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Press Release

Australian Ultra-marathoner begins run across India for charity

Thiruvananthapuram, Jan 27: Record-setting Australian endurance runner and former parliamentarian Pat Farmer on Tuesday began his run traversing the length of India – from Kanyakumari to Kashmir – with the primary goal to raise funds for the education of girls.

The run also aims to cement relations between India and Australia; encourage tourism and personal relationships with a view to create awareness of India as a tourism destination and showcase it as a positive country in Australia.

Farmer, 53, was given a rousing reception on the border between Tamil Nadu and Kerala at the township of Kaliakkavilai. Tourism Department officials and Arjuna awardee Smt. Omana Kumari were present. Despite having covered over 50 km in wilting heat, Farmer enjoyed a spirited interaction with curious locals and students from Institute of Hotel Management and Catering Technology Kovalam.

Farmer will travel a distance of 4,600 km from India's southernmost point to Srinagar over a period of 60 days, covering an average of 76 km a day – or roughly equivalent in length to two marathons –across some 10 states.

The first leg of the 'Spirit of India Run' will see Farmer journey through Kerala –as a guest of the state Tourism Department – from Poovar on up through Kochi and Kasargod before crossing over into Karwar in Karnataka. He will then hug the western coastline upwards into Goa, Maharashtra, Gujarat and beyond.

A Kerala Tourism branded vehicle and a liaison officer are accompanying the run. The Tourism Department has already accounted for the run's logistics in the state, including accommodations for the crew at each halt.

Farmer expects to cross the finish line in Srinagar on March 30, following which he is slated to fly to Delhi for a reception in his honour. A number of similar gatherings are planned at the various halts on his route to maintain the run's momentum and message. Kerala Tourism and India Tourism have jointly arranged 'India Evening' functions in Farmer's honour at Varkala on January 27, Kochi on January 29 and a send-off on February 4, at Kasaragod

"I feel very privileged to be here in this beautiful state. I love the palm trees, I love the fact that it's close to the ocean because my home in Sydney is close to the ocean as well," Farmer said. "I look forward to showcasing the best that India has to offer."



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Stopovers will also entail visits to schools and other educational institutions to impart such lessons as the importance of universal education and health. Two government girls' schools at Attingal and Tirur will host interactions between Farmer and girl students.

"It's important that people especially young people are inspired and come to understand that problems can be tackled by ordinary people putting one foot in front of the other," Farmer said.

The nine locations to be covered in Kerala are Poovar, Varkala, Harippad, Kochi, Guruvayoor, Feroke, Vadakara, Payyanur and Kasaragod.

"It's a long way. Every day, it's big mileage and it will be tough – especially over the first week to get acclimatised to the heat and humidity," Farmer said. "But I don't want it easy. This is not an Australian journey. It's about the spirit of India."

"My driving force, what keeps me going, is being able to make a difference. I care about supporting people, about helping people," he added.

Even among the myriad athletic feats undertaken for worthy causes today, Farmer's endeavours over a two-decade -long running career have taken things several steps further. Literally.

He has completed ultra-marathons in the Middle East – a 20-day campaign spreading the message of peace over a 1,500 km stretch from Lebanon to Jerusalem, and Vietnam. He also holds the record for the longest continuous land run around Australia.

But he is perhaps best known for his astonishing year-long 20,000 km slog in across 14 countries between the Earth's two poles in 2011. Some five years later, he will keep a similar pace – though Farmer clocked well over two marathon-lengths daily across North, Central and South Americas during the 'Pole to Pole Run' – in India.

His runs have also gone the distance in terms of raising funds for their intended charities: the five-stage polar crossing (described as "The Greatest Run in History") raised \$100 million for the International Red Cross in aid of the organisation's relief programmes in the developing world. Farmer has also netted millions for causes back home, like Lifeline, Cancer Council, Australian Red Cross and Diabetes Australia.

More significantly perhaps they have also facilitated dialogue on pressing issues. The Middle East run, for instance, saw individuals across national, racial and religious divides come together to spread the message of peace.

The two-month -long run hopes to do much the same to show that "Education of the Girl Child" can be achieved by taking it "one step at a time".



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Farmer hopes to raise 100,000 AUD (about Rs 48 lakh) through the run. "It costs about 50 AUD (about Rs 2,400) to educate a girl for a year," Farmer said. "The message is getting across. I'm confident we'll get there."

Besides the financial contribution, Farmer hopes his efforts will help promote bilateral ties between India and Australia. The run already enjoys strong support from the Ministry of External Affairs, the Ministry of Tourism, a number of state governments and the various Australian High Commissions in India.

To this end, embarking on the 'Spirit of India Run' on January 26 is particularly symbolic since the date holds meaning to both countries: commemorating the formation of the Indian Republic and the founding of Australia, or Australia Day.

"To me, it's meaningful to start at Kanyakumari, where the three seas meet, and work up to the mountains from the sea – that speaks to the human spirit," Farmer said. "It's also practical since Kerala feels a bit more like home, whereas the mountains will be cold."

Farmer's journey, the vistas he enjoys and the places he visits will be captured and catalogued – the route holds some 300 sites deemed of cultural significance – for audiences back home by a crew from Australian television network Channel 9. Also shadowing him throughout the run will be Farmer's run crew, including his trainer and physiotherapist.

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