friend Babita with her mother witnessing puja from outside the temple. Arti felt really bad and pulled Babita and her mother inside the temple. "Thereafter, I started gathering people to educate them against the evil called untouchability. Slowly mindsets of the people started changing and they appreciated my efforts," says Arti.

Twelve-year-old Sapna Chauhan believes change begins at home. "Child marriage ruins many young girls' lives and when I saw my friend, who wanted to study further, being forced into a child marriage I decided to stand up against it," adds Sapna, who prepared a play to create awareness about high fertility and unwanted pregnancies among adolescent brides.