

PRESS RELEASE OF SOMEN DEBNATH, INDIAN GLOBETROTTER ON BICYCLE WITH A MISSION ON 191 COUNTRIES IN 7 CONTINENTS

PROFILE OF MR. SOMEN DEBNATH, INDIAN NATIONAL ON WORLD BICYCLE TOUR 2004 - 2023, 19 YEARS 7 MONTHS ON THE ROAD

SOMEN DEBNATH, INDIA

THE WORLD BIKING ODYSSEY 191 COUNTRIES IN 7 CONTINENTS

COVID-19 CHANGED THE PLAN LITTLE DELEY

Around the world on a bicycle tour 191 countries travel after completing his journey, total distance of 200,000 kilometers on mother earth, an odyssey all the way from India to India.

Mr. Somen Debnath, an Indian national, travelled his journey on a bicycle around the world. His mission was titled "Around the World on Bicycle Tour for HIV / AIDS Awareness and Seminars on Indian Culture". The dream began on May 27, 2004, shortly after acquiring his Bachelor of Science degree in Zoology at the University of Kolkata, India. He has also obtained the 'Visarad' degree in Fine Arts at the University of Sarbabhartiya, Kolkata, India. So far, he has traveled by bicycle through 191 countries and back to Kolkata, India on 10th December 2023. And completed his journey his home town Basanti, Sundarbans 16th December 2023. Total distance of 200,000 kilometers on the globe, an odyssey all the way from India.

His journey details are below:

Journey completed:

- 🇮🇳 2004-2007: 28 States and five Union Territories of India.**
- 🇮🇳 2007-2009: All countries in Asia except North Korea.**
- 🇪🇺 2009-2012: 48 countries in Europe, and Greenland.**
- 🌍 2012-2015: 52 countries in Africa and 8 countries in the Middle East.**
- 🌐 2015-2020: 35 Countries South & North America and Antarctica. Antarctic / Southern Ocean to the Arctic Circle/ Arctic Ocean Total: 174 Countries**
- 🇳🇿 2020-2021: Covid Affected in China and lockdown in New Zealand.**
- 🌏 2022 – 2023: 13 Countries Australia and Oceania (Polynesia & Melanesia), to Southeast Asia to India**

Ongoing travel to 15 countries. Brunei is the 186th country and 5 countries to go.

Inspiration: Debnath's mission was inspired at the young age of 14 when he read an article entitled "AIDS is more deadly than cancer". The person referred to in the said article was homeless and was sitting in front of a prominent medical college in Kolkata, abandoned by its inhabitants and left to die alone. The article had a great impact on him, so he began to ask his teachers at school about HIV / AIDS. Unfortunately, no one could provide a satisfactory answer as to why this individual went through such tribulation. As a result, two years later, Somen got special training from the WBSACS (Society of West Bengal State AIDS Control) and started an awareness campaign on HIV/AIDS and education from his own school. The AIDS related stigma and lack of awareness about this deadly but preventable disease motivated him even more. Somen's first mission was to provide awareness in his motherland India, and subsequently extend his campaign to a global front and audience.

Through the lens of his eyes, Somen has gone through a myriad of experiences, difficulties, trials and tribulations. However, through the strength of the human spirit of one and others, the peace mission has persevered to a global belief and understanding that has proliferated through one and all and is continuing to grow.

One such incident among many was when he was captured by the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2007 for 24 days. He was released due to the strength of his resolve, and message of peace and non-violence.

- Times of India:

https://m.timesofindia.com/videos/in-depth/meet-the-globe-trotting-indian-activist-who-oncecooked-for-the-taliban-to-escape-death/amp_videoshow/96322278.cms

- UK Guardian Newspaper:

<https://amp.theguardian.com/travel/2009/oct/14/afghanistan-taliban>

- Taliban captive won his release by cooking curry – Telegraph

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/howaboutthat/6510505/Taliban-captive-won-hisrelease-by-cooking-curry.html>

- Somen Debnath in Saudi Arabia Indian cyclist's world tour enters Saudi Arabia as 170th country-
Telangana Today

Below are a few links from Somen's library and experiences, where his outreach and adventures have been received by many local and global media outlets.

- Passing Through in Sahara - Somen Debnath video watch:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=38hEbHkTSHU>

- SBS Australia, Melbourne:

- Bicycle sans borders: Globetrotting Indian cyclist makes Australia his 180th destination | SBS Hindi

- Somen Debnath in Better India 1 Bicycle, 12 Years, 126 Countries: This Man Is Spreading HIV Awareness! (thebetterindia.com)

- Somen Debnath in USA

GLOBETROTTING HUMANIST: Indian cyclist, AIDS activist on 17-year journey reaches Southeast Idaho | Local | idahostatejournal.com

Strategy: To educate people from different parts of society by raising awareness among students in schools, colleges, universities, and also encourage these institutions to begin a chapter on the sensitization program on HIV / AIDS, promote the use of needles and syringes among people addicted to drugs and condoms for sex workers. It also aims to create awareness among youth and encourage non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in countries around the world.

Objective: He is in the world tour of 191 countries and plans to achieve this goal to complete his journey in 2020. Because of Covid-19 he needed to continue this journey till 2023. Through his bicycle tour around the world, he is trying to raise awareness on HIV / AIDS through conferences and seminars on Indian culture. Its focus is on poor people in urban / rural and tribal areas throughout the world as they have the lowest level of awareness on this deadly disease.

Short-term objective: Students, young people and communities that benefit from awareness programs will run in the societies of their respected countries.

Long-term goal: To raise global awareness on HIV / AIDS and Indian cultures through education of local people worldwide.

