

# Saikia builds substantial lead in Raid De Himalaya



R Nataraj is in the lead in the Xtreme Moto category after Day 3 on Friday.

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Arindam Saikia of Team Polaris seemed to be within striking distance of the 20th Raid De Himalaya crown as he built up a substantial 15-minute lead by the end of day three of the motor racing event marked by heavy snowfall and freezing temperatures.

Captain AVS Gill, driving a Grand Vitara, was valiantly chasing Saikia while Himashu Arora of Harjee Rallying was right on Gill's tail, though trailing by a 53 seconds.

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 one but since then luck has not been on their side, all but pushing them out of contention.

"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", said Vijay Parmar, President of Himalayan Motorsports, the organizers. "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 kms that were scheduled. The rallyists had to contend with -11 degrees temperatures," Parmar added.

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 Umha La, a mountain pass at an elevation of 4,496 m.

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.

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.