

Agni man on way to glacier's icy heights

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TILL a few weeks ago, Dr Kartikeyan was engrossed in the development and trial of India's strategic delivery — the Agni series of missiles. Now, more than a thousand kilometers away from the Hyderabad missile complex, he is more interested in maintaining his blood oxygen levels and learning the tricks of surviving extreme temperatures at high altitudes.

The only DRDO representative taking part in the 30-member civilian expedition to Siachen, Kartikeyan is set to become the first missile scientist to walk up the icy heights of the glacier.

Other than, of course, former president APJ Kalam, who set foot on the glacier several times but never actually trekked up.

The nonchalant scientist, who has a PhD degree in Missile battery technologies, was one of the first to put in his name for the two slots reserved for DRDO in the Siachen trek this year.

The motivation being to see the working conditions of soldiers for whom he designs missile systems.

"As soon as I saw the notice for the trek, I knew I had to go," Kartikeyan says.

A part of the secretive Advanced Systems Laboratory (ASL), the scientist doesn't want to talk much about his work — other than that he works with the Agni team — but opens up when asked about his background in moun-



ROAD TO SIACHEN

DAY 4



DRDO scientist Kartikeyan. Right: A view of Leh-Srinagar Highway. Praveen Khanna

taineering and the reason for his selection for the trek.

"I have never taken part in a mountaineering expedition before. But I am a regular table tennis player and assumed that I would be fit enough for the expedition," Kartikeyan, who represents DRDO in table tennis tournaments, says.

The only thing that scares him, and most members of the expedition, is the daily morning medical checkup or the "elimination round" as some members call it.

The scientist seems fit - his blood oxygen levels and blood pressure is more or less normal - but another member has not been so



lucky. The first elimination, called by some as "Big Boss ke ghar se pehle bahar", took place on Saturday.

A senior member of the expedition, 51-year-old J S Dhaliwal from the MoD ceremonial department, will have to go back home after

his pulse rate and blood pressure just refused to go below the danger level.

On a lighter note, signs of altitude sickness are reducing but stray incidents still come to light. A media person on the trek has suddenly got a new disease — hysteri-

cal laughing. Even a mundane observation like "Look, the trees are green" sends her in splits, much to the amusement of other members. Doctors say these symptoms would go away once the cold Siachen breeze shivers her bones.

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