Achievements: From his hometown in Sundarbans, India on May 27, 2004, Mr. Somen carried out awareness programs to NGOs, schools, colleges, universities, red light areas-road and numerous restaurants. Mr. Debnath has the honor to meet 175 Indian HC / Ambassadors, 6 Reyes, 38 Presidents, 72 Prime Ministers, almost 410 Ministers and government officials from different clubs in different fields so far. He desires to travel around 191 countries at the end of 2023 covering almost 200,000 km and reach almost 20 million people. His campaign is supported by donations and company sponsorships.

Exclusive story: Mr. Debnath faced many difficulties while traveling, including 24 days captivity by the Taliban in Afghanistan, he was robbed 28 times in Central Asia, Europe and

Africa; faced countries in -35 Degrees Celsius temperature in former CSSR; 18 times beaten by skinheads; Living with wild animals such as lions, rhinos, elephants, cheetahs, pythons, etc. in the wilderness; and lived with one of the most ancient Jarawa tribe in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, India for 20 days. One of the happiest persons he met was a Bangladeshi with 25 rupees per day income / quarter happily living with his family. India is felt everywhere in this world culture. Mr. Somen has honorary citizenship with a second home in Georgia. He traveled to the Greenland, North Pole in 2011 facing -45 degrees. Met lovely people called Intuit / Eskimo. He crossed 7 Mares and Oceans with three big mountains like the Himalayas and the Alps. During night shelter, he had some fun too - courtesy police and thieves.

Future Plans and Global Village:

Somen has a devoted vision of creating a Global Village post the completion of this world tour. All the global friends and family from around the world are cordially invited to reminisce in the memories created around the world during the trip. The global village will be an 8-hectare land encompassing accommodation as well as an ecological and sustainable farm in the village. He would like to thank everyone for their great support and cooperation, not only for the world but also his mission for the global village and its future plans.

Please support this campaign to continue this journey through 2023. The fund would like to request your generous financial support to ensure the goal of covering 191 countries and 200,000 Kilometers covered through bicycling around this wonderful world. As a special commendation,

Somen would love to have you share in the common goal by having you and/or you're near and dear ones recognized as honorary travel companions during the journey.

Here Somen Debnath in Alaska: <https://youtu.be/eI0jZy1nFmU>

Mr. Somen desires to conduct workshops and presentations on HIV / AIDS and message of peace and humanity in colleges, schools, health centers, NGOs, social organizations and other institutions in Maldives & other countries, would appreciate any possible assistance and cooperation extended to facilitate the success of his tour.

Around the World on Bi-cycle Tour for HIV / AIDS Awareness Program and Seminars on Indian Culture (Started: 27 May 2004 - Achieve Goal: 2023, 191countries.

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Somen Debnath, Indian Activist & World Cyclist

WhatsApp: +91 7031537391, +1(442)-456-1371 (USA)

The World Biking Odyssey 187 / 191 Countries in 7 Continents

Around the World on Bicycle Tour for HIV/AIDS Awareness Program and Seminars on Indian Culture (Date of Journey 27 May 2004)

Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/worldsomen/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/worldsomen>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCpyR0yoYU3N8U563QLJ5hdg>

Website: <https://worldbikingodyssey.com/>

World Bicycle Day

Who is Kolkata's Somen Debnath who travelled across 191 countries on bicycle?



Published by Ujjal Roy on 3rd June, 2025

It is bicycle which environment-friendly and also helps individuals remain fit. Somen Debnath had additional cause to travel all around 191 countries of the world. The resident of South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal went away from his house in 2004 with a bicycle to travel around the world and returned his home after twenty long years in 2024.

Debnath's target to campaign awareness of AIDS

When Somen Debnath started his journey with a bicycle, that time United Nation did not announce World Bicycle Day on June 3. He started to campaign awareness of AIDS. First, he travelled 28 states and all Union Territories of the India. Then he traveled Asian countries with bicycle. Then he traveled Europe and Africa. After travelling 191 countries, he returned India after twenty years.

Through his journey, he faced many hurdles. He suffered covid in China. He was detained by Taliban in Afghanistan. However, he won all the hurdles and crossed all the milestones to campaign awareness of AIDS.

On the World Bicycle Day, he said, "I got immense support and love around the world. Everybody should try bicycle as it most environs friendly and healthy vehicle."

What United Nation (UN) says?

World Bicycle Day draws attention to the benefits of using the bicycle — a simple, affordable, clean and environmentally fit sustainable means of transportation. The bicycle contributes to cleaner air and less congestion and makes education, health care and other social services more accessible to the most vulnerable populations. A sustainable transport system that promotes economic growth, reduces inequalities while bolstering the fight against climate change is critical to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.



On 15 March 2022, the General Assembly adopted the resolution on integration of mainstream bicycling into public transportation systems for sustainable development. It emphasized that the bicycle is an instrument of sustainable transportation and conveys a positive message to foster sustainable consumption and production, and has a positive impact on climate.

According to United Nation, “Acknowledging the uniqueness, longevity and versatility of the bicycle, which has been in use for two centuries, and that it is a simple, affordable, reliable, clean and environmentally fit sustainable means of transportation, fostering environmental stewardship and health, the General Assembly decided to declare 3 June World Bicycle Day.”

It further stated, “The Assembly welcomed initiatives to organize bicycle rides at the national and local levels as a means of strengthening physical and mental health and well-being and developing a culture of cycling in society.”

Coming full circle after 19-year cycle odyssey around the world

On December 17, 2023, Somen Debnath's 19-year odyssey, during which he travelled to 191 countries, finally came full circle as he cycled his way back home to Basanti in the Sundarbans.

Written by: Dipanita Nath, Pune, Updated: Feb 8, 2024 01:29 AM IST



Soon, Debnath will bring out his book, 'The World Biking Odyssey: 191 Countries', documenting his adventures.

