

# Over 3,000 Children Participate in Ramayan Contest

By a Staff Reporter

More than 3,000 children from 30 states took part in the recently concluded contest, "Kaun Banega Ramayan Expert."

Children, between the ages of 5-15, participated in the contest whose objective was to spur interest in the Ramayan among the youth through the values of love, devotion, sacrifice, valor and integrity.

Mahesh Raghunandan, one of the organizers of the online and in-person contests, said, "The performance of the children in both phases of the contest has been nothing short of remarkable."

Spokesperson Sharad Amin explained that the community responded overwhelmingly and many children called their grandparents in India to discuss the Ramayan story.

The winners of the contest will be awarded trophies and cash prizes.

Aashna Avachat of Cupertino,



First place winners of the Ramayan contest in age-groups 5-6, 7-9, 10-12 and 13-15 were (l to r): Ashna Avachat, Aditi Krishnan, Bhavya Chauhan and Rajiv Velury.

Calif., took first place in the age group 5-6. "I like how Rama saved Sita from Ravana. I also like how Hanuman carried the whole mountain in his hands," said Avachat.

Second, third and fourth places were taken by Samhita Gurralla, Mugdha Parulekar, Sanjeev Vinodh and Navami Manangi (tie), respectively.

In the age group 7-9, Aditi Krishnan of Troy, Mich., won first place. Her parents, Meena

and Hariharan Krishnan, said, "Aditi's grandfather first read her the Ramayan story when she was six years old. He tells us that Aditi was always amazed by the powers of Hanuman."

Taruni Sunder, Tia Basak and Karuna Kankani took the second, third and fourth spots, respectively.

Natick, Mass.-based Bhavya Chauhan was the winner in the age group 10-12. Her mother, Sunaina Chauchan, noted, "We

participated in the contest after coming to know of it through one of the web sites. Bhavya is fond of the Ramayan story and knows many dialogues by heart."

Second, third and fourth places were taken by Adhitya Venkatesh, Pathik Patel and Pallavi Thota, respectively.

In the oldest age group, 13-15, Rajiv Velury of Newark, Del., who took the first position, liked the portrayal of duty in the

Ramayan. As part of the preparation for the contest, Velury reviewed several books at the University of Delaware library.

"Going through the books on Ramayan, I realized that there is so much about this great epic that I still did not know," said Velury.

Other winners in this category were Sohan Rao in second place, Smitha Y. Mirajkar in third place and Aparna Kailasam in fourth place.

# Indian Cyclist Pedals Across the Globe for Environment

By FURHANA AFRID  
India-West Staff Reporter

Avijit Chakraborty said goodbye to his wife and four-year-old daughter as he pedaled away from his home in Kolkata, March 28, 2005.

Since then, the 35-year-old has been cycling from one country to another, carrying the message of a pollution-free environment and sustainable development across the globe. His enthusiasm to set out on a two-wheel journey for the second time is being driven by another goal: to be the new champion in the Guinness World Records for cycling around the globe in the shortest time.

Chakraborty's 13-month trek to date brought him to the San Francisco Bay Area recently, riding a 24-speed bicycle given to him by President George W. Bush when he was governor of Texas in 1999.

"Nothing is impossible for human beings," Chakraborty told

India-West in a telephone interview.

In his first attempt from 1997-1999, the sports instructor covered over 60,000 kilometers across 54 countries in 27 months, but he could not break the 1974 record held by the late Canadian John Hathaway, who traveled 64,000 kilometers on his bicycle in 23 months. This time Chakraborty wants to complete the distance in 20 months.

Inspired by the Tour de France seven-time champion, Lance Armstrong, Chakraborty challenged, "If Lance can be a champion, why not an Indian?"

"This time I am better prepared. I have practiced extensively by swimming, running, skipping and conditioning my body," he explained of his five-hour daily exercise regimen.

His diet consists of fruit, power bars and water, also tantalizing his taste buds with green chillies as a substitute for other spices in his

food. And when he wants a change, "I occasionally go to Burger King and Subway," said Chakraborty.

Since he left India, he has been to 36 countries, and covered over 41,000 kilometers. He prefers to travel light with just a sleeping bag, a tent, some food and a few clothes. Chakraborty said his wife was reluctant for him to take the journey again, but it is important for him to touch as many lives as he can with his environment-friendly message.

His activism has taken him to over 95 schools globally, raising awareness among students on protecting nature.

Chakraborty's global journey has placed him in the limelight, attracting the notice of celebrities such as California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sir Richard Branson, chairman of Virgin Atlantic, who paid for his airfare from London to Miami, according to the Web site, [bicyclearoundtheworld.com](http://bicyclearoundtheworld.com), created by Abhoyjit Bhowan.

