

Navy record in scuba diving

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NEW DELHI, July 21 — Indian Navy men have created a world record scuba diving in the deep blue waters of the picturesque Pangong lake in Ladakh Himalayas bordering China along the inhospitable Chishul area at a height of over 14,200 feet.

This expedition was part of a sailing, trekking and diving trip from the southern tip of the Indian peninsula to the freezing northern top of the country, an adventure never tried before. The diving part of the expedition is going to find its mention in the Guinness Book of World Records.

Addressing a Press conference here today after the successful completion of the trip, Commodore C. G. Mathur said the 27-member Naval adventure team from the southern Naval Command, Cochin started from Kanyakumari on April 1. It was led by Cdr. P. P. Tugnnit and Lt. Cdr. K. Santhi.

Two officers and 12 sailors took off in whalers just before the onset of monsoon completing a sail of about 1500 kms upto Bombay in 22 days. The whalers, small boats, without mechanical power had to take a serious battering at sea along the western coast near Dabhol where fishing boats came to the rescue of the sailors.

Stormy weather, heavy rains and

huge waves had the better of the seamen. But for the providential help from the fishermen, all of them would have met a watery grave. The first leg of the adventure was complete at Bombay on April 27 after making halts at Cochin, Mangalore, Goa and Ratnagiri. The team then proceeded to Jammu to undertake the second leg of the adventure — trekking from this place to Pangong Tso, a distance of 870 kms in the Himalayas. They reached here on July 7. This party included two officers and 10 sailors as two had dropped out at the start on May 18.

For the sailors, trekking such a distance and in entirely different environs thousands of kilometres away from the high seas, was a unique experience. With logistics support from the Army and the Air Force, enterprise class sailing boats were transported to Pangong. Rubber dinghies were taken to be used the most important act-diving in Pangong.

Despite adverse weather conditions the team members were able to have thrilling sessions of wind surfing and sailing in the lake which looked more like a small piece of ocean on the roof top of the country.

Though bereft of any marine life, the lake water swept gentle sea waves, a delightful sight in the backdrop of lofty, calm mountain ranges. However

only one third area of this lake is under India while two-thirds fall within China, the Navy officers said.

A hydrographic survey using modern gadgets within 15 sq km area of the lake was conducted by experts in the team including a sub-mariner and underwater specialist, a mechanical engineer and a doctor. After accalmatisation and unfurling of the Indian Navy flag, the D-Day — July 18 — arrived for the divers.

In water-tight suits with woggles inside to maintain body temperature and oxygen cylinders tightly held on their backs, the divers were pushed into cold salty water of the lake. Its temperature was about two degrees with the pressure on the bodies doubling every 15 feet dive. They touched the bottom of the lake scooping characteristic stones and small rocks and garnets. Some heads were also recovered. Lt. Cdr. S. Mukherjee dived upto 120 feet.

At today's Press conference Cdr. Mathur said before this successful diving in a lake at a height of 14,200 feet, the previous best was at a height of 12,400 feet.

The other members of the diving team were Surg. Lt. Cdr T. K. Sahni, K. L. Khatri, R. Chander, H. S. Shekhawar, S. Chander, J. S. Bhati, S. Singh, V. Kumar, Ram Avtar, P. G. Unnikrishnan and D. Singh.