He was captured by the Taliban while cycling from Kabul to Herat in 2007, he experienced the devastation of the tsunami in Sri Lanka in 2004, he pedaled on ice in Antarctica, and caught Covid in China in 2020. On December 17, 2023, Somen Debnath's 19-year odyssey, during which he travelled to 191 countries, finally came full circle as he cycled his way back home to Basanti in the Sundarbans.

Soon, he will bring out his book, The World Biking Odyssey: 191 Countries, documenting his adventures.

He had started out aiming to create awareness about HIV/AIDS globally, which he did through lectures and interactions with underprivileged sections in urban, rural and tribal areas, as well as meeting students of schools, colleges, and universities worldwide.

"I would encourage institutions to start chapters on HIV/AIDS awareness programs and promote the use of (fresh) needles and syringes among drug-addicts, and the use of condoms among sex workers. My aim has also been to spread awareness among the youth and encourage NGOs in different countries," he says.

India, he found, was faring much better than many countries, with the National AIDS Control Organization effectively deploying resources to have medicines reach affected people and conducting awareness programs to reach vulnerable communities.



At 14, he came across a newspaper article, headlined “AIDS is more deadly than cancer” and started raising awareness about the disease.

The first step

Growing up in a large Bengali family, Debnath (40) was aware of the social norms by which a person’s life is structured around getting a job, getting married and having children. “I wanted to live a different life,” he says.

At 14, he came across a newspaper article, headlined “AIDS is more deadly than cancer”. He then started raising awareness about the disease at home and outside. “The second inspiration was Swami Vivekananda, who wrote in a book called Amar Bharat Amar Bharat that if you want to see the world, see India, and when you go out into the world, you will find that in each corner of the world, there is an India. It came to my mind that when God gives me a chance, I would like to see India, the world, and how India exists in the world,” says Debnath.

His third inspiration was Bimal Mukherjee, the first Indian globe-trotter, who travelled the world on a cycle from 1926 to 1937 – without a passport since this was the colonial era – and documented the experiences in the book, Du Chakay Duniya.

On May 27, 2004, two days after graduating in Zoology from the University of Kolkata, Debnath set off on his own cycling expedition with Rs 422 and no sponsorship. He relied on donations and support for his travels in India.

Then, he received financial support from the Ministry of External Affairs, then headed by Pranab Mukherjee, and four other ministries. This amounted to Rs 50,000, a number of letters and visas. “That is a sort of contribution and support from the Central

government, which went a little way. During my travels in different countries, I reached out to the Indian community as the main source of travel expenses,” he says.



Debnath has lived through the 2004 Assam floods, a 2018 tornado in Florida, and the 2019 Typhoon Hagibis in Japan.

The route

From 2004 to 2007, Debnath charted a route through India's 28 states and five Union Territories, before heading out to 23 countries in Asia in the next two years, followed by 50 countries in Europe, and Greenland, from 2009 and 2012. Next, he visited 52 countries in Africa and eight countries in the Middle East until 2015.

From 2015 to 2020, Debnath cycled through 48 countries in South and North America, and Antarctica. Then, in February 2020, just as Covid-19 was about to become a pandemic, he found himself in China and the virus found him. "Somehow, it was drinking boiled water that saved me, though I burnt my throat," he says.

He took a plane from China to South Korea, and eventually ended up spending the lockdown in New Zealand. "The lockdown was quite hard, but I considered the fact that the whole world was more miserable than me," he says. It was 2022 before he could travel again, and visited Australia, Oceania and Southeast Asia before re-entering India.

The pandemic was just one of the many challenges that peppered his path. Debnath has lived through the 2004 Assam floods, a 2018 tornado in Florida, and the 2019 Typhoon Hagibis in Japan. He has been beaten up and even got lost in the Amazon. One of his near-death experiences was in Afghanistan, when he was stopped by four men with guns in a car, and at least one of them wanted to kill him because they thought he was an Indian Army soldier, he says. "I was thinking that I need to speak. Otherwise, they will kill me. I understood only their body language, not their words. I told them that I was not in the Indian Army. I was travelling around the world, meeting people under pressure," he says.

He was blindfolded, taken "I don't know where", and beaten for four days until a translator arrived who could speak English. Debnath was asked about the Quran that he always carried in his bag, and his opinion of Islam and the Taliban. The experience

ended with his being their prisoner, during which he offered to cook for them “because their food was not delicious”.

“One day, I made them lunch and they liked it. Thereafter, I made many spicy curries that I had learned from my mother and my Mejo Ma (second uncle’s wife). I cooked different kinds of pakoras, biryani and many curries,” he says. After 24 days of captivity, he was blindfolded and left 16 km from the Iraq border.



Antarctica, February 18, 2017
World Biking Odyssey 191 countries in 7 Continents

The journey has also changed him, making him “think positive and be optimistic” in his way of life.

Back Home

On his journeys, Debnath would sometimes be joined by others on their cycles for distances between 20 and 500 km, “Because people wanted to be part of my journey. But I was always alone. I never felt lonely because I think that life is a journey and made up of duty, duty and duty – duty to yourself, duty to others and duty to your God,” he says.

Three of his cycles have been stolen, five he sent back home, and it was on his ninth cycle that Debnath arrived home. “It is not the make of the cycle that is important, it is your mindset. You can go with a simple cycle and start your journey. What matters is how long you want to continue your journey,” he says.

Debnath is back to a very different landscape. His brothers are married and have their families, as do his uncles. “We are still a close family but people are living separately in the village,” he says. The journey has also changed him, making him “think positive and be optimistic” in his way of life.

“Though many things have changed in my home and the village, I am quite comfortable because life is about changing and I accept the knowledge,” he says. He is working on his book, which will take a year, as well as a show of the paintings he made on his travels.