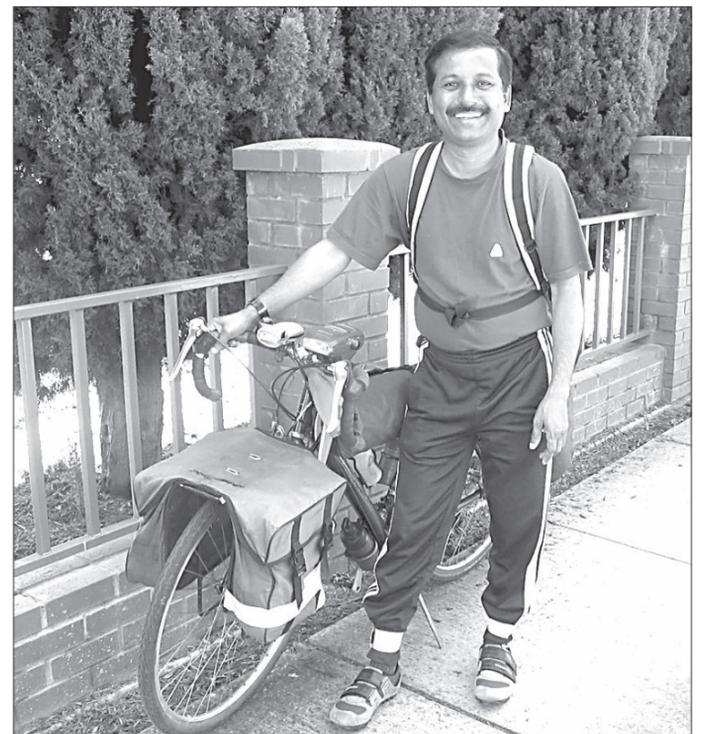
News about Chakraborty's arrival in the San Francisco Bay Area led Bhowan, an engineer in Menlo Park, to invite the cyclist to his home for a meal.

Bhowan decided to set up a Web site that would tell Chakraborty's story and provide a channel for people to make a donation.

When he started his journey in India, Chakraborty had \$550 to use for food, bicycle repairs and visa fees.

His cause has prompted several South Asian organizations and Sikh temples to help him with accommodation, food and money.

Constantly traveling, sometimes in adverse weather conditions, has not been easy. There



Thirty-five-year-old Avijit Chakraborty of Kolkata spreads the message of a pollution-free environment as he pedals across the globe, vying to be the next entry in the Guinness World Records.

were many nights when Chakraborty would lie awake under his tent contemplating if he should turn back and go home. At the crack of dawn, as the sun's rays peeked into his tent, he would shake off his frustration and remind himself of the cause he is fighting for.

"The hurdles do come, but with

full determination the black clouds disappear," he noted to India-West.

In about 10-15 days, Chakraborty will be crossing the California-Mexico border, proceeding to Latin America, South Africa, Australia and the Pacific. To make the Guinness record, Chakraborty must be in India by November.

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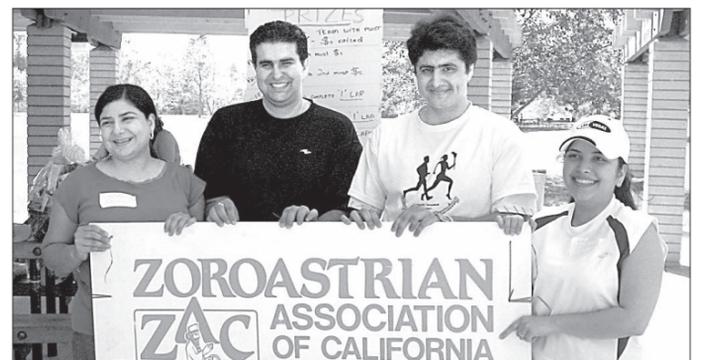
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30	\$259	\$309	\$359	\$559
40	\$319	\$479	\$599	\$929
50	\$714	\$944	\$1199	\$2059
60	\$1,734	\$2,699	\$3,604	N/A

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## Zoroastrian Group Raises \$20,000 at Walk-a-Thon



Participants hold a banner at a walk-a-thon organized by the Zoroastrian Association of California.

By a Staff Reporter

The Zoroastrian Association of California raised nearly \$20,000 at a walk-a-thon in Irvine, Calif., Apr. 30.

The walk attracted more than 200 participants of various age

groups at Mason Park.

T-shirts emblazoned with the phrase "Keep the Fire Burning" were distributed to all the participants.

Highlights of the walk included an egg hunt for children, tasty delicacies and music.

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