1 Bicycle, 12 Years, 1,37,900 Km, 126 Countries: This Man Is Spreading HIV Awareness in the World!

Somen Debnath has been travelling across the world on a bicycle to spread awareness about HIV/AIDS. Since the start of his journey in 2004, he has travelled 1,37,900 km and visited 126 countries.



"After all these years of travelling, I have understood one thing about the world -- that it simply reciprocates. If you are confused, you'll get nothing but confusion from the world. If you're pessimistic, you'll get cynicism. You will see the reflection of yourself in the world. So, if you're hopeful and optimistic, that's what the world will reflect for you. See, the world doesn't know good or bad, it simply responds to whatever we have to offer," says Somen Debnath.

His incredible 1,37,900 km journey across 126 countries lends credibility to his world view. Somen first took up the mission of spreading awareness about HIV/AIDS across the world 12 years ago, setting off on his bicycle for the journey of a lifetime.



Somen Debnath

He plans to visit 191 countries by 2020 and is currently at the southern tip of Argentina in the town of Ushuaia. From here he will continue on his journey to Antarctica.

Somen comes from a small village called Basanti in the Sundarbans, West Bengal. His concern about the neglect and unawareness surrounding HIV started growing after he read an article about AIDS at the age of 14. The article said that AIDS was even deadlier than cancer and told the story of a homeless AIDS patient who was abandoned by his village, left to die alone. He decided he wanted to do something about it, then and there. He just didn't know what or how.

"It had always been on my mind. After I completed my graduation in Zoology from the University of Calcutta, I decided to go on a three-month-long tour to Northeast India to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS. Since I didn't have many resources at my disposal, I decided to take my bicycle on the journey," says Somen. He did extensive research about HIV, found out all the information he could and prepared a presentation. "The idea was to reach as many people as possible along my journey and make them aware. After those three months, it still felt like I had not done enough, there was a lot of work remaining. So, I cycled around India for the next three years and then set off on an international mission."

When asked about how his family reacted to his decision, Somen responds with a quick clarification, "Do you mean my parents or my global family?"

"Like any parents in the world, even mine were reluctant to let me go. My father simply refused to allow me and even stopped talking to me for a while. I managed to convince my mother and she made him understand that this was something really important to me. So, he came around. Today, after seeing that I have made a family in the entire world, and have met so many important people like leaders of many nations, they are proud of me and my work," he smiles and replies.

As his journey turned global, the horizons of Somen's mission also widened. Other than spreading awareness about HIV, Somen has also become an ambassador of Indian culture.



Somen with the students of San Cayetano School, Bahia Blanca, Argentina

"My goal is to cover 191 countries by 2020. I will travel 2,00,000 km around the world and reach nearly 20 million people," he explains.

While travelling, Somen's possessions include a bicycle loaded with a bagful of essentials such as clothes, a bed mat, a sleeping bag, a tent, and what he calls his most treasured possession -- over 400 bracelets (that he never removes) collected from different places across the world.

Somen visits schools, colleges and universities in every town that he travels, raising awareness and encouraging local people to start new initiatives to educate people about HIV/AIDS. He ensures that he is able to interact with students, youth groups and communities likely to benefit from the program. So far, he has reached out to over 7,500 different institutions and 139 red light districts.

Understandably, the journey hasn't always been a piece of cake. Somen has faced numerous adversities and even near-death experiences on his journey: he's been captured by the Taliban in Afghanistan, has escaped a bomb blast in Iraq and had his bicycle stolen six times.

It is only his determination that keeps him going.

“Despite all the problems I faced throughout my journey, I have been alright! I always meet people with good hearts and after all these years, I have a global family; people that I care about and who care about me. This encourages me to keep going,” he says.

What happens after 2020?

Somen has it all mapped out. His dream is to build a Global Village in his hometown of Basanti as a tribute to his family members across the globe.

“Anyone and everyone will be welcome there,” he says.

[embed video id="38hEbHkTSHU" website="YouTube"]

Currently, Somen is trying to raise funds to continue his journey to Antarctica. So far, he has two individual sponsors and one company helping him financially. But he is still 70% short of his total budget.

“It seems I won't be able to leave for Antarctica this month as all the tickets is already booked. I have been hanging out here for the last ten days, hoping that things will fall into place. But I am not worried. I have always faced problems like this and have always found a way out of such situations. I believe in the philosophy of Bhagavat Gita; one should continue on his/her path without worrying about the outcome. That's what I am doing,” he concludes.

'I was imprisoned by the Taliban'

This article is more than 16 years old

In 2004, 28-year-old Somen Debnath set out from India to tour the world on his bicycle and promote HIV/Aids awareness – 33 countries later, he was thrown in a dungeon by the Taliban in Afghanistan. This is his story



Somen Debnath on his world tour. Photograph: supplied by Somen Debnath

I was 23 when I set out and had no intention of coming into harm's way. It was the adventure and the joy of seeing the world which prompted me to do it. What happened was perhaps a little too dangerous even for a bohemian like me, but somebody up there must have smiled.

I strayed into Taliban territory in Herat, 138km from Kabul. The Taliban, taking me to be a spy, put me in a dark dungeon for 24 days before I could prove my innocence. I could have lost my head, quite literally. This is the first time I have told my story to anybody.

I have always had a yearning for adventure, since I was a young boy in the mangrove forest of Sundarbans, east India. I come from a poor family but that did not deter me from pursuing my education, and I graduated in two disciplines: zoology and fine arts. When I entered my 20s, I developed an interest in the study of HIV/Aids which had by then become a killer epidemic in India. I lectured in schools and earned a living but, deep inside, I knew I had to do something different. I had to see the world and spread the message of harmony and Indian culture.

I have loved bicycles ever since my dad bought me one, during a time of great financial difficulty, when I was a kid. So, I went ahead and bought a new bicycle with gears, a new knapsack, some exercise books and simply set off without as much as a goodbye to my family.

In 2004 I reached the capital city of Delhi and met with various people, eventually getting an appointment with the then external affairs minister, Pranab Mukherjee. He encouraged me in my world tour and even

organized my passport and visas and whatever government clearance was needed to undertake the journey. He also gave me £300 to help with costs. Little did I know what lay ahead of me when I set out.

In 2006, after travelling across most of India, I reached the country's north-eastern tip and the villages of the province of Assam. That's where my bad luck started. I was held captive by the secessionist United Liberation Front of Asam for five days and only released when the ultras were convinced that I was not a government spy.

My journey continued uninterrupted across 33 countries – until last month. I reached Afghanistan and was looking for help because it was obvious, I knew nothing of Herat, a town in the west of the country. Suddenly a group of burly men, clad in traditional Afghan clothes and turbans, with bearded faces covered by scarves, surrounded me and started asking me questions. Did I know anything about Islam? Was I a Hindu? Had I read the Holy Koran? What was I doing in Herat?

The questions were rapid but I did not understand a word because they were talking in Pashto. They became impatient and furious and beat me up. I remember just lifting my hand in surrender, and kneeling down, praying to them for mercy. But I could not answer them because I did not understand their language. They blindfolded me and took me to their hideout which took half an hour to reach. I had no idea where it was. I just remember the semi-arid land.

After this, and again after much questioning, I was dumped in a dungeon which had no light. I was given no food save for some rice and a morsel of beef. I had to survive on that for a few days. At times, they beat me up in frustration for not understanding their commands.

However, I got lucky when I chanced upon one of my captors who spoke English in monosyllables. It was from him that I came to know that I was being held by the Taliban. I knew then that I was to die.

One day I was asked to cook and my luck again turned for the better. Coming from India, I had what I thought was a natural talent for cooking hot, spicy dishes – particularly mutton. I did precisely that, except there was no mutton so I had to make do with beef, something we Hindus consider untouchable and a sacrilege. But there can be no bigger religion than life itself, I told myself.

I cooked hot, spicy food for them the way we have in the Sundarbans. They were very happy and told my interpreter that I seemed to be a safe guy. In the meantime, I had talked more with the interpreter and through our short exchanges, I managed to make it clear that I was simply a man who was on an adventure and had no intention of harming their cause.

The interpreter must have passed this on because I was set free after 24 days. The first sunlight which hit my eyes almost blinded me. It was hot outside and I had bruises all over. My bicycle had not been destroyed. I was again blindfolded and driven away from the area where I had been held captive, but not before my friend gave me a packet containing some dry fruit. I treasured it but at the same time, I felt a chill down my spine when I realized how close I had come to death. I had heard so many stories of Taliban torture.

I just wanted to tour the world and set a record. I intend to set the record of covering 191 countries by 2020. I entered Afghanistan through Pakistan and had no trouble. I am now in Croatia and the Indian Embassy people revel in my Taliban tales.

But all I want now is to see my family. I was so close to death that my bohemian ways have gone. I know I have to complete my record first but I would have loved to tell my story to my family back in the forests of Sundarbans.

 **Somen Debnath was interviewed by Kolkata freelance journalist Anthony Dias.**

Meet Debnath Somen an Indian Man on Round the World Cycling Trip

by Gitanjali Diwakar

I was always fascinated by Jules Verne's classic novel – Around the world in 80 days. Phileas Fogg's adventurous journey across nations has left many travel bugs spellbound. Then again, what if Phileas Fogg decided to cycle his way to fame? If he chose to place a bet to do so with the additional incentive of being a social everywhere he went?



Fear not, this story is not about Fogg or his many trips across the globe. This is the story of a man, who hailed from Sundarbans, the land of the world's largest mangroves. Unlike Fogg, did not have a bet to win. Instead, he traveled the world with one mission – to fight against HIV-AIDS. He is working towards creating awareness about India's culture across the globe.

Meet Debnath Somen, the social worker whose cycle rims have helped him touch many hearts globally.



Debnath Somen in George, 2009. Photo: <https://www.facebook.com/worldsomen/>

Quick profile of Debnath Somen

- ✓ Profession: Social worker
- ✓ Place of Birth: Basanti, Sunderbans (West Bengal)
- ✓ Age: 33 years old
- ✓ Education: Master of Fine Arts (University of Kolkata)
- ✓ B.Sc Zoology (University of Kolkata)
- ✓ Sources of Inspiration: Swami Vivekananda, Bimol Mukerji (India's first globetrotter)
- ✓ Incident to remember: Kidnapped by Taliban in Afghanistan and was held hostage for 24 days. Survived due to exceptional culinary skills

Why cycle around the world?



Debnath Somen in Iceland. Photo: <https://www.facebook.com/worldsomen/>

According to Somen, there are few reasons why he chose to cycle across the globe and not resort to other means of transportation:

1. With global warming becoming an issue of grave concern, he believed that cycling would be the best way to travel, for he would be doing his part in saving planet earth.
2. This mode of transportation also permitted to reach out to a large group of people as well as develop a personal connection with every group he meets.
3. Lastly, cycling to him is the ultimate form of Yoga

So, what motivated Somen to do so?



Debnath Somen in Guinea-Bissau. Photo: <https://www.facebook.com/worldsomen/>

Somen had begun working towards the eradication of AIDS in West Bengal at the age of 16. It was not long before he realized that his message should also reach out to others across the nation's borders. Thus, he chose to cycle the world and create awareness about a deadly disease.

A gifted landscape artist, he also holds a bachelor's degree in zoology from the University of Kolkata. But how does an artist-cum-zoology expert become a social worker and a 'brand ambassador' for India's culture? "The contents of my work, as a student of zoology or even as a landscape artist, portray life. Social work is all about life's many connections. I have used my art and other skills to connect with people," commented Somen.

A journey of a lifetime

Debnath Somen hopes to travel 191 countries and spread awareness about HIV-AIDS as well as about India's cultural background to at least 20 million people worldwide. His journey had begun on May 27, 2004.

Some of the places that he has visited includes:

1. India (completely)
2. Nepal
3. Tibet
4. Afghanistan
5. Cyprus
6. The North Pole
7. Palestine (Reference: www.somen2020world.com)

Till date, Somen has cycled over 200,000 kilometres.

As part of the agenda, Somen also met many world leaders and has visited the over 72 ambassadors of India, who have been very supportive of his mission.

Body, mind and determination



Debnath Somen in Antarctica. Photo: <https://www.facebook.com/worldsomen/>

Somen's cycle venture raised many questions with regards to the health concerns that one may experience in such a situation. "Just as how a baby adapts to the environment in his mother's womb, I have begun to grow accustomed to these varied changes in climate. I have had travel to places and across climatic zones, with temperatures that varied between 50 degrees Celsius and – 50 degrees Celsius. But my body seems to have become used to it," Somen explains.

It has indeed been a roller coaster ride, so far, for this social worker. With three cycles stolen and one other having to be sent back to his hometown, Somen never considered turning back. He had done the needful to acquire the cycle that he is using at present to fulfill the task that he set out to complete. Maybe, cycling is indeed the ultimate form of Yoga or even meditation.

India vs the world – the place he loves the most

When asked about the place that he loved the most, he said, "I love the world as it is. This world is my home. Then again, India holds a very special place in my heart. India is my mother. India is my love, my spiritual guru, my God, my blood and my happiness."

A message to the youth



Debnath Somen in Sierra Leone. Photo: <https://www.facebook.com/worldsomen/>

Somen feels that if the youth wish to do something to make the world a better place, then they should go ahead and do so. "If you admire and follow a personality, try to act like the personality as well," he added. "One must not fear about doing something differently. After all, those who fear would break out of their shell and gather any experience," Somen stated.

Here's wishing Debnath Somen the best of luck, good health and happiness in his journey towards making India proud.



**Debnath Somen in Argentina. Photo: <https://www.facebook.com/worldsomen/>
Somen's journey is a sponsored venture and is supported by donations from individuals and groups. If you wish to contribute to the next phase of his journey (Somen hopes to travel to 48 countries across North and South America by 2018), you could log email him at somenglobe@gmail.com or contribute on the page www.somen2020world.com.**

GLOBETROTTING HUMANIST: Indian cyclist, AIDS activist on 17-year journey reaches Southeast Idaho

By Shelbie Harris sharris@journalnet.com Jun 25, 2021



Somen Debnath, an Indian globetrotting humanist on a 17-year odyssey to cycle the entire world for AIDS awareness and social inclusion, was recognized by Pocatello City Council member Linda Leeuwrik during his stop in the Gate City last week.

Shelbie Harris/Idaho State Journal

POCATELLO — An Indian cyclist who left the motherland of the Royal Bengal tiger 17 years ago to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS and once cooked curry to escape Taliban captors made a stop in the Gate City last week.

Somen Debnath, a 38-year-old globetrotting humanist who says, “People are my God,” received a certificate of recognition from Pocatello City Council member Linda Leeuwrik on June 16, the 6,228th day of a worldwide trek that will culminate in Debnath having bicycled nearly 125,000 miles through 191 countries on all seven continents.



Somen Debnath, bottom left, kneels next to a tree that he planted during his travels in Africa. Photo courtesy of Somen Debnath



Somen Debnath during his travels in Brazil. Debnath was in the Gate City last week during his 17-year mission to cycle the globe for HIV/AIDS awareness. Photo courtesy of Somen Debnath



Somen Debnath on the Brooklyn Bridge

Somen Debnath poses with his bicycle while sitting on the Brooklyn Bridge in New York.

Photo courtesy of Somen Debnath

Indian cyclist reaches Qatar on 200,000 km trip

Updated - August 12, 2013 12:08 pm IST - Dubai



Somen Debnath. File photo

An Indian cyclist who is on a mission to pedal around the globe has reached Qatar after touring 79 countries.

Somen Debnath, who plans to set up a global village near Kolkata, has already toured 79 countries and plans to visit 191 nations by 2020 and he will move to Saudi Arabia on August 15.

Debnath started his 'Around the World on Bicycle' initiative in 2004 to spread awareness on HIV/AIDS. Debnath said he expects the local government to award him eight hectares of land for his global village.

He plans to cover 200,000 kilometers, reaching up to 2 million people by the end of his journey in 2020.

About his plans for a global village, the idea is to share and care for everyone in society irrespective of their caste, color or creed and give dignity to each of them, Debnath told Gulf Times.

The young adventurer also claimed that all his expenses were covered by people he met during his journey.

Published - August 12, 2013 10:47 am IST

Indian cyclist's world tour entered into Saudi Arabia as 170th country

Irfan Mohammed|Published: 31st October 2022 7:35 pm IST



Indian Cyclist Somen Debnath met with Indian community in Riyadh

Jeddah: A young Indian cyclist who is on a mission to pedal around the globe and reached Saudi Arabia after touring different countries across the globe was touched by the warm welcome accorded to him by the Indian community.

Somen Debnath has been travelling across the world on a bicycle to spread awareness about HIV/AIDS. Since the start of his journey in 2004, he has been on the road and travelled 1,85,400 km and visited 169 countries.

Debnath hails from a small village called Basanti in the Sundarbans, West Bengal. His concern about the neglect and unawareness surrounding HIV started growing after he read an article about AIDS at the age

of 14. The article said that AIDS was even deadlier than cancer and told the story of a homeless AIDS patient who was abandoned by his village, left to die alone. He decided he wanted to do something about it, then how he had started his journey to bring awareness about HIV/AIDS.

“I was touched by the affection shown by the Indian community living in Riyadh whether its Telangana NRI forum or Bengali Milan, it was a heart touching reception”, he told this correspondent on Monday. Hailing the gesture and support of the Indian Embassy in Saudi Arabia, he said that it will be one of the memorable in his global journey.



“I had desperately tried to obtain a tourist visa of Saudi Arabia for 12 years but didn’t succeed till 2019, however, pandemic delayed my visit”, said Debnath.

He is currently in Riyadh and planning to visit various cities in Saudi Arabia in a month’s time and keen to visit universities and NGOs in the Kingdom.

Though it’s merely 3 days in Saudi Arabia yet I feel that I know the country and people for a long time.

Debnath said that he had met with 72 Prime Ministers, 38 Presidents and 6 Kings across the globe so far during his tour.

The young cyclist also said that he is keen to meet with Saudi Prime Minister and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

Debnath said that he was warmly received by the Indian community living in the Kingdom and expressed his gratitude to the Indian embassy for the help that was offered to him.

Debnath was felicitated by Telangana NRI Forum and greeted by a group of Telugu women on Sunday.

Through the lens of his eyes, Debnath has through a myriad of experiences, difficulties, trials and tribulations. One such incident was when he was captured by the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2007 for 24 days. He was released when his abductors realized his mission.



Somen Debnath is pictured in Alaska. Credit: Somen Debnath

Indian cyclist, Somen Debnath, is cycling the world raising awareness of HIV/AIDS and has so far visited 180 countries and covered more than 190,168 kilometers.

Key Points

- Indian cyclist Somen Debnath is on a journey to raise awareness of HIV/AIDS and connect with people around the world.
- So far, he has travelled to 180 countries on his bike and is currently in Australia before setting out to 11 more countries on his list.
- Besides meeting kings and prime ministers, he claims to have been robbed often, beaten a few times and captured by the Taliban during his adventure.

“We are all born for a purpose and this is my purpose,” said Indian national, Somen Debnath, explaining why he is cycling through almost 200 countries.

According to Mr. Debnath, three main reasons had inspired him to set off on the journey of a lifetime.



Australia marks the 180th destination for Somen Debnath and his bike. Credit: Somen Debnath Credit: Supplied by Somen Debnath.

At 14, he said he read about the death of a person with HIV/AIDS in a newspaper article and decided to take action to raise awareness of the disease globally.

He said he was also fascinated by a quote written by India's first global citizen, Swami Vivekananda, in his book, "Amar Bharat Amar Bharat".

It read along the lines of "If you want to see the world, see India as India is within the world and if you go to the world, you will see India in every corner."

His third trigger came from a globetrotter called Bimal Mukherjee, one of the first Indians to go around the world on a bicycle between 1926-1937.



Somen Debnath talks about many encounters during his trip around the globe. Credit: Supplied by Somen Debnath

At 21, Mr. Debnath said he decided that cycling would be the easiest vehicle to reach people as, "it is environmentally friendly, it is the ultimate yoga and affordable."

Mr. Debnath hails from a small village called Basanti in the Sundarbans in West Bengal, and has completed a degree in zoology from the University of Calcutta (now Kolkata).

His initial journey was a three-month-long tour of Northeast India and, since then, he has travelled to 180 countries, with 11 more to go before he hangs up his cycling shoes.

Connecting with prime ministers to celebrities

Despite having limited resources, Mr. Debnath said he kept going propelled by the "five Ds" of dream, determination, decision, discipline and dedication.

He said that his journey had connected him to thousands of people around the world.

In his experience, he said he had felt the "very positive impact of the Indian community as they always support people who wish to do something unique".

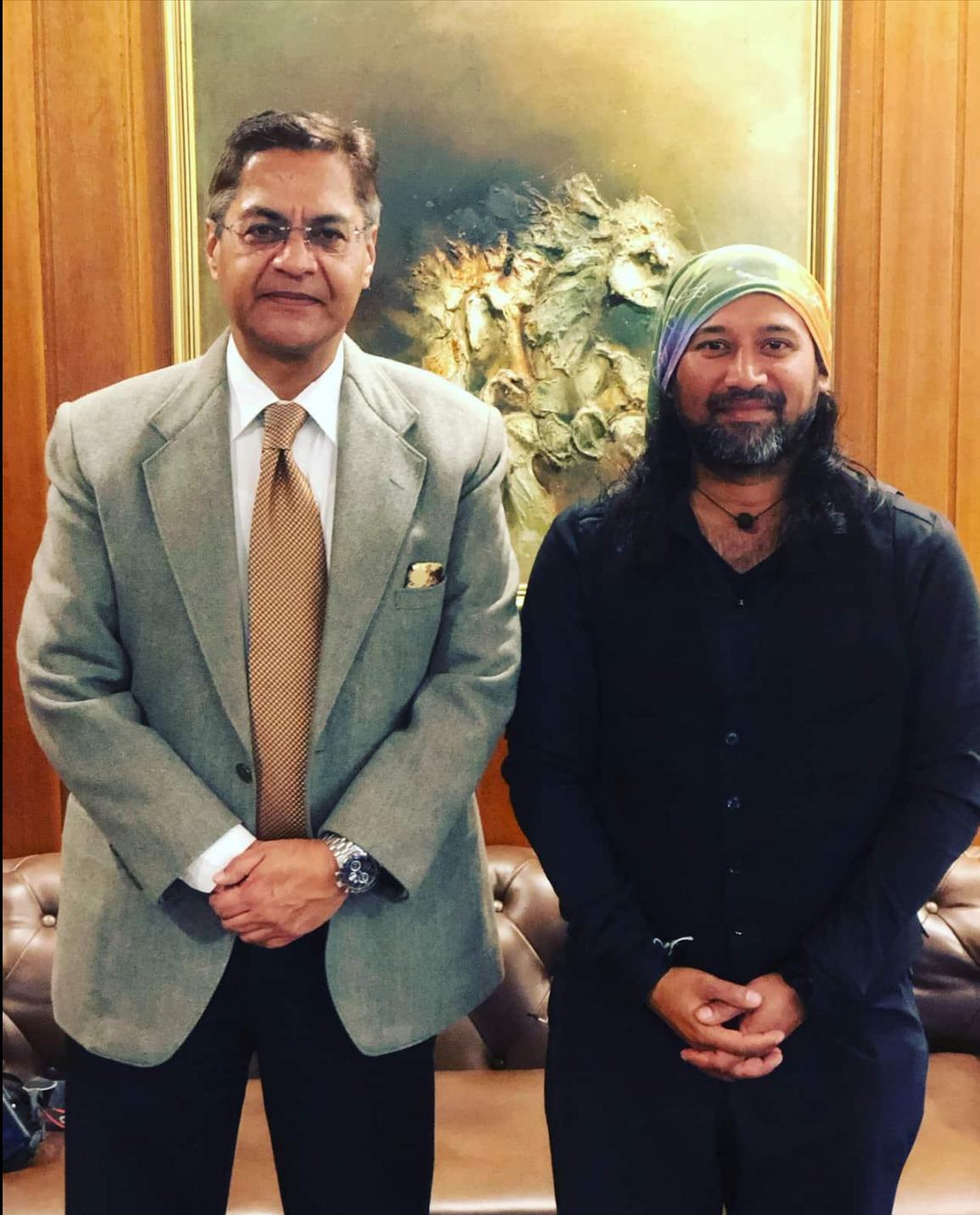
"I inevitably end up being sponsored by individuals or organizations that believe in my cause and help raise funds to support me," he said.

When I go to other countries. I meet the Indian diaspora there and I get a lot of love from them.

Somen Debnath

He claimed that he had dedicated years to educating the people about how prevention was better than cure when it came to AIDS.

His audience ranges from schoolchildren to politicians and, during his travels, he has met prime ministers, presidents, kings, high commissioners and celebrities.



Somen Debnath I with Manpreet Vohra, India's High Commissioner to Australia. Credit: Supplied by Somen Debnath

To sustain himself, he said he was careful with his diet.

"If you have to ride hundreds of kilometers every day, you have to be focused," he said.

"I keep hydrated, try to eat vegetarian food where possible and eat things that appeal to me. Meditation and yoga also help me to utilize my time effectively."

Robbed, beaten along the way

But his journey has not been without obstacles, according to Mr. Debnath.

I have been robbed several times, beaten up, captured by the Taliban, escaped a bomb blast and had my bicycle stolen many times.

Somen Debnath

He said one event in particular stood out for him which was when he was robbed by five people in Northeast India.

He said he had been riding through a jungle when he was captured by the robbers who took all of his belongings

“I (wondered) where will I stay overnight as they took everything, so I begged their leader to take me home with him. He initially kicked me but then took me home for three nights and eventually returned all my things,” he recalled.

“He even took me sightseeing and, when it was time for me to leave, threw a party. Even a thief can have good intentions. The tears that I saw when I left him were my reward. I saw a saint in a robber.”

He maintained that moments like these had made him realize that people should not be judged because there was good in everyone.



Cyclist Somen Debnath says that Canberra is a ‘well thought out’ and ‘bike-friendly’ city. Credit: Supplied by Somen Debnath

Captured by the Taliban in Afghanistan for 24 days

“In 2009, I was looking for some help in Herat, 138km from Kabul in Afghanistan. It was Taliban territory and they took me to be a spy and locked me in a dungeon. I was unable to explain to them that I was harmless and, on an adventure, due to language barriers,” he said.

“Luckily, one of (my captors) spoke some English so I was able to communicate with him, one day, they asked me to cook and I made a hot and spicy curry that they liked.

“I was able to convince my interpreter that I had no intention of interfering with their cause so they let me go after 24 days. My bicycle was destroyed but I was grateful to be alive.”



Somen Debnath has covered more than 190,168km on his bike. Credit: Supplied by Somen Debnath
As he continued to pedal around the globe, he said he was happy making the world his family.

“The world is my home and my country,” he said.

In the future, he said he planned to return to India and create an ecological and sustainable village. He wants everyone to come to India and experience it for themselves.

He is also writing a book called “The World Biking Odyssey; 191 Countries”.

Wong Kim Hoh meets...

'I cooked curry for the Taliban': Activist cycling around the world to promote HIV awareness



Mr. Somen Debnath entered Singapore, his 181st country, in August.
ST PHOTO: ONG WEE JIN

Published Sep 10, 2023, 05:00 AM

On May 27 in 2004, a 21-year-old Indian embarked on an epic journey. Starting from his village in the Sundarbans region in West Bengal, activist Somen Debnath resolved to visit 191 countries and cycle 200,000km by 2020 to raise HIV awareness.

With just US\$17 in his pocket, he was on his way a mere couple of weeks after the idea of "Around The World Bicycle Tour For HIV/AIDS Awareness Program & Presentation of Indian Culture" popped into his head.

To Be Continued...